



ASSET-DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS



KEY FACTS

- › More than one in three women have experienced domestic violence in their lifetime.⁷¹
- › Nearly one in five U.S. women has been sexually assaulted (18%).⁷¹
- › Sexual assault creates \$6.5 billion in medical and mental-health care costs each year,⁷² and domestic violence creates \$6.3 billion⁷³ (in 2015 dollars).
- › Nearly 8 million days of paid work each year are lost due to domestic violence issues, the equivalent of more than 32,000 full-time jobs.⁷³
- › Sexual assault doubles survivors' risk of housing instability,⁷⁴ and domestic violence nearly quadruples it.⁷⁵

THE ROLE OF ASSETS

- › **Protect** Homeownership is associated with lower rates of both domestic violence and rape, which suggests that assets may have a protective effect.⁷⁶⁻⁸²
- › **Recover** Liquid assets and familial financial assistance can help offset post-assault expenses and facilitate access to services among sexual assault survivors.⁸³
- › **Move Forward** Among domestic violence survivors, asset-building services such as matched savings accounts, targeted financial literacy education, and small-business development can enhance survivors' feelings of hope and build their capacity to plan for the future.^{84,85}



IDEAS FOR HUMAN SERVICES

- › Integrate financial services and longer-term economic assistance into crisis management.
- › Connect with IDA programs and other unique savings tools to build survivors' financial resources.
- › Offer tailored financial literacy education, which can include credit repair, savings, budgeting and debt management.

SUCCESS STORY

Learn about Christa's story of escaping domestic violence and transforming her life. Savings opportunities, financial education and credit counseling helped Christa attain an education and purchase a safe home for herself and her daughters (page 59).

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services

What is the challenge?

Survivors of domestic violence (DV) and sexual assault (SA) often suffer financially as a result of the violence they encounter. Economic dependence is a major reason that women remain in abusive relationships.^{86,87} Additionally, DV survivors who leave their abusers often have no savings, and many must also contend with the poor credit and debt that result from the economic abuse they have experienced.⁸⁸ Economic abuse often isolates survivors from financial resources such as bank accounts, credit cards and cash. Both sexual assault and domestic violence create expenses for survivors, including medical bills, counseling costs and legal fees:⁷² SA produces \$6.5 billion in medical and mental-health care costs each year,⁷² and DV creates \$6.3 billion⁷³ (in 2015 dollars). SA and DV can also produce housing instability for many survivors, who must move residences for safety reasons,^{74,75,89} resulting in housing-related costs and, for those who cannot afford to move, a need for emergency shelter. Sexual and domestic violence can also disrupt survivors' income by interfering with their employment. Physical and emotional injuries associated with these types of violence make working difficult for many survivors, leading to time off, diminished performance, job loss, and, for some, the long-term inability to work.^{90,91} Abusive partners often prevent DV survivors from arriving at work, make them late or harass them at work, which decreases survivors' productivity and endangers their continuing employment.^{91,92} Nearly 8 million days of paid work each year are lost due to domestic violence issues — the equivalent of more than 32,000 full-time jobs.⁷³ Because of these far-reaching consequences, financial well-being is a central issue for survivors of sexual and domestic violence, and economic services are important to survivors' recovery.

In addition to crisis counseling, many domestic and sexual violence agencies address survivors' immediate economic needs by assisting with shelter, food, medical care, transitional housing, employment and government benefits. These services are essential to survivors' immediate safety, and they can lay the groundwork for long-term recovery. While some of these services are provided only in the immediate aftermath of violence, others are furnished on an ongoing basis for months or years, presenting an opportunity for longer-term interventions like asset building. However, many DV and rape crisis service agencies do little to encourage survivors to plan and prepare for their financial futures. This is particularly true among rape crisis centers, as DV agencies tend to be better funded and equipped to provide economically focused services.⁹³ Programs focused on forward-looking economic empowerment, savings and financial literacy can be an important part of helping survivors to recover and build a future free of violence.

How can assets help?

There is evidence that asset ownership may be beneficial in both reducing the risk of domestic and sexual violence and helping survivors to recover. Homeownership is associated with lower rates of both domestic violence and rape.⁷⁶⁻⁸² Additionally, liquid assets and familial financial assistance can help offset post-assault expenses and facilitate access to services among sexual assault survivors.⁸³ Among DV survivors, asset-building services such as matched savings accounts, targeted financial literacy education and small-business development can enhance survivors' feelings of hope and build their capacity to plan for the future.^{84,85} Asset-building programs of this kind provide an important complement to existing economic supports such as housing, medical care, employment assistance and case management. Asset-building programs can be tailored to include a trauma-informed lens in order to maximize participants' empowerment. In the long run, these programs can increase survivors' income and wealth ownership, facilitating access to safe neighborhoods, educational opportunities and higher earnings, which may reduce the risk of future violence.

Which asset-building strategies can help survivors?

ECONOMIC ACTION PLANS (EAPs)

An economic action plan (EAP) is a service that maps out the specific steps necessary for survivors to become economically secure, including continuous safety planning, education and employment planning, and resource identification and acquisition. EAPs often also include steps to begin addressing outstanding debt and other long-term goals, such as asset development. This intensive approach can help survivors begin to move forward economically while covering their immediate safety needs.

Redevelopment Opportunities for Women

The Redevelopment Opportunities for Women's Economic Action Program (REAP) emerged from a community collaborative of 13 domestic violence and three homeless service agencies that began working together in 2000 to develop economic services for low-income DV survivors in the St. Louis, Mo., region. This collaboration culminated in the creation of a targeted program that promotes increased economic security and physical and emotional health through financial education and access to a matched savings program. REAP assists participants achieve their financial goals by helping them develop an individual EAP. Initial outcome data for women who participated in REAP's savings program found that participants reported positive economic, social and psychological benefits. REAP also offers trainings for DV advocates from other agencies interested in building economic empowerment opportunities for survivors.

For more information: www.row-stl.org/row-s-economic-action-program



INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT ACCOUNTS (IDAs)

Individual development account (IDA) programs — matched savings accounts that are used for specific, asset-building goals like higher education or homeownership — can be tailored for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. Modifications of these kinds of targeted programs may include financial education and assistance that addresses the particular economic needs of survivors, such as relocating and finding alternative work. They can offer valuable peer assistance for both emotional support and sharing of expense, such as by reducing child care expenditures through shared care or shared living. Programs of this kind can increase participants' financial stability by helping them build new social networks, accumulate savings, and plan for and achieve their financial futures.

Kentucky Coalition Against Domestic Violence

The Kentucky Coalition Against Domestic Violence (KCADV) offers two IDA programs: 1) a classic IDA program, which is federally funded by the Assets for Independence initiative (a federal effort to support asset building); and 2) a car IDA program, which is supported by the Allstate Foundation and other private funders. Participants use the classic IDA to save for the purchase of a first home, postsecondary education, the creation or expansion of a small business, or a dependent child's postsecondary education. The car IDA program benefits survivors for whom lack of reliable transportation is a barrier to employment, housing or school. Since its inception, KCADV has helped 167 IDA savers purchase homes, 151 pay for postsecondary education expenses, 47 start or expand a small business, and 77 purchase vehicles.

For more information: www.kcadv.org



“Recognizing that the acquisition of assets could help survivors of domestic violence break the cycle of poverty that often held them in abusive relationships, KCADV began its IDA projects to help survivors and other low-income families become economically self-sufficient. Through the IDA programs, we have followed many survivors from lengthy stays in an emergency shelter to stable housing and employment, and eventually to home or business ownership or a college degree. During their time in the program, savers gain the assets that help them get by, not just get ahead, AND the knowledge and tools to help them make wise financial choices throughout their lifetime.”

Vickie A. Johnson, Economic Justice Programs Coordinator, KCADV



FINANCIAL LITERACY EDUCATION (FLE)

Financial literacy education (FLE) programs provide information and strategies about budgeting, goal setting, credit and debt management, financial services and savings. Targeted FLE programs can help survivors of sexual assault and DV address their specific economic challenges by sharing strategies to recover from economic abuse and by informing participants about the financial assistance policies available to survivors of violence. These targeted services can work in concert with the standard FLE curriculum, which emphasizes saving, budgeting and other financial goals. FLE programs tailored to the needs of domestic violence survivors have been shown to improve survivors' financial literacy and financial self-efficacy.^{94,95}

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence collaborated with the National Endowment for Financial Education to develop a financial education curriculum called Hope & Power for Your Personal Finances: A Rebuilding Guide Following Domestic Violence. NCADV also provides training and technical assistance to domestic violence programs and other community organizations that wish to address economic issues with victims of domestic violence.

For more information: <http://www.ncadv.org/programs/financial-education>

SMALL-BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT (SBD)

Small-business development (SBD) programs offer training, support and seed money that allows participants to develop and grow their own small businesses. Entrepreneurship can be empowering, as it places a woman in control of her work and the economic dimension of her life. Some survivors may already be engaged in entrepreneurship, such as offering in-home child care or running a cleaning service. These survivors may benefit from additional training and support to grow and develop their businesses. Other survivors may have difficulty continuing their previous careers for reasons related to the violence and may welcome the opportunity to embark on a new business project. Facilitating self-employment among DV and sexual assault survivors can bolster their long-term economic stability by providing a steady source of income and has the potential to lead to economic independence.

Project Phoenix

Project Phoenix is a program that empowers domestic violence survivors to develop successful small businesses. Based in central New York State, Project Phoenix is administered by Vera House (a DV agency), WISE Women's Business Center (a training and support initiative for women in business), and South Side Innovation Center (a business incubator). Participants receive 75 hours of business development training, one-on-one business counseling, networking opportunities and ongoing DV advocacy. Since the program's inception in 2012, 50 survivors have participated in Project Phoenix, which is supported by a grant from Verizon Wireless.

For more information: http://wisecenter.org/?page_id=10264

“One of the biggest obstacles facing domestic violence survivors as they rebuild their lives is regaining their financial independence. Providing survivors with tools they can use to start a small business can give them the opportunity not only to provide for themselves and their families again but also to grow as individuals and rebuild their self-esteem. Entrepreneurship gives survivors the opportunity to follow their passions, become financially self-sufficient, and regain the independence they likely lost in their previous relationship.”

*John O'Malley, Public Relations Manager, Verizon Wireless Upstate New York Region,
Funder of Project Phoenix*



KEY RESOURCE

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) has teamed up with the Association for Enterprise Opportunity to create a fact sheet designed to help both microenterprise development programs and DV agencies meet the special economic needs of DV survivors. This service is part of NCADV's initiative to promote financial education in the DV field. Find the fact sheet at: www.ncadv.org/files/micro&DVFactSheet.pdf



SUCCESS STORY

Christa M. moved to a town in Kentucky five years ago because she didn't want her two daughters to grow up around the violence and substance abuse that were keeping her from taking charge of her life. She moved into subsidized housing and supported her family on a meager work-study income while she studied nursing at Owensboro Community and Technical College. To make ends meet, Christa charged many of her living expenses to credit cards; she soon found herself shackled by high debt and a low credit score.

The Kentucky Coalition Against Domestic Violence (KCADV) IDA program helped change Christa's life. "It sounded too good to be true," she said of the program that matches low-income earners' savings at a rate of 2:1 and can be used for education, homeownership or small-business expenses. Christa enrolled and began the financial literacy classes and monthly one-on-one financial counseling sessions that are part of the program. She learned how to budget, saved enough each month to maximize the matching funds, and deposited the majority of her tax refunds into her IDA. Christa is making sure the experience makes a difference for her two daughters, ages 12 and 9. She explains, "One of the best things about this program is that my girls have learned with me, and will grow up knowing how to make good financial decisions."

Christa used her savings and matching funds to complete certified nursing assistant and licensed practical nursing programs at the community college and got a job at a nursing facility. She opened a second IDA to save for a home in early 2009, and in less than a year had saved the maximum contribution of \$2,000. Christa also worked hard to improve her credit score by more than 150 points, enough to get a competitive, 4.25% interest rate on her mortgage. In October 2009, Christa and her daughters moved into their brand-new three-bedroom home with a large backyard. Many families with young children live in the neighborhood, and Christa's daughters made friends quickly.

Christa continues to look toward the future and would like to start her own small business developing and managing a personal-care home for older adults. She plans to open another IDA to cover some of those expenses. She explains, "Five years ago, I never even thought about having my own home. Now I know that anything is possible."

From KCADV Success Stories: <http://kcadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Success-Stories.pdf>

KEY RESOURCE

From 2010-2012, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Community Services and the Family Youth Services Bureau collaborated on a new initiative aimed at boosting access to assets among domestic violence (DV) survivors: Building Assets for Survivors of Domestic Violence (BASDV). BASDV supplements the existing Assets for Independence (AFI) program, which connects community-based nonprofits with asset-building opportunities such as financial education. The BASDV initiative aims to:

- › Educate AFI grantees' about the economic needs of DV survivors.
- › Inform DV agencies and survivors about the range of asset-building opportunities that are available.
- › Explore avenues for partnership between asset-building and DV service providers.

One product of BASDV is a toolkit to assist domestic violence service providers and asset-building organizations to collaborate to bring asset-building opportunities to survivors of domestic violence.

Find the toolkit and information about the BASDV initiative at:

<http://idaresources.acf.hhs.gov/page?pageid=α047000000Bmr7F>

