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CHANGING SYSTEMS
TRANSFORMING LIVES

REIMAGINING COORDINATED COMMUNITY RESPONSE (CCR)

A Focus on Survivor-Centered Design

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I. Using Survivor-Centered Design to Re-imagine CCRs

The “Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence” model has been the most widely replicated approach to addressing domestic violence throughout the world.¹

At its core, a Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence (hereinafter “CCR”) places the responsibility of preventing or stopping domestic violence on the community as a whole. CCRs represent the notion that victims of violence should not be made responsible for the behavior of their abusers, but rather, that communities are responsible for keeping their members safe. This model was a fairly radical idea when introduced, and to this day, the notion that victims are responsible for their own safety still lingers strongly in people’s minds, especially in countries such as the U.S. where individualism and self-responsibility are culturally dominant values.



Two significant contributions of the CCR model to the collective response to domestic violence are:

1) the effort to align community responses directly with survivors' needs;

2) the emphasis on coordination and collaboration among multiple participants to meet those needs.

The CCR model provides concrete processes for analyzing where and how community responses to domestic violence meet survivors' actual day-to-day needs, and conversely, where and how those responses are disconnected from survivors' experiences. CCRs encourage communities to look closely at how specific actions/responses impact survivors and engage people of mixed expertise and perspectives in the process of problem-solving.

While CCRs have been applied to a variety of systems and institutions (e.g. health, child welfare, dependency), it has overwhelmingly been applied to the criminal justice system. Many features of the criminal justice system (CJS) lend themselves well to the CCR model – the role of the “State” in criminal proceedings, the fractured but interdependent agencies, and the general mandate to stop/deter the commission of violence. Other features of the CJS, however, including its disproportionate impact on BIPOC, LGBTQ and disabled individuals and communities, as well as a history of violence perpetrated by actors within its ranks, have eroded the efficacy and relevance of CCRs for many. In fact, the application of CCRs to the CJS has resulted in the observation and criticism that

CCRs work only for victims representing the dominant classes in society (white, English-speaking, able-bodied, economically secure, gender-conforming).

Another, but less-considered, consequence of the widespread application of CCRs in the CJS context is the diminished role of survivors' voices and agency. The effort to shift the burden of stopping violence from survivors to the community unintentionally resulted in the disempowerment of victims within the community - an ironic twist to a model originating from a commitment to survivors' centrality and the community's role in preserving survivors' agency and autonomy.² It was survivors of domestic violence that made the original observations that the traditional criminal justice system response to domestic violence placed an

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impossible burden on victims by insisting they pursue criminal accountability for their abusers, as victims would suffer direct retribution. Survivors also observed that poorly coordinated justice system actors lead to information and process gaps through which abusers escaped accountability. Survivors successfully pushed systems to recognize their role in preventing domestic violence, and systems responded by developing policies, protocols and tools to address domestic violence³.

Unfortunately, survivors' success at engaging systems ultimately led to their disenfranchisement. Practitioners in various criminal justice system agencies, and across the legal system, assumed greater responsibility for responding to domestic violence, and greater control over it. Legal system approaches to addressing domestic violence became increasingly technical and complicated. Planning meetings, work sessions and even trainings became increasingly in-house, and a limited number of domestic violence advocates evolved into proxies for survivors amid all of this. The phenomenon has been self-perpetuating as the only ones at the table anymore are those that see the community response to domestic violence as an area requiring legal and system expertise. Even domestic violence advocates represented are a homogenous group, since the ones invited to the table are those deemed to have the necessary system expertise.





For these reasons the “Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence” model has been limited to the narrow confines of improving criminal justice system practice.

The time has come, however, to breathe new life into the model, and this can only be achieved by restoring the preeminence/centrality of survivors’ voices and agency to the model. If the CCR model, at its core, insists that the whole community assume responsibility for the behavior and safety of its individual members, and then work collaboratively to that end, survivors must be positioned to define “community,” as well as the notions of both “safety” and “responsibility.” Survivor-Centered Design (SCD) offers a concrete process/strategy for re-establishing survivors at the center of CCRs.

Survivor-Centered Design (SCD) combines attributes of both Human-Centered Design (HCD) as well as Institutional Analysis.⁴ In SCD survivors of domestic violence are engaged in imagining responses that will meet their needs in real time. Using the specific practices of Human-Centered Design (HCD), survivors (and others) design community responses from scratch which are then tried-out and assessed. The iterative process of HCD allows survivors to stay engaged during all three phases: inspiration, ideation which may include a reassessment and re-design and the final one of implementation. Survivors (and others such as advocates or interested players within the system) use the tools of Institutional Analysis (IA) to explore where and how existing responses become misaligned with survivors’ needs. Consistent and continuous input from diverse survivors is essential to aligning systems to be responsive.

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Utilizing Survivor-Centered Design to re-imagine CCRs provides the opportunity to engage a broad spectrum of survivors, representing a wide range of experiences, to identify what types of responses from the “community” will lead to increased safety and well-being. CCRs provide the vehicle through which to engage the larger community in meeting survivors’ needs and assure meaningful communication and collaboration among all available helpers. Survivor Centered Design offers the promise of developing wholly novel CCRs that are truly responsive to all survivors of domestic violence.



II. Survivor Centered Design Process

Survivor-centered approach and design for programs has long been a shared ideal for the movement to end domestic violence.

In fact, the massive success of the movement in shifting policy, funding and scope of services lies in the mobilization efforts by survivors, advocates and grassroots community-based activists. Many advocates would argue that the emergence of so many programs, statewide and Tribal coalitions, as well as national organizations committed to ending domestic violence arose out of the groundbreaking efforts of survivors and advocates. But over the last thirty years or so, the focus on institutional reform has resulted in a lack of critical analysis, conservatism in program design and services, comfort with

the status quo, hierarchical and pathologizing interventions and the non-inclusion of survivors in any processes⁵.

The evolving history of the movement has also ignored and erased the involvement of many survivors and advocates from diverse and marginalized communities that have been sites of various forms of resistance to multiple intersecting issues. The national leadership and many of the well-funded programs including CCRs moved away from including and being informed by the diverse and often contradictory needs of survivors. Lost in the national narratives were voices of survivors from racially, ethnically, culturally marginalized groups, survivors from the LGBTQ communities, various disabled survivors, and those from poor neighborhoods

to name a few. The focus of many programs, particularly within the legal system, has been on forcing survivors from the margins to “access” and “fit” into existing services. Advocates focused on working with survivors to navigate the systems rather than forcing systems players to change their methods and processes.

It became clear to BWJP, as a national leader in responding to concerns and challenges posed by legal systems, that all the years of work to reform these systems have not had the desired impact. In fact, the impact was often detrimental to survivors from the margins. That became increasingly clear under the pressures of COVID-19 and the racial “reckoning” following murderous incidents of violence. Numerous



conversations and one-on-one technical assistance with coordinators of color within long-existing CCRs as well as new emerging ones and advocates working with marginalized

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survivors has forced BWJP staff to reconsider its priorities, focus on reimagining current work and recreate methods to truly involve survivors as the leaders of change work.

Over the last 18 months, BWJP has had to revisit its work and its impact, and model a process of inclusion that will lead to better efforts and reforms within the legal systems. The focus has been on reimagining CCRs, as one example, among a multitude of other efforts. Through a critical examination of our current work, local and statewide conversations with advocates from diverse communities, listening sessions with various social justice activists as well as staff working in legal systems, BWJP has forged a new path of actively involving survivors to guide policy development and systems reform.

Even though survivor leadership has been one of the guiding principles of work in CCR, the reality, as outlined earlier, is that most CCRs engage minimally with survivors. Even when

some survivors are listened to, CCRs often do not properly reflect the realities of all survivor demographics within many jurisdictions. Those from racially and ethnically marginalized communities, as well as from LGBTQ, low-income, immigrant and disabled communities, are often not meaningfully considered. The question, then, is how we reinvigorate CCRs to focus on the principle of survivor leadership. BWJP is responding by applying its prior knowledge and experience to practice this principle by listening to LGBTQ and disabled survivors to inform BWJP's future work. We lay out the guidance and methods needed and necessary for CCRs to go focus on giving primacy to survivors and ensuring their work and programs create true access and safety to those on the margins.

For SCD to be well integrated into a wholly reimagined CCR the first area of work is to expand the current narrow concerns of CCRs as coordinating various aspects of the criminal system to a broader one. It is well known from work with survivors that many are often engaged with the criminal, civil and family court systems with each one failing to provide adequate access and safety for the adult survivor and the kids. Often, they are caught between differing expectations and orders from different court practitioners leading to heightened risks. So, the first order of business for a currently "well-functioning" CCR is to expand its "membership" to include practitioners from both the family and the civil systems to close some of the current gaps and cracks.

A thorough institutional analysis starts a process that examines:

What work has been done? What has worked and what has not worked and for whom?

Who is included?

Who is forgotten?

Where do we know a lot and where do we know very little?

How do we know what we know? Based on whose lives?

Who has fallen through the cracks and why?

Answers to these queries can direct all existing CCRs and those being formed to ensure that they are truly prioritizing the safety of the most vulnerable in the community. To date, CCRs have centralized the safety of survivors from the dominant majority. To fashion services, access, safety and accountability, CCRs will have to centralize those at the margins.⁶

Who occupies the margins varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. While survivors from a specific racial or ethnic community may be minoritized⁷ in one area, they may not be in other parts of the country. For example, lesbian survivors may be at the margins in one jurisdiction, but they may not be elsewhere. In other instances, poor lesbian survivors of color may be experiencing marginalization across many different axes. A well-thought-out intersectional analysis of the varieties of marginalization can assist CCRs in formulating and designing better programs and services⁸. There are many articles and tools⁹ available that will aid in the endeavor. Ultimately, for



communities to not engage in the enterprise of examining CCRs through an SCD approach is antithetical to the work that needs to get done to truly promote safety for all.

To truly reflect the realities of survivors, CCRs must include players outside the legal system: community-based advocates, health care including community health care providers, housing, education personnel, faith leaders and other community activists to name some. Missing players in almost all CCRs has been various community leaders. The word Coordinated Community Responses becomes a misnomer and meaningless when members of the community are excluded from participation. Concerns of privacy and confidentiality are raised as ways to prevent full participation but social change on domestic violence cannot occur without continued, consistent and full participation by all facets of community not just members of the legal system.

Change occurs by considering the inclusion of survivors from all walks of life, not just those who have either accessed the system or have been involved with local domestic violence programs. While listening to and including these voices is important, they represent only a fraction of those



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who find themselves in abusive relationships. Many of these survivors may not be comfortable in legal systems for a whole host of reasons including thinking that engagement with legal systems heighten individual risk and the loss of family and community. Therefore, it behooves CCR members to begin connecting with survivors by reaching out to places where people gather within their communities. CCR members should look outside traditional systems to connect with a broader range of survivors, and not rely on dv-specific programs or services for outreach, as only a fraction of survivors utilizes these.

Pragmatically, this does mean that systems' players must stretch beyond their traditional social and professional networks¹⁰. Yes, it does require building relationship, trust and engagement given the myriad ways in which many members of these communities have been oppressed, discriminated against and murdered. It is the responsibility of systems' players to ensure that they reveal why the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives of survivors is critical to both the work and inquiry and is also meaningful to the community the survivors represent. Clear communication with and the use of appropriate responsive language ensure that the newly designed services and programs are meaningful to the community.



The CCR team needs to use an immersion approach that allows members to understand the lived experience of survivors. Dialogues of various types: conversations, listening sessions, one on one conversations are useful aids. The team can develop the needed questions and take on the responsibility of creating safe environments making topics accessible and relevant. Secondary research is necessary for the process. Using all the relevant information gleaned from survivors, prototypes of programs can be designed and then evaluated by the survivor group to test for relevance. A process for integrating consistent and constant feedback from those impacted the most has to be inbuilt into any program design¹¹. Developing an accurate roadmap that is visually captured in a logic model can assist in developing insights, bundling ideas, creating insights into what is working and what is not working, defining indicators of success, building new and better partnerships, monitoring and evaluation and finally scaling up nationally. The design of a truly survivor responsive CCR can only be designed with the input of diverse and often contradictory survivor voices.



BWJP has set the stage for CCRs to reinvent themselves by the application of SCD to two areas within the IPV project. One examines the specific concerns of deaf survivors and their lack of inclusion within CCRs and the other examines the marginalization of Bisexual survivors by both the LGBTQ¹² field and responses from the legal systems.



Both of these efforts outline how to employ the SCD process, including: the conception of ideas; conducting outreach to organizations and individuals; building trust between BWJP, advocates, organizations, communities and survivors; instituting a dialogue process that enables diverse perspectives and often contradictory stances to be included; drawing threads and themes; and ensuring the inclusion of opposing views and ideas for designing programs within the legal system.

Endnotes

1 For example, this model won the Innovations in Government Award, sponsored by the Ford Foundation and the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. In 2014 the Duluth Model of CCR was recognized again with the Future Policy Award for Ending Violence against Women and Girls. Additionally, in 1998 the Open Society Institute in supported the implementation of the Duluth Model CCR in 19 countries.

2 A. Lerner and N.E. Allen. 2009. "Still a Movement after All These Years? Current Tensions in the Domestic Violence Movement". *Violence against Women*, 15 (6) 656-677.

M. Ciurria. 2018. "The Loss of Autonomy in Abused Persons: Psychological, Moral and Legal Dimensions". *Humanities*. 7(48) 1-19.

J. Aldridge. 2013. "Identifying the Barriers to Women's Autonomy in Domestic Violence: The Tensions between Women's Personal Experiences and Systemic Responses". *Social Inclusion*, 1(1) 3-12.

3 See N. J, Sokoloff et.al. (eds). 2005. *Domestic Violence at the Margins: Readings on Race, Class, Gender and Culture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

4 HCD is a three-phase process (Inspiration –future users define the problem; Ideation – users generate ideas that are usable and real world fixes and Implementation is sharing the product for use) that places the needs of the user first in designing useful and usable products. The focus is on the user. Institutional Analysis originating out of Institutional Ethnography is a method and process that allows individuals within systems to explore and analyze organizational daily activities that are guided by internal arrangements and structures of power.

5 See Lerner and Allen above

6 hooks, b. 2000. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston, MA: South End Press. 2nd Edition

7 Burman, E. and K, Chantler. 2005. *Domestic Violence and Minoritization: Legal and Policy Barriers Facing Minoritized Women leaving Abusive Relationships*. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 28(1) 59-74

8 Crenshaw, K. 1991. *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, and Violence against Women of Color*. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1300

9 Warrier, S. 2022. *Intersectionality in Robert Geffner et.al. (eds). Handbook of Interpersonal Violence across the Life Span*. Springer (eBook) 151-164

10 There are lots of tools to foster outreach to diverse communities. See Warrier S. 2000. *Outreach to Underserved Communities: A Curriculum in Five Modules*. Harrisburg, PA: NRCDV. See also the website of Culturally specific communities: <https://ujimacomunity.org/>, <https://esperanzaunited.org/en/> , <https://www.api-gbv.org/>, <https://www.vera.org/centers/victimization-and-safety>, <https://avp.org/resources/nys-lgbtq-ipv-network/>, <https://biresource.org/> - these are a few organizations that can provide much needed assistance in formulating outreach and access.

11 See BWJP. 2022. *Survivor Centered Design: On the Use of Human Centered Design for creating Safety*. Forthcoming

12 See also Washington Post. 2022 "A record number of US adults identify as LGBTQ, Gen Z is driving the increase". Feb 17



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