

Mass Rights for Change: Strategic Plan



Mass Advocates Standing Strong
Victim Rights Law Center
Pathways for Change

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Introduction

The Collaboration and Its Partners

Mass Rights for Change (MRfC)

We are 3 agencies:

- **Mass** Advocates Standing Strong (MASS)
- Victim **Rights** Law Center, (VRLC)
- Pathways **for Change**, Inc. (Pathways)

In 2007 a program called *Building Partnerships for the Protection of Individuals with Disabilities Initiative*, funded by the Office for Victims of Crime, invited MASS (and others) to begin work on an exciting project that would create a program to educate people with disabilities by trainers with disabilities to *recognize, report* and *respond* to all types of abuse. This is how the Awareness and Action (A&A) trainings began.

VRLC and Pathways began working together in 2009. Pathways and VRLC's long-standing collaborative relationship includes cross-referrals for sexual violence survivors in Central Massachusetts. In addition to referrals, VRLC attorneys provide training to Pathways staff and volunteers to help improve free legal assistance access to sexual assault survivors in Central MA.

Seeing the need and an opportunity to expand services to survivors with I/DD, Pathways forged a connection between MASS and VRLC and agreed to request the funds to support this collaboration. In 2017 we

gratefully received grant funding for this project from the Office on Violence Against Women.

Planning and Development to Date

We came together to build the collaboration and named ourselves Mass Rights for Change (MRfC). We created our name by taking parts of the name of each agency, which are described below. As a collaboration, we have created a Charter together that includes a roadmap for how our collaboration will work together throughout this project. We then created a Statement of Focus that states that we have come together in order to focus on survivors of sexual violence who have intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD), and how each agency can improve to serve these survivors. Next, we created a plan for how to assess the needs of the agencies as well as survivors in the community and people with I/DD through crafting a Needs Assessment Plan, which we implemented over the previous months. We then created a Needs Assessment Findings Report that described what we found, including 8 separate key findings, that our team could then focus on for our Strategic Plan.

The Individual Agencies

Mass Advocates Standing Strong (MASS) is a grassroots self-advocacy organization run for and by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the state of Massachusetts. MASS calls the people within their organization “members” and not clients or consumers. The partners involved within this collaboration include members from the Central Massachusetts region of MASS. They are also the Awareness and Action team for Central Massachusetts. The Awareness and Action

program is a key and unique program provided by MASS. MASS is the only self-advocacy I/DD organization dedicated to providing peer-to-peer education around abuse and violence in Worcester County. Through its Awareness and Action Program, MASS' self-advocates train others in Worcester County about how to recognize, report, and respond to abuse.

Victim Rights Law Center (VRLC) provides free legal services to sexual violence victims in Massachusetts. VRLC is the only organization to offer sexual assault-specific legal services in Worcester County. VRLC offers survivor-centered and empowering legal representation to rape and sexual assault survivors in Massachusetts. This includes adults and children; people of all abilities, gender identities, and sexual orientations and immigrants, refugees, and undocumented persons, regardless of immigration status.

Pathways for Change, Inc. (Pathways) is a stand-alone multicultural rape crisis center (RCC) and provides trauma-informed support services to survivors of sexual violence in ASL, English, Portuguese, Spanish and Vietnamese. Pathways is well-known for innovative work that includes their Deaf Survivors Program (DSP), the creation of a regional hotline collaboration, outreach and prevention work with sexually exploited individuals and a college campus advocacy program. Pathways provides free support services to 47 cities and towns in Central Massachusetts, which includes:

- 24-hour crisis intervention
- Support Counseling
- Healing Circles (support groups)

- Advocacy in the medical, police and legal settings
- Prevention education for youth and adults
- Professional training
- Community outreach

Focus Statement

The Mass Rights for Change team is committed to a survivor-centered approach that empowers individuals with I/DD in Central Massachusetts who have experienced sexual violence. The core of this collaboration is that it values the whole person seeking help, services, support, and safety. We see the person before we see the disability or that they have been a victim.

Our Vision

The vision of Mass Rights for Change is to see a future that supports all victims of sexual violence who have intellectual and/or developmental disabilities to:

- Recognize they have been abused
- Know they have rights
- Be able to get the services they need without barriers
- Act on their power to manage their recovery and healing
- Have all the help they need to recover in their own way that works best for them

This vision will support all survivors of sexual violence who have I/DD to have doors opened. We will start with our three agencies and then we hope to do this across our area, our state, and hopefully the country.

Our Mission

The mission of the MRfC team is to remove barriers and increase the services, access, and support for survivors of sexual violence who have I/DD in Central Massachusetts. The mission is for MASS, VRLC, and Pathways to work together to make this change happen, by building a strong, ongoing partnership, between the 3 agencies. We will do this through respect, teamwork, true listening, and understanding. Specifically, we will:

- Develop new ideas that will build trust between our programs and survivors of sexual violence who have I/DD
- Review, revise, and create policies, and practices within MASS, VRLC, and Pathways
- Create guidelines to increase the accessibility and responsiveness of our services and programs
- Develop a plan to improve how people are given help and increase survivor safety. And treat individuals with kindness and compassion, making sure that all survivors are believed.
- Develop and provide training for the MRfC partners

Needs Assessment Purpose

In order to accomplish the mission of the MRfC team, we created a needs assessment to better understand the issues that survivors of sexual violence with I/DD face when seeking services. Our team hoped

to do this by asking people with I/DD, survivors of sexual violence, and people who work with both groups, along with staff from all three agencies, what helps and what stops, or at least slows down people from getting the services they need, and how we can remove these barriers and increase the helpful practices. We hoped to get from this process:

- Practical information on what works in services for survivors of sexual violence who have I/DD and how to improve services
- Information on what we can do to improve our individual agencies and services, and to implement activities based on that information
- Increase agency commitment and ability to provide help and services to survivors with I/DD
- To make sure that all participants within the project are excited about our project and our success now and in years to come.

Needs Assessment Goals

- Find what gets in the way for each of our agencies in helping survivors of sexual violence. This may be in the policies, procedures, the buildings, or what training staff and volunteers receive, or do not receive, to help survivors.
- Find out what is good and what is working or not working inside of each organization to help staff and volunteers provide safe, accessible, and helpful services to survivors of sexual violence and those with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.
- Find out how people who are survivors of sexual violence and who have I/DD are now able to get help from each of our organizations and what gets in the way of them getting that help.

- Find out how people who are not part of the statewide support system of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) get access to services and support.
- Guardian and Parent Input: Sometimes guardians and sometimes parents have influence or rights to decision-making about people with I/DD. We asked this group about their opinions about the need and necessity of sexual violence services for people with I/DD.

We met our goals of asking a large cross-section of people about services for survivors of sexual violence who have I/DD. Through the kindness and honesty of those willing to share their experiences and stories, we were able to find some gaps and areas of focus for our collaboration to focus on, for the rest of this current grant process, as well as some long-term plans for change.

Below is a list of the key findings our team found through the needs assessment process.

Key Findings from MRfC Needs Assessment

Key Finding #1: Human dignity remains a key value for all three agencies and their clients and members.

Key Finding #2: An Empowered stance toward all people is a key value of the partner agencies, but needs to be better understood to support people who have I/DD.

Key Finding #3: Stereotypes, biases, myths, and beliefs create barriers to people seeking and receiving services.

Key Finding #4: Confidentiality is often misunderstood, not explained well, breached, or not applied consistently.

Key Finding #5: Agencies silo their workers and knowledge, which creates a lack of collaboration in meeting the full needs of survivors.

Key Finding #6: Lack of accessible communication creates barriers to services.

Key Finding #7: Safety and access issues need to be addressed to better work with survivors with I/DD.

Key Finding #8: MASS has not until recently made sexual violence against people with disabilities a priority, creating a gap in their agency knowledge and practices.

Strategic Plan

Our key findings gave all three agencies specific areas to focus on, in order to help improve services and support for survivors. Given the amount of time left for this grant period, and the expertise of our TA from the Vera Institute of Justice, together we met virtually over a 2-day period February 5 – 6, 2020 to discuss as a group what would be best to do for the remainder of our grant.

We came up with an outlined strategic plan, and our team began to meet to agree on the rest of the details. This is when the Pandemic in

the United States began to be reported. As a result, since many within our team are vulnerable citizens, we stopped meeting in person in March. We began to meet virtually as a team to then regain our work, and focus on our strategic plan. Our team was able to re-organize and get settled, and had to re-evaluate our goals for our strategic plan. After getting some more information about what was available for models to build on, for some of our initiatives, we were able to come to the following plan to complete by the end of September, 2020.

Below is a Table that shows our plan including initiatives and activities to be accomplished. The first initiative was developed from the Key Findings #6 and #7: Key Initiative 1: Promote access and enhance safety at all organizations within Mass Rights for change. This initiative responds directly to the safety and access needs of all organizations, but especially during a time of social distancing. We recognize that our original plan may look different during this time, and will review tools that allow us to consider remote safety and access. The second initiative was looking at Key Findings #'s 1, 2, 3, 4, and 8: Key Initiative 2: Build staff capacity and comfort of MRfC partners to effectively, safely, and without bias, respond to and serve survivors with I/DD. This initiative will focus on staff capacity and comfort and address what we found in our needs assessment that bias and stereotypes are obstacles and barriers that people with I/DD face on a regular basis. This initiative focuses on practical changes to our systems – forms, policies, and training tools to increase access, comfort and capacity-building. The third and final initiative is in response to Key Finding #5: Key Initiative 3: Prioritize working together and learning from each other – both within and between agencies - through policy and practice at MRfC agencies. This initiative formalizes all of the collaboration building Mass Rights for Change has achieved over the course of the grant program, ensuring that we maintain a commitment to collaborating in years to come.

Table for Initiatives and Activities for MRfC

Key Initiative 1: Promote access and enhance safety at all organizations within Mass Rights for change	Who is Responsible?	By When?
Conduct Safety and Access Reviews	All	
Review existing tools	All/PD	April/May 2020
Adapt existing tools	All/PD	April/May 2020
Group reviews final tools	All	May 2020
Send Vera the changes to new tools	PD	June 2020
Make any edits to new tools	All/PD	June 2020
Send to OVW for approval/highlight new changes	PD	June 2020
Assemble a team for safety and access reviews	All	June 2020
Conduct the safety and access reviews at VRLC and Pathways	Workgroup/teams	July 2020
Draft barrier removal and safety plans	All/PD	July 2020
Review by group	All	August 2020
Send to Vera for feedback and edits	PD	August 2020

Make any edits to barrier removal and safety plans	All/PD	August 2020
Send to OVW for approval	PD	August/September 2020
Revise MASS Facebook Page/Website for additional accessibility	MASS	
Assemble work group	MASS	April/May 2020
Review Current content of Facebook Page/Website	Work group	April/May 2020
Facebook Group Creation – Adding in relevant topics and discussion board	Work Group	May 2020
Reach out to contacts of websites found for input	Work Group	May 2020
Draft workplan for new content sharing content found	Work group	May 2020
If needed, draft new content	Work group	June 2020
Submit plan for new content and content to MASS for preliminary approval	Work group	July 2020
Review all new material specifically for access	All/MASS	July 2020
Send to full collaboration for any feedback or edits if needed	All	August 2020
Make any edits needed	Work group	August 2020
Send to Vera for feedback	PD	August 2020
Make any edits as needed	MASS/PD	September 2020
Send to OVW for approval	PD	September 2020

Upload new content to Facebook/Website	MASS	September 2020
Create Confidentiality Form in Plain Language (VRLC)	VRLC	
Assign VRLC staff to work on form - group or individuals	VRLC	April/May 2020
Review current confidentiality form	Work group	April/May 2020
Review any existing plain language confidentiality that exists - PD listserv	Work group	April/May
Draft/adapt a new confidentiality form in plain language	Work group	May 2020
Internal feedback at VRLC	VRLC	May 2020
Make any edits needed	Work group	May 2020
Review by whole collaboration	All	June 2020
Make any edits needed	Work group	June 2020
Submit to ED/Board for review/edits/approval	Work group	July 2020
Submit material to Vera for feedback	PD	July 2020
Make any edits needed	VRLC/PD	August 2020
Submit to OVW for approval	PD	August 2020
Create Confidentiality Packet in Plain Language (Pathways)	Pathways	
Assign Pathways staff	Pathways	April/May 2020
Review current confidentiality packet - all	Work group	April/May 2020

three documents		
Review any existing documents that may exist - confidentiality, grievance, or clients' rights	Work group	May 2020
Draft new plain language documents of each policy	Work group	May 2020
Internal Pathways review of new documents	Pathways	June 2020
Make any edits needed	Work group	June 2020
Full collaboration Review	All	July 2020
Make any edits needed	Work group/PD	July 2020
Send to ED for approval	Work group	August 2020
Send to Vera for final feedback	PD	August 2020
Make any edits needed	Work group/PD	September 2020
Send to OVW for approval	PD	September 2020
Create a "living document" to contain question re: disability status and request/need for accommodations	VRLC	
Assign VRLC staff to work on from – group or individuals	VRLC	April/May 2020
Review current intake questions/process	VRLC	May 2020
Create interview questions to ask MASS partners about better questions for intake	VRLC	May 2020
Conduct interviews with MASS members to include	VRLC and MASS	June 2020

feedback for better questions/content		
Create new living document for intake based on research and interview(s)	VRLC	July 2020
Review by MRfC	All	July 2020
Make any edits as needed	VRLC	August 2020
Submit to ED/Board for review/edits/approval	VRLC	August 2020
Submit to Vera for review	PD	August 2020
Make any edits needed	VRLC	August/September 2020
Submit to OVW for approval	PD	September 2020
Begin to use new tool for intakes with survivors with disabilities	VRLC	September 2020

Key Initiative 2: Build staff capacity and comfort of MRfC partners to effectively, safely, and without bias, respond to and serve survivors with I/DD	Who is Responsible?	By When?
Revise/create release of information in plain language – MASS and Pathways	MASS and Pathways	
Create working groups	MASS and Pathways	April/May 2020
Review current process of how to work with information	Work groups	May 2020
Review how other agencies work with information	Work groups	May 2020
Draft workplan – Manage information clarity, content, how to use a ROI	Work groups	June 2020
Create plain language draft of ROI that will work with agencies that you work with	Work groups	June 2020
Bring it to internal review	Work groups	July 2020
Make edits as needed	Work groups/PD	July 2020
Bring to MRfC Review	All	July 2020
Make edits as needed	Work groups/PD	August 2020
Send to Vera for Review	PD	August 2020
Make edits as needed	Work groups/PD	September 2020
Send to OVW for approval	PD	September 2020

Use new forms after approval	MASS and Pathways	Ongoing
Revise/create mandatory reporting procedures – MASS and Pathways	MASS and Pathways	
Create internal workgroups within the agency	MASS and Pathways	April/May 2020
Review current policies and procedures	Work groups	April/May 2020
Create a workplan to clarify procedures for disclosures	Work groups	May 2020
Update/Revise procedures	Work groups	May/June 2020
Review by MRfC	All	June 2020
Edit changes	Work groups	June 2020
Review by Vera	PD	July 2020
Edits changes	Work groups/PD	August 2020
Provide draft to ED/Board for reviews	Work groups	August 2020
Final review	All	September 2020
Send to OVW for approval	PD	September 2020
Revise onboarding procedures to include resources such as webinar/s, and/or opportunities to meet with experienced staff, to develop/ increase comfort serving people with I/DD – VRCLC	VRCLC	
Assign VRCLC staff to work on revising onboarding procedures	VRCLC	April/May 2020

Review webinars currently offered as part of onboarding.	Work group	April/May 2020
Review available 3 rd -party-produced webinars, that provide guidance on interviewing/ working with clients with I/DD.	Work group	April/May
Select 1-3 webinars from those reviewed, to be included in onboarding materials for new staff.	Work group	May 2020
Request review from MRfC of the webinars selected.	All	May 2020
Make changes to selections, based on feedback, as possible, given available resources.	Work group	June 2020
Draft written procedure for onboarding to include increasing knowledge and comfort in serving people with I/DD	Work group	June 2020
Submit material to Vera for feedback	PD	July 2020
Make any changes needed	Work group/PD	July 2020
Submit written policy and proposed webinars to ED for review/ changes/ approval	Work group	July 2020
Make any changes needed	Work group/PD	August 2020
Submit to OVW for approval	PD	August 2020
Implement new procedures and include new materials in onboarding of new/ future	VRLC	September 2020

VRLC staff.		
Create workplan and outline of facilitated questions for “AMA” panels – MASS and Pathways	MASS and Pathways	
Create workgroup	All	April/May 2020
Create outline for panels	Work group	May 2020
Decide who attends	Work group	May 2020 and Ongoing
Decide who asks questions	Work group	May 2020
Decide how are questions asked	Work group	May 2020
Create key questions to be included in panels	Work group	June 2020
Create workplan for panel	Work group	June 2020
Review by agencies	MASS and Pathways	June 2020
Make edits as needed	Work group/PD	June 2020
Review by MRfC	All	July 2020
Make edits as needed	Work group/PD	July 2020
Send to Vera for review	PD	August 2020
Make edits as needed	Work group/PD	August 2020
Review and submit to OVW	PD	September 2020
Ready to implement panels with further funding	All	September 2020 and ongoing

Key Initiative 3: Prioritize working together and learning from each other – both within and between agencies - through policy and practice at MRfC agencies.	Who is Responsible?	By When?
Create MOU among all three agencies.	MASS, Pathways and VRLC	
Assign people to working group to create new MOU's.	MASS, Pathways and VRLC	April/May 2020
Review current MOU's between member agencies	Work group	April/May 2020
Develop agreements and commitments between agencies	Work group	May 2020
Review by agency leaders	Work group	May 2020
Make edits	Work group/PD	May 2020
Review by MRfC group	All	June 2020
Make edits	Work group/PD	June 2020
Submit to Vera for review	PD	June 2020
Make Edits	Work group/PD	July 2020
Send to OVW for approval	PD	August 2020
Create survivor support packet to support collaboration between MRfC agencies – and	MASS, Pathways and VRLC	

supported access for survivors to the agencies		
Create working groups	MASS, Pathways and VRLC	May 2020
Identify content for survivor support packet through group discussions and review of resources available from other agencies	Work group	May 2020
Create content for packet	Work group	June 2020
Draft packet	Work group	June 2020
Review by MRfC	All	June 2020
Make changes/edits	Work group	July 2020
Send to Vera for review	PD	July 2020
Make changes/edits	Work group/PD	July 2020
Send to each agency for internal review	Work group	July 2020
Make changes/edits	Work group/PD	August 2020
Send to OVW for approval	PD	August 2020
Begin to use survivor support packets within agencies	All	September 2020

Some of our planning helps each organization be prepared to move into more implementation with future funding, along with some sustainable plans for on-going collaborations.

Conclusion

Our MRfC team has overcome many obstacles to get to the implementation phase of this grant. We have been able to create access and true partnership among the members of the team which now extend into each agency. We are very excited to begin to work

through our strategic plan and make meaningful and powerful changes to each member agency. We are so grateful to the Vera Institute of Justice for all the support in getting us to this place, as well as to the Office on Violence Against Women for giving us the opportunity to make real and permanent changes, that will help people with I/DD who are survivors of sexual violence, to get better access, support and services as a result of this grant.

Over time, working together, our team has regularly used PowerPoint presentations as a way to create plain language presentations of information. We have found that it helps to engage with material and planning. Therefore, as a first act of implementation, we are submitting a version of our Strategic Plan in PowerPoint form to provide a more accessible version of our plan. We look forward to beginning our work to accomplish these initiatives, or as we call them “buckets”, with the activities that will lead us through to success.