

# **SurviveAbility**

## Collaboration Charter

### Introduction

SurviveAbility brings together seven agencies, the Lane County Domestic Violence Council - VALID Subcommittee, and Lane County Department of Children & Families. These nine partners are joining forces to improve the way we respond, both as individual organizations and as an inter-connected system, to women with disabilities who have experienced violence.

### Vision

Women with disabilities and Deaf women throughout Lane County who have experienced violence and abuse will be empowered to disclose abuse and access services and safety. The services women seek will be accessible, responsive and informed because agencies throughout Lane County will understand and address the vulnerabilities, barriers and challenges that survivors encounter and will embrace the important role each plays in promoting safety for women with disabilities and Deaf women.

### Mission

The mission of SurviveAbility is to effect system change in Lane County around services for women with disabilities and Deaf women who have experienced violence or abuse. With the active participation by survivor consumers, we will: nurture better relationships between our agencies; provide cross training to collaboration members; integrate the experiences of women with disabilities and Deaf women into our agency policies & protocols; and, sustain our work beyond the grant funding.

### Values/Assumptions/Guiding Principles

ACCESS: We believe women with disabilities and Deaf women who have experienced violence & abuse have the same rights as all women to participate in all appropriate programs and services.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** We will strive to create a safe place for SurviveAbility members and our key informants to share their experiences, challenges, and successes without fear of that information moving outside of the collaboration.

**EMPOWERMENT:** We believe in expanding the ability of a diverse group of people to make their own choices in life. In this vein, we seek to ensure that people with disabilities and survivors inform the foundation of our change efforts.

**INCLUSION:** We believe that women deserve equitable treatment that meets their unique circumstances in a way that creates equal safety, support, and involvement.

**PRIVACY:** We understand the importance of people's ownership of their own stories and experiences. We will seek to ensure and support this right for people with whom we work.

**RESPECT:** We approach each other with integrity, believing in each other's commitment to our group, to our goals; we will work to understand what each other needs to feel respected, so that we can be considerate, thoughtful, and trustworthy in our relations in this collaboration.

**SELF-DEFINITION:** We will respect the right of each person to define themselves and their experiences; we will accept and value each individual's self-definition regarding their experiences as women with disabilities and/or women who have experienced violence and abuse.

**UNDERSTANDING:** We believe understanding goes beyond comprehending pieces of information. Understanding also means we will honor each other's viewpoints, experiences, and our differences. We will increase our awareness of our diverse movements' histories, missions, successes and challenges. This will allow us to listen to each other's opinions and feelings, even in those situations where we agree to disagree - we still understand each other and respect diverse points of view.

## Key Terms and Definitions

Accessibility - We consider accessibility to apply to the entire organizational environment in which women with disabilities interact – how it looks, how it feels, how people are interacting with you, and the staff’s ability to address the unique needs of each woman with a disability who is a survivor of violence. This will mean that women with disabilities and survivors experience the environments as open and welcoming, where access to information and services is integrated into our work, our goals, and our visions. Accessibility means physical, sensory, and attitudinal access.

Caregiver – Most often, a contractual relationship where one is expected to support the daily needs of the other.

Caregiver Violence (CGV) – Abuse and control that is used by an individual who is in a position of providing assistance with daily needs to an individual with a disability. This abuse can include physical, emotional, sexual, medical, financial, spiritual oppression, and also includes neglect.

Collaboration - Our vision of collaboration is that we will come together in a meaningful way for a designated period of time to create sustainable systems change within our organizations so that we can better respond to women with disabilities who have experienced violence. Collaboration is a more intensive way of working together than coordination or cooperation. It is the most intensive way of working together while still maintaining our own individual identities.

Disability – From the federally accepted definition: The term disability means, with respect to an individual:

A. a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual (such as walking, speaking, seeing, hearing, breathing, learning, performing manual tasks, caring for oneself, etc. These are examples only; other activities such as sitting, standing, lifting, reading are also major life activities.);

B. a record of such an impairment; or

C. being regarded as having such impairment.

In the spirit of our value of Self-Definition, we acknowledge that women may experience a disability without being “formally diagnosed”; this may mean barriers to certain supports & services. We also acknowledge that “disability” and “ability” are not static; we each move in and/or out of these situations.

Domestic Violence/Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) - A persistent pattern of coercive control, including physical, sexual, financial, spiritual, and psychological attacks that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners. IPV occurs in a cultural context of gender inequity, where violence is condoned as a legitimate method of problem solving. Violence and abuse in the areas listed above are not the end goal, but tools used to gain and maintain coercive control over the victim/survivor. These tactics may be used against spouses, intimate partners, dating partners, ex-partners or spouses.

Eligible – Meeting certain requirements for services, support, etc. Eligibility requirements and limits are often set by the funding source.

Intimate – A relationship based on choice, linked with feelings of closeness and vulnerability.

Sexual Assault (SA) - Includes, but is not limited to rape, unwanted touching, being forced or pressured to perform sexual acts, forced vaginal, anal or oral penetration by body parts or foreign objects, sexual name calling and sexual harassment.

Systems Change - Change our service delivery systems so that the information and services we provide are integrated, informed and relevant to people with disabilities who experience violence. This may mean changing policies, practices, and organizational culture.

Violence (& abuse) – Behaviors that target the survivor/victim's individuality & safety; can include physical, sexual, economic, emotional, spiritual abuse and neglect. This is not limited to physical assaults, and can include threats and intimidation as well as neglect.

While we understand there are differences between the relationships, issues and types of violence and abuse described above, we also have learned that there are overlaps. In particular we acknowledge the overlap, where the same individual is both caregiver and intimate partner. In this situation, we must be aware of the cultural contexts and the tactics, issues, and safety needs related to this overlap.

## Work Plan Timeline

### Enhance Collaborative Relationships:

October 2006 – August 2007: Convene Executive Committee, develop collaborative relationships and related documents;

September – December 2007: finalize Collaborative Charter and send to OVW for approval.

### Plan and implement Needs Assessment:

September – December 2007: Create a process to define scope and narrow focus;

October – December 2007: In consultation with ASI, Design Needs assessment plan and tools;

January 2008: Submit Needs Assessment plan & tools to OVW for approval;

January - February 2008: Conduct Needs Assessment;

February - March 2008: Compile, sort, present information collected to Executive Committee, prepare report, and submit to OVW for approval.

### Develop Strategic Plan:

March 2008: Review, prioritize and focus Needs Assessment information, and create our strategy to impact our focus areas.

### Implementation phase:

April 2008 through Project end date: Implement strategies to impact focus areas.

## Members' Roles & Contributions

### Member Organizations' Roles and Responsibilities

SurviveAbility is comprised of the following agencies and organizations: Cottage Grove Community Sharing, Direction Service, Lane Independent Living Alliance (LILA), Sexual Assault Support Services (SASS), Siuslaw Outreach Services (SOS), ShelterCare, Womenspace, the Lane County

Domestic Violence Council (DVC)/VALID subcommittee, and Lane County Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Additionally, we have six Community Consultants, women who bring a diverse range of life experiences around violence, abuse, and disabilities. The Community Consultants participate in both our collaborative and the DVC/VALID subcommittee, offering consultation and the perspective of survivors and consumers.

Each of the member organizations have agreed to the following:

- Contribute to meeting space for regularly scheduled meetings, workshops, events.
- Identify staff members to act as primary representatives to the SurviveAbility Executive Committee, and workgroups as needed.
- If the primary representative is unable to continue, each agency will take responsibility for identifying the new representative, and orienting and introducing that person to SurviveAbility.
- Participate in conducting physical & programmatic assessments of their programs and services. Based on these assessments, each organization agrees to help develop the strategic plan to improve organizational accessibility and responsiveness for women with disabilities who have experienced violence. This includes physical, sensory, environmental, and attitudinal accessibility and responsiveness.
- Develop and implement policies and practice changes within their organization designed to reduce the barriers for women with disabilities and survivors who are seeking services, as identified and prioritized during our strategic planning process.

DCF, as the grant recipient, has the unique role of fiscal and program grant administrator. In this role, DCF is responsible for progress reporting and other grant administration tasks.

#### *Individual Roles and Responsibilities*

As stated above, each partner agency will identify one or more staff members as a representative to SurviveAbility. We will also recruit six Community Consultants to represent the DVC/VALID subcommittee and to inform and guide the collaborative on issues relevant to women with

disabilities who have experienced violence and abuse. The individuals who participate on the SurviveAbility executive committee and workgroups will:

- Foster change in and share information with their organizations, groups, and systems;
- Keep their agencies and organizations updated on decisions, discussions, needs, activities and plans;
- Keep SurviveAbility updated on changes, challenges, information from their organizations, groups and systems.

The Project Director responsibilities will be staffed by DCF. The primary responsibilities of the project director will be to provide oversight to the collaborative process, needs assessment, strategic planning, and implementation of change efforts; provide oversight of product development; ensure collaborative activities fall within parameters of grant program; organize executive and workgroup meetings; ensure meeting notes are completed and distributed; facilitate grant monitoring and reporting; and provide budget oversight and administration of grant funds.

### Decision-Making Protocol

We value consensus as our primary decision-making process. This hinges upon the representation of the partners in the decision-making process. We will look to our vision/mission statements to inform our discussions and our decisions. When a decision needs to be made, the facilitator will call roll asking for each participant's level of agreement. This process is known as "consensus role call":

Thumbs down – No, this decision will not work for me.

Thumbs neutral – This is probably not my favorite answer, but it can work for me.

Thumbs up – Yes, this decision works well for me.

When all members respond to the consensus role call with Thumbs neutral or Thumbs up, we will have reached consensus. If any member responds with Thumbs down, we will continue the discussion.

If we are unable to come to consensus within the time constraints of the meeting, we will table the item until a future meeting. This will allow further information and discussion to occur before another consensus role call.

If at a future time we as a group decide we cannot come to consensus, we will assign an ad hoc work group, charged with creating a recommendation or proposal to bring back to the full group. If needed, we will call additional meetings focused on the issue, topic, or decision rather than rely solely on our monthly executive committee meetings. We also know that we can call on our technical assistance provider, Accessing Safety Initiative, to help us come to consensus.

Administrative decisions of the grant that fall under the responsibility of DCF as the lead recipient will remain with DCF.

### Communications Plan

#### *Internal communication:*

We understand that in a collaborative, about 10% of our work will happen in our Executive and Workgroup meetings. We also have responsibility to communicate with our “home agencies” to engage in the other 90% of our collaborative work. Thus, as members of the committees, we will be liaisons to and from our agencies and systems, sharing information among our agency staff, volunteers and Boards of Directors, and fostering change within our systems. Strategies for sharing information include regular reports at staff meetings, management team meetings, and Board of Director meetings on collaboration activities.

SurviveAbility members are encouraged to communicate directly with each other, sharing information through email, phone calls or in person, at any time rather than only at SurviveAbility meetings. While email is helpful for sharing information, resources, and documents, some communication is more effectively handled through telephone or in person. If email communication becomes more substantive, the discussion will be moved to a SurviveAbility meeting or to one on one communication. We will encourage direct and personal communication as a strategy for building our relationships, understanding and trust.

#### *Meeting process, structure, and safety:*

**The SurviveAbility Executive Committee** will meet monthly, for 1.5 hours. The Executive Committee is made up of representatives from our 7 grant partners, 6 community consultants, the coordinator of the Lane County Domestic Violence Council, and the project director from Lane County Department of Children & Families. Each partner agency will specify their representative(s). We will dedicate part of each agenda to Agency/Movement introductions, to increase our collective understanding of our roots and foundations. We also know that our communication is not limited to our scheduled meeting times. We will inform each other of information, activities, breaking news, etc by email, phone or in person.

**Workgroups** will be developed as we move forward on our work plan (i.e., a Needs Assessment workgroup). These workgroups will be formed to accomplish specific tasks and activities related to our work plan. Members of our Executive Committee volunteer to serve on workgroups, which are comprised of equal representation of systems, and will include at least one community consultant. Workgroups will get their direction and objectives from the full Executive Committee and will report back at monthly meetings.

**Facilitation** of the meetings will rotate through the group members, ensuring we each have opportunities for “leadership” of the executive group. We will designate a Vibes Checker, who is responsible for monitoring the pulse and mood of the group, ready to ask for a check-in and to invite comments & thinking from individuals. This will help us remember to slow down, listen, and to hear each other. Location of meetings will rotate through partner agencies.

We are committed to ensuring our meetings are accessible. This means we will:

- Provide ALL material in alternative formats;
- Ensure meeting locations/logistics are accessible;
- Provide equal and respectful access;
- Share the talking space;
- Commit to confronting our assumptions about accessibility;
- Create flexible agendas to allow us to revisit topics, giving time to reflect and respond;

- Avoid sidebar conversations as well as interruptions;
- Focus on listening and learning.

We have a commitment to ensuring our meetings are safe. This means we will:

- Be prepared to support a meeting participant if needed;
- Provide a private space for processing feelings and emotions;
- Encourage participants to exercise self care at the start of the meeting;
- Include local crisis information in meeting materials;
- Model respectful interactions by being open and honest in our discussions, respecting differing points of view, being open to asking questions and having questions asked of us;
- Avoid using collaboration meetings to voice negativity or gossip;
- Communicate when we are not able to attend meetings, or must leave meetings early.

*External communication:*

As SurviveAbility moves forward on our needs assessment, strategic planning, and change implementation, it is important to communicate key information and lessons learned to our broader stakeholders. We are fortunate to have available to us the VALID committee of the Domestic Violence Council to aid in this. The SurviveAbility Executive Committee will work with the VALID committee leadership to schedule periodic updates and information sharing to facilitate information exchange. We will also identify other key decision-making bodies (i.e., the Board of County Commissioners, full Domestic Violence Council) to which we will present information.

DCF will take responsibility for formal communications with the federal partners. We will share responsibility for sharing information on the lessons learned and progress of our collaborative on other community groups, coalitions, etc that we attend.

### Media Plan:

In order to be responsive to media opportunities and challenges, we will designate a media group, whom we will empower to be our media spokespersons. This group will be made up of representatives from our disabilities advocacy agencies, our survivor advocacy agencies, and a representative from DCF; representatives will have experience dealing with the media, and will also be supported by Lane County's Public Information Officer.

When we receive calls from the media regarding the work of SurviveAbility, we will refer calls to the media group. If any member of SurviveAbility sees an opportunity for media outreach, that person will bring the opportunity to the next monthly meeting for brainstorming our specific outreach effort to take advantage of the opportunity. If the opportunity is time-sensitive, we will discuss our response via email. Press releases will be developed by the Media Group, at the direction of the full group.

If we as a collaborative get called by the media regarding a community crisis, we agree to focus the interview from the specific crisis to a higher level in order to raise public awareness of the overarching issues. For instance, we will comment on what we know about the overall issue of violence against women with disabilities both locally and nationally, as well as how to become involved in ending the violence and abuse.

Collaborating organizations agree that they will make no comment to the press that is critical of any other collaborating organization. In addition, we each hold a responsibility to state when we are speaking on behalf of ourselves or our organizations, rather than for SurviveAbility, and as stated above, agree to refer media inquiries regarding violence against women with disabilities to either the Executive Committee or media group.

If a criticism of the work of SurviveAbility is publicized, our Media Group will convene to consider a response.

### Confidentiality Agreements

We believe confidentiality is essential for maintaining trust and participation in our group. Therefore, we agree that we will maintain confidentiality

regarding our collaboration's change efforts. There are several different types of information, and we have developed specific agreements for each.

*Confidentiality of survivor/client information:*

While we agree that the primary purpose of our Executive and Workgroup meetings is to move us forward on our system change efforts, and not venues for discussing individual clients, we anticipate that those of us who provide direct service will begin to work more closely together, with "clients in common" as a result of our participation in SurviveAbility. We understand the critical importance of issues related to confidentiality, information sharing, mandatory reporting, and safety needs; we will prioritize efforts to increase our understanding of each of our protocols, mandates, histories and expectations in these areas. During the implementation phase, we will work to develop a shared process/protocol for working together while respecting our boundaries.

*Confidentiality of our collaborative meetings:*

We agree to have a distinct division between "on the record" and "off the record" parts of meeting. To do this we will have a 2-3 minute break between the two sections, signifying we are now moving into the "off the record" portion of the meeting. We will also use a visual signal to signify this change to the meeting: when conversations are "off the record," the minute taker will place the notes underneath the cone to signify notes will not be taken. We will be flexible to people's unique needs and allow people the freedom to say a comment. The "vibe watcher" will ask if this is a comment to be kept "off the record". We will then decide as a group whether this needs to be addressed in the moment or if we can wait until the "off the record" section of the meeting.

We will designate 5 minutes at the end of our meetings to ask clarifying questions, check-in's, and to give another opportunity to state if something is to be kept "off the record".

We feel it is important in growing our collaboration that we be able to voice concerns about our own or other organizations or people. To this end, we agree to be solution-focused when we bring an issue or concern to the group. Therefore we agree that before doing so, we will take time to consider:

- Does the information you are bringing to the group, belong with the group?
- Would sharing this information with the group enhance or support the mission, goals and vision of the SurviveAbility group?

Likewise, we have a responsibility to consider if & how we take information FROM the meeting back “home”. Some of the information, such as announcements or when we are asking each other to share or gather information from our home agencies or groups is obviously intended to be shared back & forth. Some information is clearly intended to be kept confidential in the meeting space, as described above. However some situations may be less clear; we may not be sure if it is appropriate to take some information out of the meeting space. In these cases SurviveAbility members will ask 1-2 other people from our group to consider the following questions.

- Would sharing this information enhance or support this mission of SurviveAbility?
- Is there any way that the confidentiality or other interests of survivors or members of SurviveAbility be personally hurt or compromised by sharing this information?

If consensus is not reached between this small group, we will bring it back to the next SurviveAbility meeting for further discussion.

Our statement describing why this agreement exists will be posted at our monthly meetings:

- We agree we are using these guidelines and structure with the spirit of allowing everyone to participate and keeping trust within the group.

*Mandatory Reporting:*

We also acknowledge that some members may be subject to mandatory reporting requirements, so may be required to report client information, if disclosed, relating to harm to self or others. If this situation should arise, the collaborative member will notify the collaboration of their obligation prior to the sharing of information.

### Confidentiality of Needs Assessment:

Our Needs Assessment Plan will include additional confidentiality agreements.

### Conflict Resolution Plan

As members of the SurviveAbility collaborative, we understand that we will face barriers, challenges, and differences of opinions and perspectives. We bring a wide range of communication styles, life experiences, and passions. Our growth from these learnings will ultimately result in a stronger, sustainable collaborative.

We encourage direct communication when issues and conflict arise. This means:

- We agree to engage in 1:1 discussion with the individual we are in conflict or with whom we have a difference of opinion;
- In group discussions, we will reflect back in the moment, clarify issues, intent, and perceptions;
- We will speak from our own experiences;
- We will practice good communication and listening skills;
- We will work to ensure time to address responses, comments, discussion.

If conflict cannot be resolved through direct communication, we will access local, impartial facilitators to help us work through the issue. If this doesn't lead us to resolution, we will seek assistance from our technical assistance providers, Accessing Safety Initiative.

### Celebration and Acknowledgement

The work we are doing can be hard, but the rewards can be many. We will look for opportunities to celebrate our successes, and we will be mindful of opportunities to thank and acknowledge each other, both directly and in our meetings.