



## **WHAT IS SURVIVOR PEER SUPPORT?**

- » Survivor Peer Support is based on a connection over shared lived experiences of abuse, violence, exploitation, or trauma. It is voluntary, survivor-led, and trauma-responsive. The essence of peer support is to nurture hope. Survivor Peers connect to other survivors through the shared goals of living free from violence and coping with the effects of trauma on body and spirit.
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## **BENEFITS OF SURVIVOR PEER SUPPORT**

- » Recognizes the strength, resilience, and wisdom of survivors.
  - » Demonstrates the diversity of life choices and healing paths.
  - » Demonstrates the independence of survivors and helps counter the imbalance of power between staff and clients.
  - » Provides real opportunities for leadership development and exercise of healthy personal power.
  - » Demonstrates a commitment to equality and mutual respect.
  - » Offers access to information and insight that may not otherwise be available.
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## **DELIVERING SURVIVOR PEER SUPPORT**

- » Peer support is not curriculum-based -- it is truly survivor-led. Survivor Peers must be flexible and responsive to the needs and goals of the survivors they are serving at any given time. If a number of clients are interested in starting a small business, schedule an entrepreneurship workshop. If participants are looking for fun activities to do with their children, consider karaoke night, movie night, or another family-friendly activity.
  - » Survivor-led services are empowering.
    - Adapting services based on participant feedback is empowering to clients as it demonstrates that their needs and goals are the top priority.
    - It is empowering to Survivor Peers to be able to adjust service delivery and the allocation of program/agency time and resources in order to better meet the needs of those they serve.
    - At the program/agency level, it fosters a culture of learning when we listen carefully and deeply to those we serve and implement feedback in real time.
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## **ROLES AND ACTIVITIES**

- » Survivor Peers can effectively deliver a broad range of services and support tailored to the individual needs of your clients, community, and programs. Examples are listed below, but this list is not exhaustive. There are infinite opportunities to create and innovate!

## **ROLES AND ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)**

- » **Individual Support**
    - Safety planning; systems navigation & advocacy; goal identification & planning; exploring & setting boundaries
  - » **Facilitating Groups**
    - Open discussion of the dynamics of violence & abuse; exploring & setting boundaries; check-in circles; self-care strategies; safety planning; crisis de-escalation; problem-solving
  - » **Facilitating (or coordinating) Healing-Centered Workshops**
    - Art; vision boards; aromatherapy; poetry; self-care/pampering; dance; yoga; walking; book club
  - » **Inreach & Outreach**
    - Art; vision boards; aromatherapy; poetry; self-care/pampering; dance; yoga; walking; book club
  - » **Education and Awareness Events**
    - Entrepreneurship; employment skills; education opportunities; navigating systems; systems advocacy; survivor speaking.
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## **SCREEN IN! INCLUSION OF SURVIVOR PEERS**

- » A diverse staff, at all levels of your program or agency, will help you serve a more diverse groups of clients. In general, it is a good idea for staff to look like the clients and communities they serve. Employing Survivor Peers from marginalized or otherwise underserved communities may help you to identify barriers to accessing services and develop more culturally-grounded and culturally-responsive services to meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable members of your community.
  - » In addition to connections over shared culture and lived experiences of abuse or exploitation, many survivors express an interest in talking with Survivor Peers about their experiences navigating court systems and child custody issues, living with PTSD or other effects of trauma, and/or coping with substance use. Service engagement and attendance can be an effective measure of success. As a rule, people show up for services and activities that they find valuable and helpful.
  - » **Screen In!**
    - Be careful not to create unnecessary barriers to engaging survivors as peer support volunteers and staff. Survivors are resilient and resourceful and will self-select into the right role at the right time.
    - Don't ask survivors if they are healed enough to serve; trust they will know if and when peer support fits into their healing journey.
    - Don't set hard time limits between ending services and returning as a peer support volunteer or staff; the best training for peer support is participating in peer support and gradually assuming more leadership.
    - A robust training program, including shadowing and mentorship by experienced peers, offers opportunities for survivors to determine if peer support is a good fit for them.
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## **SURVIVOR PEER SUPPORT IN HOUSING**

- » Advocates or case managers in housing programs are required to balance competing priorities. They help with safety planning, provide supportive services, and connect survivors with community resources and financial assistance. In addition, they are often responsible for collecting clients' income verification, calculating client rent payments, and holding clients accountable to leases or service agreements.

## **SURVIVOR PEER SUPPORT IN HOUSING (CONTINUED)**

- » In housing programs, Survivor Peers are a lifeline to clients who aren't sure who they can trust. They can spend time supporting clients on whatever needs are most important to them: riding the bus together to learn the local routes, accompaniment to enroll children at school, attending an AA meeting, setting up online banking, or making a safety plan.
  - » In the long-term, Survivor Peers create opportunities for clients to make connections and build positive social support networks. They help clients identify their needs and goals and to effectively access the support services and resources necessary to meet their needs and achieve their goals.
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## **POTENTIAL FUNDING OPTIONS**

- » Survivor Peer Support can be implemented at a very low cost by building on existing survivor networks and using volunteers. However, bringing Survivor Peers on staff and paying them equitably should be the goal. Survivor Peer Support is a core service. Major housing program funders recognize and fund peer support. Peer support is an emerging best practice and including it in your applications may make it more competitive.
  - » **Potential Funders:**
    - Victims of Crime Act - Criminal Justice Division (VOCA-CJD), Transitional Housing
    - Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), Transitional Housing
    - Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Continuum of Care (CoC)
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## **SUPERVISION AND LEADERSHIP**

- » Truly survivor-led services require survivor leadership at all levels of the organization. Create leadership opportunities for survivors. If necessary, Survivor Peers on staff can gain supervisory experience by supervising volunteers and then move into staff supervision. Supervision must be collaborative, reflective, and trauma-responsive.
- » **Ethical Considerations**
  - Confidentiality for staff, particularly Survivor Peers, is essential.
  - You employ a Survivor Peer, but you do not own their story.
    - \* It is theirs to share in service of the work and at their own discretion.
    - \* Survivor Peers may be interested in fundraising or speaking to the media, but it must not be a requirement of their position.
  - You must get consent every time you might want to share information, even anonymously.
    - \* Be careful in how you seek consent. Staff will feel obligated to say yes to their supervisor or agency leadership, so you must create the conditions of informed consent and respect staff limits and boundaries.
    - \* Ask about professional development interests and comfort level with different types of peer work or advocacy prior to making any specific requests. That way, you can only make requests that are in line with the Survivor Peer's interests and comfort level.

## THE SAFE ALLIANCE

- » The SAFE Alliance is a merger of Austin Children's Shelter and SafePlace, both long-standing and respected human service agencies in Austin serving the survivors of child abuse, sexual assault and exploitation, and domestic violence.
  - » **Vision:** A just and safe community free from violence and abuse.
  - » **Mission:** To stop abuse for everyone.
  - » **Guiding Principles:**
    - Respectful and trusting relationships
    - Diversity, accessibility, and inclusiveness
    - Focus on survivors
    - Mutual accountability
    - Shared responsibility and collaboration
    - Continuous learning and adaptation
    - Safety for people and the organization
    - Celebration
- \* For more information about The SAFE Alliance, visit [www.safeaustin.org](http://www.safeaustin.org).
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## STRONGER TOGETHER

- » Coming together as survivors is enough. We are not alone. We are stronger together. We explore different healing modalities, share life experience, grow confidence, learn about community resources, and build a support network together as equals. We are enough. We inspire each other.
- » Tips for Advocates: Implementing Survivor Peer Support was developed in collaboration with The SAFE Alliance and Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV). TCFV is grateful to Lisa Pous and Erin Goodison (The SAFE Alliance) for sharing their expertise for this publication.

*Find more of our Advocacy Tip Sheets at [tcfv.org/policy/creating-safer-spaces/](http://tcfv.org/policy/creating-safer-spaces/)*