



National Resource Center
on Domestic Violence

**Documenting the Major Shifts in Funding for
Sexual Assault and Domestic Abuse Victim
Services in Iowa from 2012 to 2015**

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes three years of documenting a significant shift in how domestic abuse (DA) and sexual assault (SA) victim service programs operate in the state of Iowa. Due to large and persistent funding cuts at the local, state and federal levels, in 2012 the Iowa Attorney General's Crime Victim Assistance Division (CVAD) created a *Strategic Funding and Services Plan* ("Plan") to significantly modify how funds would be distributed across the state. The Plan focused on: (1) shifting a portion of shelter dollars to domestic abuse advocacy services that could occur within communities and that could help survivors either safely stay in their homes or find safe, permanent housing ("DA comprehensive services"); and (2) dedicating more funding to comprehensive sexual assault (SA) services in order to increase and build capacity.

Information provided in this report came from multiple sources:

- 1) Service data submitted by programs to CVAD from 2012 to 2015;
- 2) In-depth interviews with program administrators each year over three years;
- 3) Internet-based surveys with DA and SA direct service staff; and
- 4) In-depth interviews with program administrators, staff, state coalition directors and CVAD administrators

The Transition

Prior to the transition, there were 25 service areas across Iowa. There were 24 state-support DA shelters, which offered dual services (both domestic abuse and sexual assault services). There were three freestanding sexual assault programs.

The transition divided the state into six regions – each with 1-2 sexual assault service providers, 1-2 domestic violence comprehensive service providers and 1-2 shelter-based providers (see map on page 4). Through a competitive grant process, funding was therefore granted to a smaller number of providers – resulting in some programs losing their state funding. A small number of those who lost funding have transitioned to being community supported, or have modified their services, and others have closed. For example, in the space of one year the state went from having 24 state-supported DA shelters to nine.

Change in Service Provision from 2012 to 2015

The primary goal of the transition was to better reach and assist:

- 1) Sexual assault survivors;

- 2) Traditionally underserved racial and ethnic groups; and
- 3) Survivors experiencing additional challenges such as limited English proficiency, immigration status or having disabilities.

Based on service data provided by programs to CVAD from 2012 through 2015, many of the changes that were hoped for as a result of this transition have partially or fully come to pass. Between 2012 and 2015, the Iowa domestic abuse and sexual abuse programs increased their services by 22% (from 23,561 in 2012 to 28,627 in 2015). The greatest increases were in the desired areas: 50% more sexual assault survivors were served, more traditionally underserved survivors were served, and survivors experiencing additional challenges such as limited English proficiency, immigration status or having disabilities were served. It is important to note that a great deal of funds were allocated to hiring additional staff as part of this transition, and within the first year of the transition over 130 new staff were hired.

Impact of the Transition on Sexual Assault Services

There are now ten state-funded sexual assault comprehensive (SAC) grant holders in the state of Iowa, where there had been only three. Grant holders now cover from between 2 to 19 counties. Prior to the transition, most programs in Iowa were dual-focus (DA and SA), with only three stand-alone SA programs. One executive director of a DA-focused program, who used to manage a dual program, expressed a sentiment heard from many other directors:

"I think three years ago if we were honest about the level of competency and actual service numbers – you know, whenever we would talk we would say we served domestic violence and sexual assault. And if we were to be truthful and honest, that 'and sexual assault' should have been a smaller font because of the time and energy we put into sexual assault was probably half of what we put into domestic violence."

Results from fiscal year 2015 show that 50% more SA survivors are being served under the new system.

Impact of the Transition on Non-residential Domestic Abuse Services

A number of positive changes were noted by directors of programs with comprehensive domestic abuse service grants. These changes in brief were:

- 1) Advocates were freed from enforcing rules in shelters and could focus more on helping survivors obtain housing and other resources;
- 2) Having flexible funds provided advocates the ability to address survivors' individualized needs; and
- 3) The increased focus on mobile advocacy increased program reach to survivors who would have otherwise gone unserved.

The challenges that still need to be addressed included:

- 1) Ensuring that children are not overlooked now that they are not in shelter settings;
- 2) Needing more resources for transportation and staffing to meet the higher need in the community; and
- 3) Standardizing a definition for and understanding of mobile advocacy.

Impact of the Transition on Domestic Abuse Shelter Services

The transition in funding services in Iowa certainly hit the domestic abuse shelters the hardest, as they went from 24 to 9 funded shelters across the state. While directors of the shelters had many positive things to say about the transition -- agreeing with the need for stand-alone sexual assault services and with the need to provide more domestic abuse survivors with non-residential options -- the transition resulted in a number of challenges for those running shelter programs:

- 1) Whereas shelter vacancy rates used to be as high as 42%, shelters are now consistently at or over capacity;
- 2) Shelters are now being overwhelmingly used by the most traumatized survivors with the most complicated issues -- meaning they are staying longer and requiring advanced advocacy skills from workers who are often some of the least trained, newest employees in the organization;
- 3) Programs have shifted from serving as few as 2 to 8 counties prior to the transition to covering as many as 19 post-transition; and
- 4) Prior to the transition, holiday/weekend shelter and on-call shifts could be spread among all staff, while today, staff paid off other grants (DAC or SAC) cannot cross over to work in the shelter. It is now a challenge to cover these shifts as well as staff absences due to sickness and/or trainings.

When the transition began there were 24 state-supported shelters in Iowa, with a 42% vacancy rate. In 2015 there were 9 state-supported shelters, most consistently at or near capacity. See Figure 8 on the next page

Impact of the Transition on the Culturally Specific Programs

Prior to the transition, CVAD funded three culturally-specific programs (CSPs) focusing on intimate violence – LUNA (Latinas Unidas por un Nuevo Amanecer), Monsoon United Asian Women of Iowa, and Deaf Iowans Against Abuse. In addition, Meskwaki Victim Services, focused on the Meskwaki Native American community, was receiving federal but not state funding. These programs were small – most consisting of a director and fewer than five staff.

The transition plan dedicated 10% of funding to strengthening culturally-specific programming in Iowa. State and coalitions recognized that too many minority communities in Iowa were underserved and that the existing CSPs were not sufficiently funded or staffed to meet community needs. The 10% set aside

mirrored programs at the federal level and those of other states – though Iowa chose to widen the definition of applicable CSPs to include the LGBTQ community. CSP grants were awarded through the same competitive grant process as those for mainstream SA/DV programs.

Initially, CSPs were encouraged to work statewide, but more recently there is a growing recognition that serving all of Iowa's 99 counties is not feasible at current funding, staffing and organizational capacity levels. Many CSPs have since focused their efforts on specific counties or communities, while leaving their doors open to survivor/victims and community partners outside their geographical focus areas.

In 2015, there were seven CSPs funded by CVAD; the original three and:

- **Amani Community Services** - focusing on the African-American communities in Linn and Black Hawk counties in NE Iowa
- **Nissa African Family Services** - focusing on African immigrant and refugee communities across Iowa
- **Transformative Healing** - focused on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and other gender and sexually diverse communities
- **Meskwaki Victim Services** – focused on the Meskwaki Native American community in Tama and Palo Alto counties

Iowa was recently awarded a grant from the Office of Victims of Crimes to fund consultants who will focus on capacity building for CSPs. With only seven CSPs across 99 counties, funders see many possibilities for expansion and growth in programs to meet culturally-specific community needs.

Impact of the Transition on Organizations

Many program administrators spoke of the transition as having impacted their organizations in myriad ways. The most common themes mentioned were

- 1) **Fundraising**: needing to establish new connections in new communities; competing for the same dollars; difficulty of SA programs raising funds compared to DA programs
- 2) **Stakeholder and community relations**: becoming established in new communities, explaining to stakeholders why this shift was made
- 3) **Regional relationships**: the complexities of now needing to collaborate as a region to provide comprehensive services
- 4) **Their relationship with CVAD**: while directors recognized that CVAD staff were doing their best to guide this transition process, there were issues around how decisions were made and how communication was handled

- 5) **Staffing and management issues:** many programs went from being small and non-hierarchical to having multiple levels of management, others faced significant challenges regarding laying staff off or hiring new staff, and some struggled with managing staff in remote or satellite locations.

Lessons Learned from the Transition

- **Transitioning a statewide system is not a smooth process.**
 - **Communication counts.** Program administrators expressed the need for more communication and more windows onto the process, so they could see changes coming and prepare. State funders and the two state coalitions both received praise for on-site technical assistance and program feedback; even more opportunities for this kind of communication during such a transition would have been helpful.
 - **The state coalitions needed more funding to be ready to support members.** While both of the state coalitions received additional funding to respond to needs related to the transition, they and the funders recognized over time that it was not enough. No one had anticipated, for example, how many trainings would be needed for new staff, as over a hundred new employees were hired in the first year of the transition. Further, all of the other responsibilities that go with being state coalitions continued on top of having to attend to helping programs deal with this major transition.
 - **The state funders now wish they had increased their staff and systems to support the transition.** From increased financial reporting requirements to changing database needs, the Iowa transition put pressure on the state funders that they had not fully anticipated. Additional oversight from legislators and federal sources increased demands on their time as well.
 - **Relationships among funders, coalitions and service providers suffered short-term.** The Iowa transition was undertaken knowing that some personal relationships would suffer. All parties acknowledge losses. Some relationships have begun to recover; others already have. By and large, all agree that a change of some kind was needed to meet the needs of Iowa's SA and DV victim/survivors.
 - **Funder meetings with communities were viewed as essential in setting the stage for the transition.** Iowa's state funders conducted numerous face-to-face meetings in communities across the state prior to launching the transition. They intentionally attended these meetings with the two state coalition directors. The meetings let communities have a say in the project, increased their understanding of the issues involved, and allowed communities to prepare for the change before it occurred.
 - **Hiring took longer than predicted.** Many service providers had been small nonprofits that hired for one or two positions a year. During the early years of the transition, many doubled

their staff size and did so quickly, without knowing exact job descriptions. Funding began flowing in very quickly and some organizations that experienced hiring difficulties ended up reverting funds to the state.

- **Separating domestic assault programs from sexual assault programs worked to increase SA service numbers.** Funders, both the DV and SA coalitions, and most administrators agree that the same impact could not have been achieved by simply adding more SA advocates to existing dual programs.
- **Strengthening a focus on housing can mean that shelters experience a shift in survivor demographics.** Once survivors had multiple housing options open to them, fewer opted for shelters, especially communal shelters. Often, those survivors who did opt to go to shelters had more complex needs and faced greater challenges to finding and maintaining stable housing. A great deal of thought needs to be given to how to transform shelters into places that can adequately serve these higher-needs clients, while in shelter and afterward. Thought also should be given to how to support shelter staff in an environment of fewer 'quick successes.' Finally, shelters and funders need to think about how to build stronger networks with other service providers in the mental health, substance abuse, employment, and housing sectors.
- **Communities and stakeholders will take years to adjust.** Most organizations have a long history in their communities and often have trouble understanding the complex reasons why more providers might be better than just one. Outreach and building/rebuilding of relationships takes longer than might be expected.
- **Impact on community fundraising must be considered.** Not normally the purview of funders, this issue is a day-to-day concern for most organizations and administrators. Support, ideas and understanding can help to acknowledge this concern and pave the way for regional partners to discuss and move forward.
- **The state coalitions played a key role in the transition.** Iowa's SA & DV coalitions were leaders in the transition. Both parties worked closely with each other and with CVAD to help shape the transition and support programs.
 - **Mutual support and communication are important.** The two coalitions worked closely together throughout the transition. Any differences of opinion were kept behind closed doors once a decision was made; a united front was deemed important.
 - **Basic certification training demands overwhelmed coalition training resources, making it difficult to attend to more advanced training needs.** In an effort to standardize training and aid member organizations, the state coalitions committed to doing the initial certification

training for all new hires in the first years of the transition, in addition to more advanced trainings. The number of new hires – more than 130 – overwhelmed their training capacity and limited focus on more advanced trainings that had been planned.

- **Small culturally-specific programs (CSPs) may require significant capacity building and support to increase their growth trajectories.** Iowa began the transition by encouraging some, mostly urban-based, CSPs to work statewide, but has recently recommended that such groups focus on smaller geographic areas.

State Context Matters

- **Iowa's state SA and DV coalitions work well together and support each other.** The Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) completely supported the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault (IowaCASA) in the move away from dual-focused DV/SA programs. ICADV recognized that some of their members might suffer and that nearly all members would be impacted by such a move, yet they decided that the benefit to Iowa's sexual assault survivors outweighed the pain of organizational change and loss. Without this level of collaboration the transition might have been jeopardized and could have been much more divisive and destructive.
- **Iowa's funding climate.** The transition happened in part because the state funding situation was no longer tenable to fund all of the programs within the state. In 2015, federal VOCA funds were significantly increased, which made adapting to changes less difficult. The increased funding was also used to increase staff wages, which had been a goal of the process from the beginning.
- **Iowa is a rural state.** One likely reason that so many of Iowa's domestic violence shelters had such high vacancy rates before the transition is because of the rural composition of the state. States with more densely populated areas may need a very different solution as they assess the extent to which DA and SA victims are being adequately served across their own state.
- **The unique nature of regions within states requires regional solutions.** All parties of the Iowa transition agree that much of the success of the transition was due to making room for unique, regionally-based solutions that take into account the strengths and weaknesses of the grant holders, as well as their regional partners, communities and other service providers. Even in hindsight, none of the parties interviewed for this project felt they could write a transition 'roadmap' that would work across all regions. Both funders and coalitions recognized that leaving decisions open for regions caused initial stress, but also resulted in solutions better suited to each region.

Conclusion

The Iowa transition achieved many of its initial goals. Such large-scale systems change did not occur without sacrifices; there were periods of uncertainty, miscommunications and stress for all parties involved. Today, most program administrators, coalition staff, funders and frontline staff view the outcomes of the transition positively, though some wish the changes had come more slowly or been handled in different ways.

While this transition has created positive change for Iowa, it is important to view it within the context of that state, at that time, with its unique funding opportunities and limitations. Funder advocacy, the mutual support of the coalitions and the freedom of programs and regions to search for unique solutions each played a part in the ultimate outcomes.

It is also important to note that despite significant change, Iowa's SA/DA system still faces challenges and ongoing changes. Shelter-based programs are dealing with some of the most complex survivor needs – an unexpected outcome of the transition. Sexual assault and domestic violence comprehensive programs have different definitions and practices around mobile advocacy – and few programs feel they are providing the level of advocacy some survivors need to stabilize in housing. The focus on providing survivors with more housing options, which has resulted in fewer families coming into shelters, may mean that programs have to find new and innovative ways to reach child survivors. No transition can solve all issues, but it is to be hoped that Iowa's new system has the strength and resources to confront issues as they arise.

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