

CREATING INCLUSIVE AGENCIES

SEXUAL VIOLENCE & INDIVIDUALS WHO IDENTIFY AS LGBTQ



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CREATING INCLUSIVE AGENCIES

SEXUAL VIOLENCE & INDIVIDUALS WHO IDENTIFY AS LGBTQ

The success of sexual violence services and prevention efforts within any specific population is highly dependent upon the organization and its staff members having the skills and knowledge needed to value and affirm all members of the community. Before reaching out to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) community or trying to implement prevention strategies or survivor services, organizations should first assess their current capacity and create an action plan for addressing areas that need improvement.

Organizations that do not do internal assessment risk alienating LGBTQ communities by having organizational structures, processes or individual staff members that do not demonstrate inclusion or that are dismissive or even derogatory to individuals who identify as LGBTQ (e.g., agency forms that only present female-male gender options, staff members who make assumptions about gender). Individuals who identify as LGBTQ may interpret these negative contacts to mean such organizations are not competent to serve the needs of LGBTQ communities. For the purposes of this document, organizational capacity can be understood as the structures, processes,

resources and willingness to develop and implement sexual violence prevention strategies and survivors services with the LGBTQ communities, while individual capacity is defined as the knowledge, skills and motivation to do this (Flaspohler, Duffy, Wandersman, Stillman, & Maras, 2008). There are steps that organizations can take to build capacity for engaging LGBTQ communities, facilitating prevention efforts with LGBTQ communities, and providing services to survivors who identify as LGBTQ. This resource outlines these steps, as well as some areas for consideration, and activities to help organizations move even further toward a more inclusive, affirming agency.



THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSESSING READINESS

Efforts of community-based sexual violence agencies working with LGBTQ communities must focus on promoting healthy LGBTQ relationships, strong interagency collaborations, and providing competent services and prevention efforts. When agencies spend the time assessing internal readiness and then address the needs discovered, they are protecting future disclosures and safety of survivors, as well as boosting credibility with LGBTQ community organizations. Once some

assessment and planning has been conducted, it will be beneficial to collaborate with LGBTQ community groups or agencies (see the *Sexual violence & individuals who identify as LGBTQ: Resource List* for links and information on LGBTQ community organizations and online resources).

For some agencies, a good first step would be to connect with a local LGBTQ community agency, or begin researching issues that affect LGBTQ communities within the service area. This will provide input on what is going on and where a sexual violence prevention agency could provide assistance and/or build skills.

Some helpful questions and activities could be:

- Will preventing sexual violence in LGBTQ communities put people at additional risk for violence in the broader geographic community?
- Have there been issues or incidents locally where individuals who identify as LGBTQ were targeted and, if so, what was the community's response? How were the issues/incidents resolved or do they remain unaddressed?
- Are there prevention efforts already taking place? Does the LGBTQ community think sexual violence is a problem that needs to be addressed through prevention efforts in either the LGBTQ community or in the broader community?
- Are there resources in the community for survivors who identify as LGBTQ to seek support if they disclose that are not based on the male-perpetrator/female-victim model? How would these services be responsive to a survivor's needs? How would an agency know?
- Approach LGBTQ community agencies or leaders within the LGBTQ community to assist in conducting an assessment of community readiness. The assessment could identify overall community climate for individuals who identify as LGBTQ, size and demographics of individuals who identify as LGBTQ in the community, strengths and resources available, gaps in services, etc.
 - Based on the assessment results, consider where to begin promoting equality and celebration of diversity within the community, provide models

and programming on healthy LGBTQ relationships, or work to strengthen organizational policies and systems within the community that respond to crimes, promote equality, and address social issues.

- Finding out what competent services or programming would look like can help when assessing current efforts. It is always useful to have something to strive for and work on when outlining ways to improve or strengthen efforts.

Individual skills and knowledge

Because access to appropriate and competent services is the right of every victim of sexual violence, agencies and community organizations should commit to assessing current efforts to make sure all individuals feel comfortable asking for help. A survivor may be re-victimized by the transphobia, homophobia, biphobia, or heterosexism¹ of those they turn to for help. They can also be negatively affected when service providers are not aware of, sensitive to, or skilled in meeting their needs. Likewise, prevention activities that are not inclusive of all members of the community can lead people to believe that sexual violence messages about attitudes, knowledge, skills, or behaviors do not apply to them or are not meant for them. Effectively working with LGBTQ communities, as with any community, takes a commitment and willingness to examine one's own biases, to actively work to grow and change, and to make LGBTQ-sensitivity and LGBTQ-specificity a priority at individual and organizational levels. Every agency needs to have some knowledge and awareness of LGBTQ issues, because whether they know it or not,

¹ For more information on terminology, see the NSVRC's Talking about gender & sexuality: Sexual violence & individuals who identify as LGBTQ

they likely already serve clients and conduct prevention efforts with individuals who identify as LGBTQ.

Individual capacity includes the ability of staff to recognize and respond to their own and others' homophobia and heterosexism. This provides the foundation for staff attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs that demonstrate respect and dignity toward LGBTQ communities and individuals, which the organization can then cultivate and reinforce. It is also important for staff to have knowledge about culture within LGBTQ communities, the nuances of, and appropriate language use, and an understanding of the larger social and



political context. A final dimension of individual capacity is having the skills to work with and become an ally with LGBTQ communities. Implementing prevention programming requires prior knowledge of a community, and culturally competent practitioners meet not only the needs a survivor may have as a result of violence, but other forms of prejudice and discrimination and their impacts on the healing process (Gentlewarrior, Martin-Jearld, Skok, & Sweetser, 2008; Girshick, 2002; Heidt, et al., 2005; Witten & Eyler, 1999).

Agency strengths and needs

Organizations can support staff capacity in these areas by assessing staff knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about individuals who identify as LGBTQ and sexual violence against and within the LGBTQ communities. Based on this assessment, organizations should provide ongoing staff/volunteer development opportunities such as pre-service and ongoing training and active supervision. An agency can conduct both internal and external assessments of the agency's strengths and gaps in responding to sexual violence in LGBTQ communities. If resources are available, focus groups or a survey in LGBTQ communities to understand the perception of the agency within this community can be helpful in starting this process and getting feedback from the individuals who it most impacts. One resource for organizational assessment of policies, data forms and agency materials is the *Agency Safety Assessment Tool* (Health Imperative, n.d.).

Ultimately, the success of building capacity within an organization to be LGBTQ-inclusive first internally and finally with the broader community will be a result of the management's commitment.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BUILDING INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

The assessments noted above will show where individuals, agencies, and/or communities have areas for growth – this is the time to plan on taking some steps toward building capacity in those areas. Following are some activities an agency can implement to move toward engaging LGBTQ communities in prevention strategies and providing culturally appropriate services.

Foster an inclusive, supportive environment

Organizations should be willing to take the risks that leadership calls for by demonstrating respect and valuing the diversity of all people. Some ways this process can begin are:

- Be sure the agency’s mission or values statement includes LGBTQ-inclusive language. For example, listing out issues or core values that support equality: This agency works to end the oppression of all people. This agency values and celebrates the diversity of our community and strives to protect the rights of everyone.
- Display noticeable and affirming artwork or photographs showing diverse people, flyers for LGBTQ events and services, rainbow flags, and/or LGBTQ magazines or newsletters (i.e., The Advocate, Human Rights Quarterly). The physical environment can say a lot to a victim and the public. Clients will sense if they can expect respect and compassion before they ever talk with you.
- Provide information specific to LGBTQ issues, such as same-sex sexual assault. If there are none available, contact your local or regional



LGBTQ center for information or ideas on creating a pamphlet or other materials for survivors who identify as LGBTQ.

Supporting agency staff, volunteer, and leadership

Agencies should represent the communities they serve – leadership, staff, volunteers, and other members of the organization should reflect the cultural, racial, ethnic, and social identity of the service area. Welcome all community members by announcing volunteer training or staff openings in local LGBTQ newspapers or through LGBTQ centers.

- Create a workplace that is open and



affirming to employees as well as to job applicants who identify as LGBTQ. For example, does your health plan provide coverage for domestic partners? Does family leave include adoption or care for a partner? Are there gender-inclusive bathrooms?

- Develop a team to review paperwork and policies. Include individuals who identify as LGBTQ on the review team and/or develop a process to gather feedback from LGBTQ community leaders. This can include anything staff or volunteers will need to

complete either on-line or in paper form: the policy and procedure guides for staff and volunteers, emergency contact information forms, etc.

- Ensure that the agency's nondiscrimination statement for staff and volunteers clearly bans discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Ensure that staff and volunteers are LGBTQ aware and sensitive

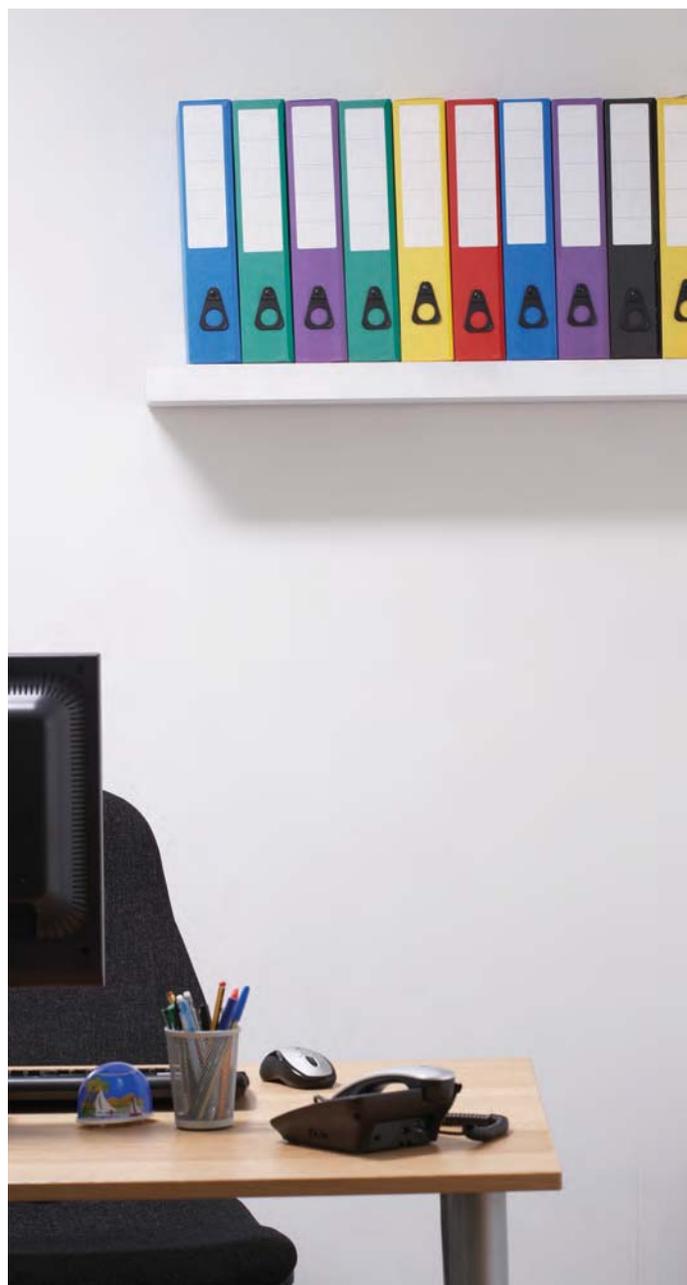
Implement ongoing LGBTQ anti-bias training sessions and discussion items for board, staff and volunteers. For example, provide opportunities for staff and volunteers to examine and reflect upon their own culture and its influences on personal attitudes and values. Other strategies could include:

- Encourage staff and volunteers to examine their own comfort level when working with individuals who identify as LGBTQ. Provide opportunities and resources for staff and volunteers to begin to unlearn oppression, perhaps with the assistance of outside agencies.
 - Include exercises and conversations that look at individual privilege and biases in staff and board meetings, volunteer trainings, and other agency conversations.
 - Institute mandatory anti-harassment training on heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia.
- All supervisors should have training and support on addressing homophobia, biphobia and transphobia among staff and volunteers, among clients, and how to encourage staff in being supportive of clients who identify as LGBTQ. Provide training for existing and new

ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD AVOID LOOKING TO LGBTQ ORGANIZATIONS AS “EXPERTS” AVAILABLE TO TEACH “EVERYTHING THERE IS TO KNOW” – SELF-EDUCATION AS AN AGENCY IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS ON THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL.

staff and volunteers on LGBTQ sexual assault and on LGBTQ issues in general. LGBTQ sexual assault is more than a “token” topic in your training and is incorporated throughout the training through role plays, examples and by making the connections between all forms of oppression and sexual violence. Some examples could include working with local LGBTQ providers to develop a training on “Working with youth who identify as LGBTQ” for staff.

- Contact local hate crime registry organizations to provide training for staff and volunteers. This may be especially helpful for legal advocates and counselors.
- Provide specific trainings on survivors who identify as transgender and the transgender community. This group is particularly stigmatized and marginalized and needs extra attention.
- Make sure the trainings are not one-time “token” trainings that have no follow-up or connection to everyday operations and projects.

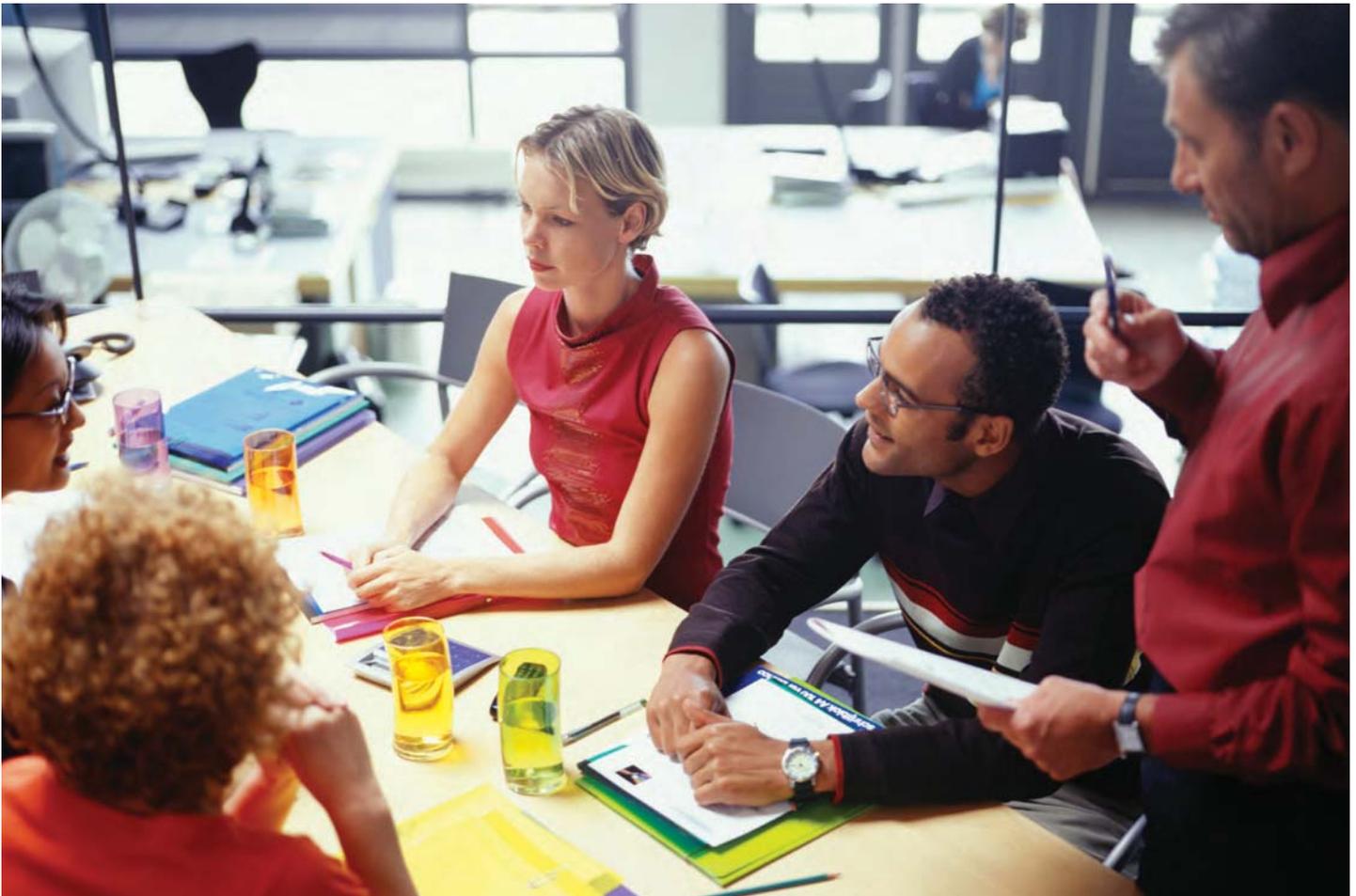


Collaboration

Community-based agencies should be working with one another as equal partners in order to prevent and respond to sexual violence against individuals who identify as LGBTQ. Collaboration can be especially important for agencies who have limited resources, but want to offer competent services and prevention strategies. Contacting a local or regional LGBTQ agency for more information opens the door for future opportunities. An agency should be familiar with current issues such as gay marriage and domestic partnerships, individuals in the military who identify as LGBTQ, and issues of specific concern to individuals who identify as LGBTQ in your community before reaching out.

Once a relationship is established, some goals or activities could be:

- Familiarize yourself with current issues such as hate crime laws, local anti-violence agencies, and trends in hate crime against LGBTQ communities in your region. Contact local anti-hate crime organizations for more information and as an opportunity to begin a collaborative relationship.
- Create collaborations with school administrators, hate crime prevention educators, and local LGBTQ centers in order to be in a better position to reach school-aged children and youth who, statistically, perpetrate most of the hate crimes against LGBTQ communities.

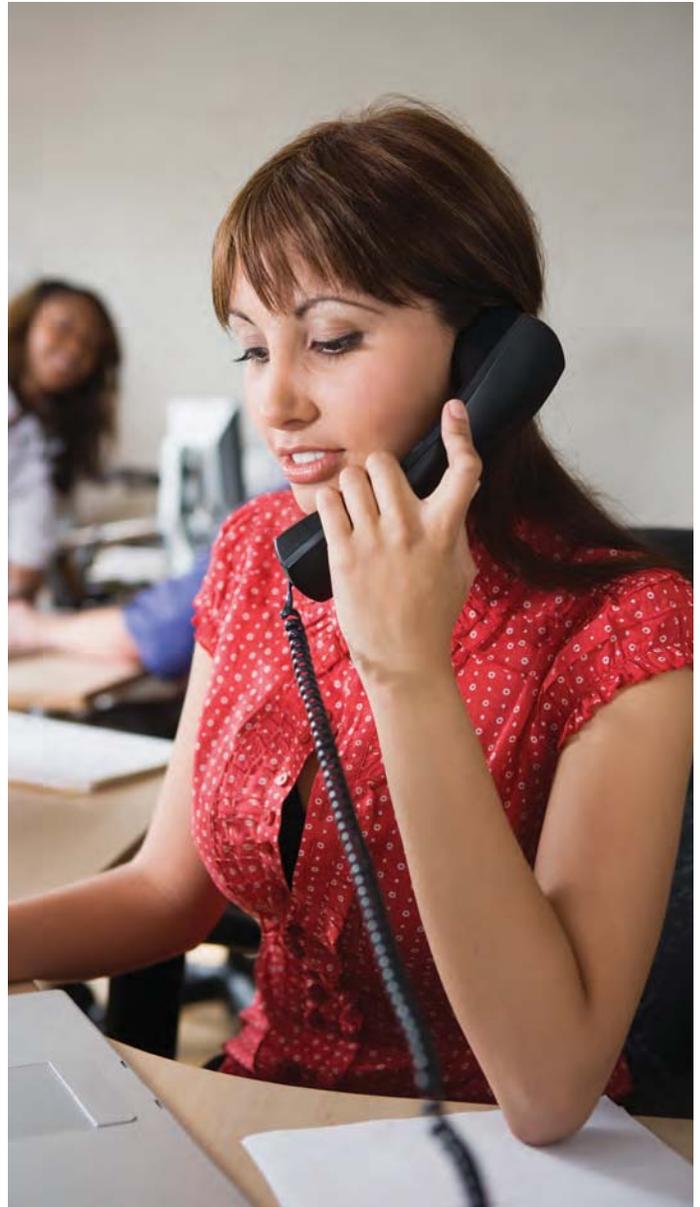


- In collaboration with LGBTQ community-based organizations, identify and apply for new funding to bridge gaps and address the intersections of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexism and sexual violence prevention.
- Build support for legislative change, lending support to bills related to LGBTQ issues, highlighting the impact on victims of sexual violence.

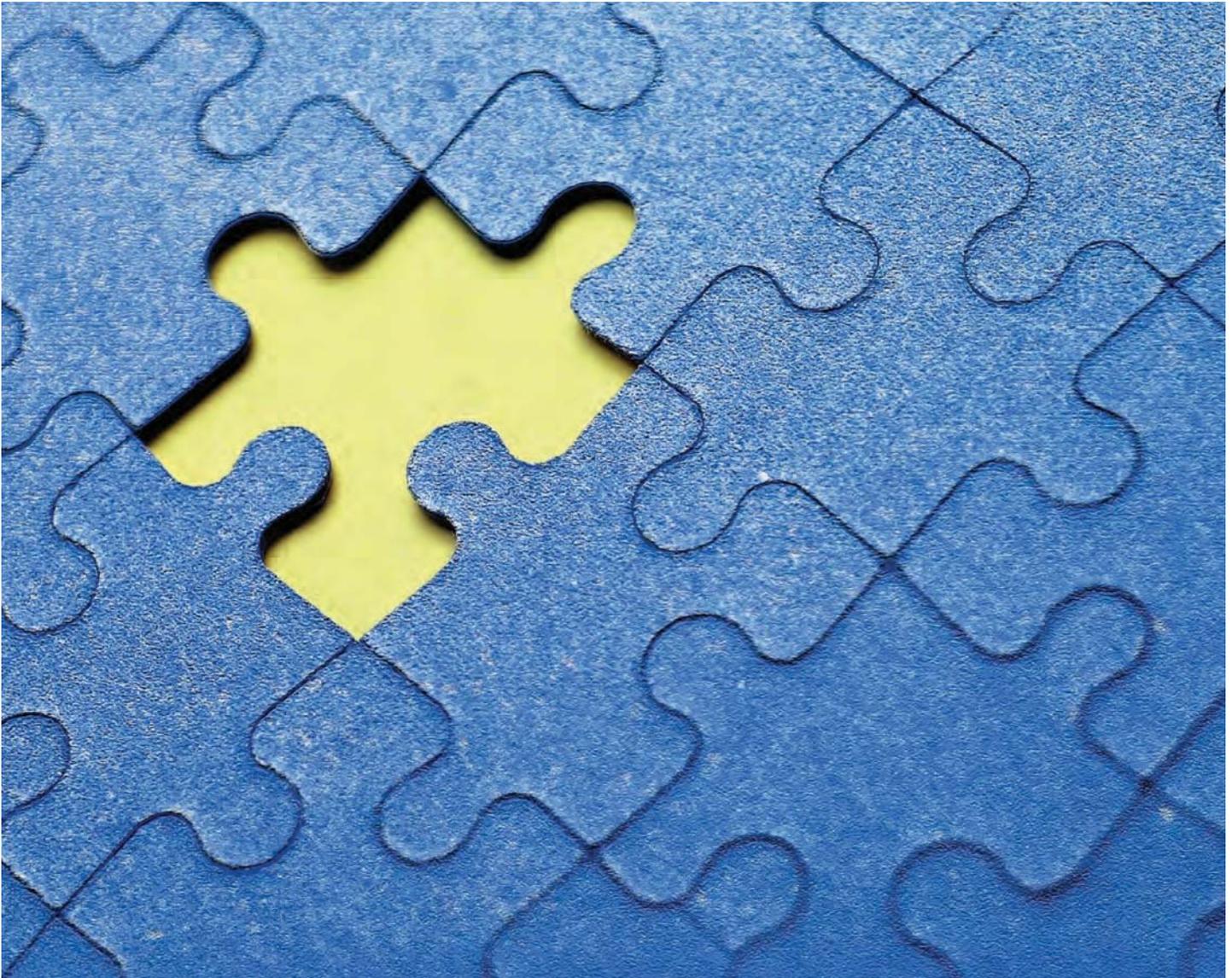
SUGGESTIONS FOR SERVICES

Agencies looking for ways to strengthen or improve intervention services can consider some of the following:

- Ensure that service protocols allow for the possibility of survivors who identify as LGBTQ. For example, resources and materials for survivors who disclose sexual violence from a same-gender partner.
- Make certain that referrals used by staff and volunteers are LGBTQ affirmative and welcoming. Collaborate with LGBTQ and hate crime victim service providers to provide comprehensive services for victims who identify as LGBTQ and their loved ones.
- Write intake forms in terms that are gender neutral or explicitly inclusive of various sexual orientations and gender identities. For example, rather than providing two options under gender (male or female) leave a blank space for the client to fill in. At a minimum, sexual orientation should include bisexual, heterosexual, gay, and lesbian. Having multiple boxes (or the ability for a client to self-identify) is both empowering and indicates to the client that you and your office are conscious of and sensitive to LGBTQ issues.



- Using gender-neutral language like “partner” when asking about a survivor’s sexual or relationship history allows individuals to be more open about their lives.
- Offer some specific support groups for victims of sexual assault who identify as LGBTQ. Ensure that the agency’s non-discrimination statement for clients clearly bans discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.



SUGGESTIONS FOR OUTREACH

- Be sure your existing outreach materials are gender neutral and inclusive. For example, information on drug-facilitated rape, survivors with disabilities, internet safety – all of these materials should include individuals who identify as LGBTQ too.
- Provide a table or booth at LGBTQ-specific events with information on sexual assault prevention and the services your agency provides (e.g., LGBTQ pride festivals).

Remember to ensure that the language in the information is gender neutral or explicitly inclusive.

- Provide agency information and sexual assault information at local LGBTQ centers.
- Advertise your rape crisis hotline in local LGBTQ newspapers or LGBTQ center newsletters. Provide a website link on an LGBTQ center website and vice-versa.

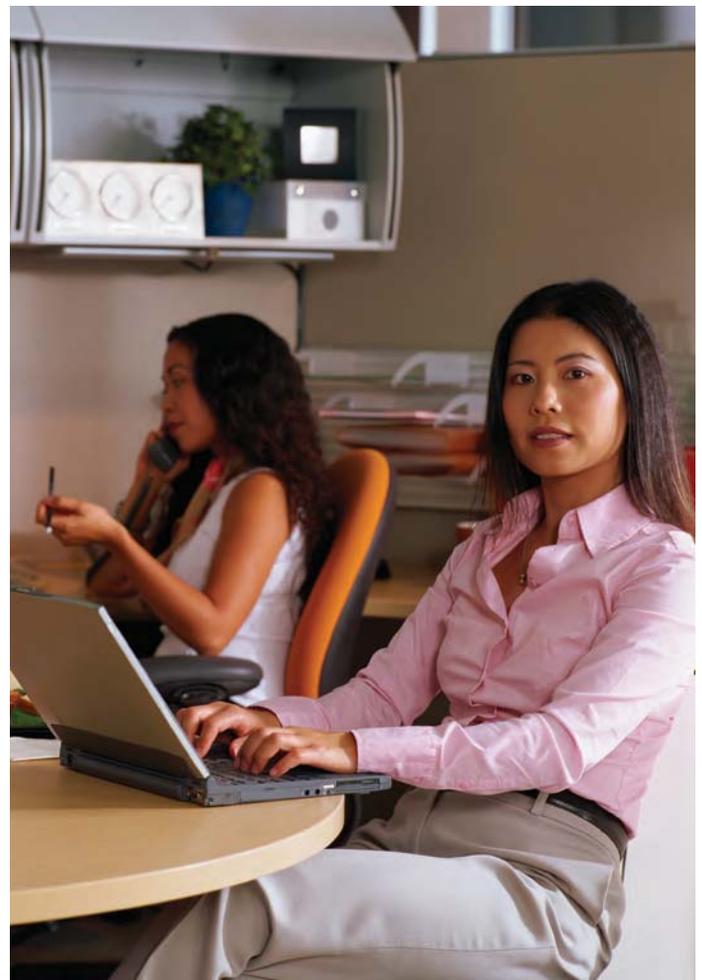
SUGGESTIONS FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- If using scenarios or examples during presentations, include same-sex sexual assault as well as sexual assault against a person who identifies as transgender. Be prepared for LGBTQ specific myths that may arise.
- Become comfortable talking about LGBTQ sexual assault and LGBTQ issues. Practice out loud if needed. For more information on terminology, see the NSVRC's *Talking about gender and sexuality: Sexual violence & individuals who identify as LGBTQ*.
- Do not make assumptions about the sexual orientation or gender identity of members of the audience. Be aware of language that assumes heterosexuality. When using inclusive language, try to truly represent alternative experiences. For instance, if you say "LGBTQ" make sure you don't only talk about individuals who identify as lesbian or gay.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PREVENTION

- Teach individuals bystander intervention skills and how to interrupt oppressive remarks against individuals who identify as LGBTQ. For example, telling students how to take action when a classmate says, "That's so gay."
- Establish a community-based task force of multidisciplinary partners to foster systemic changes and violence-free norms around sexual assault in LGBTQ communities.

- Work with a local school district to implement LGBTQ-inclusive sexuality education and sexual violence prevention programs that are comprehensive in focus, culturally competent, and responsive to the link between sexual violence and various forms of oppression. Review the school policies on responding to sexual violence, bullying and sexual harassment with an eye on students who identify as LGBTQ.
- Build support around legislation that affirms various sexual orientations and gender identities such as legalizing gay marriage, health insurance for same sex partners, hate crime law reforms, etc.



- Use same-sex couple examples in prevention materials, on agency web-sites, and in prevention programming. Use gender neutral language in all curricula and outreach materials.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Throughout this guide, the terms “victim” and “survivor” are used interchangeably to be inclusive of the various ways people who have experienced sexual violence may identify. The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) recognizes and supports the use of person-first terminology that honors and respects the whole person, which is also reflected in this guide. Finally, PCAR acknowledges that individuals should ultimately choose the language that is used to describe their experiences and therefore supports advocacy approaches that are person-centered and that use the terminology preferred by individuals they serve.

CONTRIBUTIONS

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