

New Strategies: Home Visiting and Mobile Advocacy

“Taking the time to do home visits, going with people to court or other places communicates ‘I’m here for YOU’ and makes a connection that is unique. Other services survivors are having to navigate just aren’t structured that way.”

-Home Free Advocate

Services Can Happen Anywhere

- Operating in confidential locations has in some ways hidden our work away from the community
- Face-to-face relationships with other community providers enhance understanding of each other's "lenses"
- Fluidity in advocate's day to provide for time in the community promotes connection to networks and the bigger picture
- Placing advocates in cross-disciplinary settings (child welfare, courts, WorkSource, police, etc.) provides access to services for survivors not using hotlines or shelters

An Approach That Makes Sense

- In-person contact with landlords, service providers is almost always more effective
- Home is safe space and comfort zone – for kids, too!
- Shifts burden of logistics, cost from survivor to program
- After isolation of DV, having a visitor can be a “welcome sense of social normalcy”
- Participants often proud of and excited about their new homes and want to share it
- Fewer missed appointments; easier for advocate to be on time, establishes consistent and reliable contact

“I have some participants who love to have me in their home and want to have all our visits there. Others want to meet at a coffee shop or somewhere else. We talk about what they want to talk about, too; we always talk about rent stuff, but they lead the conversations. “

- Home Free Advocate

“I think the more I learned about domestic violence, the more I realized that I am not really the person at risk.”

- Home Free Advocate

Safety for Staff AND Survivors

- Safety planning is key - whether in your office, the shelter, the survivor's home, or in the community
- Thoroughly discuss where it's best to have visits that are safe and comfortable to survivor
- Know how survivor wants you to handle it if someone s/he knows sees you together and wonders who you are
- Have a plan for what you'll say/do if you encounter the abuser
- Avoid doing home visits if:
 - Abuser knows housing location and is not staying away
 - Abuser's behavior includes stalking/following survivor
- Ensure your program knows where you are
- Follow your instincts and keep your cell phone charged and handy

“Sometimes you’re just going to have to drink that cup of tea if you want to build trust, and that’s ok!”

- Home Free Advocate

Some Challenges

- Survivors may feel they need to clean house for you, offer you food, or “host” you
- Sometimes survivor isn't home when you get there, or doesn't really want you in their space
- You can't bring all the resources available at the office
- If survivor is in shared housing , hard to have privacy
- Children are often curious and want to be in on the visit
- May see things you'll have to have hard conversations about
- If meeting in the community, someone may see you together and ask the survivor who you are

“I try to think about how I would want someone to act in my own home visit and then present that way.”

- Home Free Advocate

Planning is Key!

- Bring a bottle of water with you, avoid visits near a mealtime
- Clarify the visit's purpose (not an inspection!). Don't comment on how the place looks (unless it's to compliment)
- Bring a folder with things you might need, but don't take up a lot of space
- Give yourself extra time to get there so you are not stressed
- Discuss how survivor wants you to handle it if someone she knows sees you together and wonders who you are
- Look "civilian;" don't carry a clipboard or display your agency logo on stuff you bring to the visit

Experienced Mobile Advocates Said...

- “I’ve had folks say I’m the only ‘guest’ they have, especially when they’ve relocated.”
- “I feel like when I am more fearful, it’s a good sign to do some self-care around Vicarious Trauma.”
- “Hands down it is what participants prefer.”