

# Many Voices ND: A Needs Assessment on North Dakota's Response to Domestic Violence

## BACKGROUND:

From January to September 2023, Global Rights for Women conducted a needs assessment on North Dakota's response to domestic violence. Under the guidance of CAWS North Dakota and the project Planning Committee, Global Rights for Women interviewed survivors and advocates to identify survivors' needs and assess systems' responses. This summary provides an overview of the full report, which is available from CAWS.

## FINDINGS:

Listening sessions with survivors and advocates **identified strengths and gaps** in the response organized into the following categories:

- Six Areas of High Needs
- Criminal Justice System Gaps
- Facilitative Linkages and Informal Assistance

As Global Rights for Women heard distinct ways in which underserved survivors were affected by the category,

Global Rights for Women also listened for **trends** impacting connections between service providers and survivors, including the **impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic** on those connections. Those trends and impacts were organized into three areas where change is occurring:

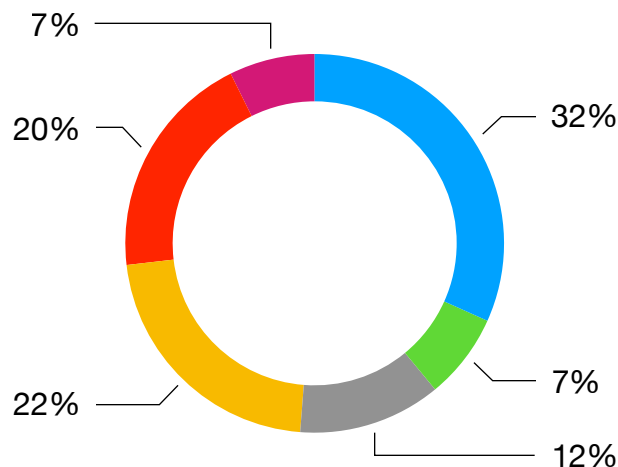
1. Tools and resources for advocacy
2. Survivors' needs and experiences
3. Formalized response systems

## PARTICIPANTS:

27 Survivors  
32 Advocates

Representing  
17 distinct sessions  
10 Direct Service Programs

## UNDERSERVED SURVIVORS INTERVIEWED\*



- Rural/Remote Women (including those with children)
- Indigenous/Tribal Members
- LGBTQIA2S+
- Latine/Hispanic Community
- Person with Disabilities
- Men

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

The detailed report findings should be reviewed by domestic violence service providers and stakeholders to explore ideas for action. Additional efforts should be made to hear from Native survivors and Tribal communities. Specific topics for review include: promoting effective coordination in light of current challenges, resourcing for systemic advocacy, mitigating gaps in rural health care, and increasing competency of professionals in addressing domestic violence.

## **FINDINGS: SURVIVORS HAVE HIGH NEEDS IN THESE SIX AREAS**



Safe & Affordable  
Housing



Children and  
Economic Security



Affordable &  
Accessible  
Transportation



Legal Assistance



Access to Mental  
Health Care



Advocacy

## **FINDINGS: CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM GAPS**

Listening sessions identified the following system gaps impacting survivor safety and offender accountability:

- lack of arrests for violence
- insufficient charging or reduced charges
- minimal or no jail time
- significant problems with no-contact orders
- violations to no-contact orders go unaddressed
- insufficient follow-up in some Batterer Intervention Programs when participants fail to complete

In multiple instances, survivors are still being harassed even with no contact orders in place; some were criminalized when they then took actions to address the violence. Interactions with police were mixed with some survivors reporting very helpful interactions and others describing how police harassed or ignored them.

## **FINDINGS: FACILITATIVE LINKAGES & INFORMAL ASSISTANCE**

Coordination and supportive linkages between agencies were cited by advocates as critical to getting survivors the support they need, however there are many places where coordination has suffered as a result of staffing shortages, turnover, and burnout.

Informal support from family, friends and others in the community provides critical support for many; but when survivors experience blaming or belittling from these sources, it greatly complicates their efforts to get help.

*“...As soon as I walked out of that courtroom, [the advocate] already had me a cell phone because he shut off my cell phone. I couldn't connect it back. He blocked it. They had me an apartment. Bills already turned on and everything. Within a few hours they helped me a lot and they assured me we're here for you.”*  
-A Survivor

## **FINDINGS: TRENDS AND THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON SURVIVOR-ADVOCATE CONNECTION**

**Tools & Resources:** more survivors have mobile phones, but that also means increased use of social media; use of telehealth and mobile advocacy are increasing.

**Needs and Experiences of Survivors:** more severe forms of violence are showing up; more survivors have complex mental health needs.

**Formalized systems:** centralization of social services intakes has been hard; staffing turnovers and understaffing impacts coordination and services.

COVID-19 impacted service delivery and organizational operations for direct services agencies in an environment where every other organization was changing as well. Programs responded by moving to on-line advocacy, changing shelter policies, and finding ways to support each other as co-workers. However, high staff turnover and burnout does suggest that the pressures were great, and some advocates shared concern that low wages in the field led to poor retention in the face of those pressures.