

# Project EMERGE Strategic Plan

Spring 2008



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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **Background**

For many years the Syracuse Area Domestic and Sexual Violence Coalition has recognized and sought to improve community response to people with disabilities and d/Deaf people who experience domestic and sexual violence. Agencies, including ARISE, who advocate with, and provide service to, individuals having disabilities recognized an unmet need. They were sure that they were involved with people with disabilities and d/Deaf people who had experienced domestic and sexual violence, but they wanted to be more explicitly helpful. In addition, agencies with long histories of serving people who experience domestic and sexual violence wanted to become more accessible to people with disabilities and Deaf people. The need in our community has always been great, and yet the ability to come together around this issue had been a consistent challenge. The time was right for collaboration.

Many in our community were energized when Vera House and ARISE received a three year grant from the Office on Violence Against Women, Education and Technical Assistance Grants to End Violence Against Women with Disabilities Grant Program. The receipt of these funds enabled Vera House and ARISE to form a collaborative relationship called Project EMERGE. The initial goal of the collaboration was to formalize our relationship through the development of a document that guides our work process- our Collaboration Charter. The team then moved to convene the Accessibility Task Force, a new committee of the Syracuse Area Domestic and Sexual Violence Coalition.

In an effort to move our work forward, the team planned and conducted a comprehensive Needs & Assets Assessment. This was the first step for Project EMERGE in understanding the opportunities and gaps in our community for systematic change. A Needs & Assets Assessment Report was written to summarize the results of a Needs & Assets Assessment that was conducted by Project EMERGE during March, April and May 2008. The findings of the report were utilized in the development of this Strategic Plan for our work within our organizations and our community. This plan provides the specifics around how we will implement change to improve our community response for women with disabilities and d/Deaf women who have experienced domestic and sexual violence.

## **Understanding Project EMERGE**

### **Vision**

We, Vera House, ARISE, and our community partners, will together create a comprehensive and inclusive community prevention and response system, guided by, and in service to, people with disabilities and Deaf people who are survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Through this system will ensure access, equality, empowerment, and safety for all through accountable and knowledgeable providers.

### **Mission**

Project EMERGE, a partnership between Vera House and ARISE, will build a community movement through increased collaboration, program policy review and education, which will work to improve access by building a comprehensive and inclusive coordinated community response for women with disabilities and Deaf women who have experienced domestic and sexual violence.

Vera House and ARISE have joined the expertise of the personnel at each agency to create Project EMERGE. This partnership is structured around *INTERDEPENDENCE*, rather than our two agencies

just 'working together.' Together we are working to create a system of resourcing each other to better deliver services. This collaboration will →

- Seek input from and listen to people with disabilities and Deaf people who are survivors of domestic and sexual violence
- Create, provide, and improve accessibility at our agencies.
- Co-influence each other's policies, procedures, and practices
- Learn from each other how to better assist all people, including people with disabilities and Deaf people who are survivors of domestic and sexual violence.
- Provide training to service providers

It is also important to understand what Project EMERGE is not able to focus on with the current funding from the Office of Violence Against Women. Project EMERGE is prohibited from providing direct service to survivors with disabilities or d/Deaf survivors or conducting specific efforts around the prevention of domestic and sexual violence. The project also can not do specific work within the criminal justice system. These issues may be part of the long range planning of Project EMERGE as we work to create sustainable systems change.

## Overview of Needs & Assets Assessment

*“Abused women with disabilities have a double whammy. I didn’t know whether to deal with my abuse first or my disability. I didn’t know where to turn, and I lost all hope.” - survivor in a Listening Circle*

This Needs & Assets Assessment sought to seek out often silenced or invisible voices. Project EMERGE conducted a Needs & Assets Assessment, hereafter referred to as NA, in an effort to develop an informed Strategic Plan. In the quote above, a survivor eloquently summarized the experiences of many of her peers. The purpose of the NA was to gather information on Vera House, ARISE, and community agency policies and practices, as well as the experiences of women with disabilities and d/Deaf women who experience domestic and sexual violence.

Project EMERGE utilized three methods to conduct the NA. Twenty seven (27) interviews were conducted with key stakeholders at ARISE, Vera House, and other agencies within the community. The interviews provided a global, policy perspective on the strengths and weaknesses at our agencies and in our county. Listening Circles, or focus groups, were then held with over fifty (50) participants. Project EMERGE brought together our consumers, women with disabilities, d/Deaf women, and survivors (often people who identified as both) to share their experiences with our agencies. Direct service providers at both Vera House and ARISE also met to dialogue about the intersection of disability, d/Deafness, and domestic and sexual violence in the work they do. The final leg of our NA was an online survey for direct service providers at Vera House and ARISE. The survey assisted Project EMERGE in developing a comprehensive understanding of how to better meet the needs of direct service providers.

Findings from the NA are centered on six major categories- ***trust, knowledge and practice, rapport with law enforcement, outreach to d/Deaf women, merger of strengths, and survivor centered services.***

**1. TRUST:** *Women with disabilities who have experienced domestic and sexual violence do not trust the current service delivery system’s ability to holistically meet their needs. This is particularly true for women with mental health disabilities.*

- Survivors report not being believed when they disclosed experiences of domestic and sexual violence.

- Women with disabilities report that it has been their experience that Vera House's shelter has limited physical accessibility. This is also true for other shelters in the community, as well as non-disability focused services. Women with disabilities and d/Deaf women also report that Vera House could improve in its ability to provide a wide array of accommodations.
- Survivors with mental health disabilities do not find that services at Vera House, or in the greater community, adequately meets their needs.

**2. KNOWLEDGE & PRACTICE:** *A general lack of knowledge around the intersection between disability, d/Deafness, and domestic and sexual violence creates inadequate response for survivors with disabilities and d/Deaf survivors. Both service providers and survivors note that the holistic needs of women with disabilities and d/Deaf women who are survivors of domestic and/or sexual violence are not fully and consistently met at ARISE, Vera House, or elsewhere in Onondaga County due to this lack of a joint skill set at the agency and provider level.*

- Service providers are not knowledgeable about the intersection of disabilities, d/Deafness, and domestic and sexual violence, and this impacts their ability to provide services.
- Direct Service Providers at ARISE are not comfortable or prepared to incorporate domestic and sexual violence into their work.
- Direct service providers at Vera House and ARISE are eager to learn and expand their ability to provide best practice services to women with disabilities and d/Deaf women who are also survivors of domestic and/or sexual violence.

**3. RAPPORT WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT:** *Survivors with disabilities and d/Deaf survivors and their service providers report many experiences of inadequate response from law enforcement which has created a legacy of mistrust.*

- Survivors with disabilities and their service providers report many experiences of inadequate response from law enforcement which has created a legacy of mistrust.

**4. OUTREACH TO d/DEAF WOMEN:** *The d/Deaf community sees itself as isolated from hearing service providers that serve populations other than the d/Deaf. The long history of struggling to obtain services has led the d/Deaf to experience difficulty trusting or reaching out to unfamiliar service providers.*

- d/Deaf women in the community are unaware of the services available when they experience domestic and/or sexual violence.
- Trust is extremely important to establish with d/Deaf women. As the d/Deaf community is small and most individuals are familiar with each other, there is fear of gossip and loss of confidentiality.
- d/Deaf women reported numerous issues surrounding working with Interpreters.

**5. MERGER OF STRENGTHS:** *Vera House, ARISE, and the larger human service community provide a rich array of services to women with disabilities and/or women who are survivors of domestic and/or sexual violence. However, these services are often delivered in silos. There is a general lack of support for d/Deaf women in our community. Project EMERGE can engage the d/Deaf community by meeting, sharing strengths and learning from each other.*

- Onondaga County is a service-rich community for women with disabilities and women who are survivors of domestic and sexual violence.
- ARISE and Vera House are both respected agencies within the community at delivering services to their target populations.
- Service Providers from each field need to improve their ability to cross resource each other.

**6. SURVIVOR CENTERED SERVICES:** *Women with disabilities and d/Deaf women need to be respected and treated as knowledgeable about their situation and needs. Domestic and sexual violence and disability service providers are most empowering to survivors with*

*disabilities and d/Deaf survivors when they utilize language and approach that focuses on the strengths of the individual and allows them to be in charge of their healing and independence.*

- Language should focus on the strengths of survivors with disabilities and d/Deaf women.
- Women with disabilities and d/Deaf women are most empowered when her service providers work together while allowing her to lead the process

## **Key Short-Term Initiatives**

Project EMERGE has developed four initiatives of focus for the remainder of the current grant. These initiatives center on promoting systems change beginning with our own agencies. These initiatives were selected by a team of ARISE and Vera House staff who are positioned to make change within the agencies, as well as participation from crucial stakeholders at other agencies in the community.

1. Project EMERGE will build the capacity of Vera House and ARISE to respond to women with disabilities and Deaf women who disclose domestic and/or sexual violence.
2. Vera House and ARISE will move towards increased access for all survivors with disabilities (including mental health) and d/Deaf survivors.
3. Vera House and ARISE will develop policies, procedures, and practices that enable each agency to provide best practice services to survivors with disabilities (including mental health) and d/Deaf survivors.
4. Project EMERGE will build lasting relationships with the local Deaf community, focusing on developing d/Deaf leaders in the area of domestic and sexual violence.

These initiatives were developed and chosen by the Project EMERGE Core Group and a select assembly of key stakeholders from our community. The Needs & Assets Assessment found these initiatives as key needs with unique opportunity for change at ARISE and Vera House. They were chosen because they are most inline with the vision and mission of Project EMERGE as well as congruent with the scope of the grant.

These initiatives will work to build a movement at ARISE and Vera House that will shift the way services are delivered to person centered approach. Every level of agency services will be addressed from service delivery to survivors with disabilities and d/Deaf survivors to Vera House's relationship with the Deaf community. Project EMERGE will systematically examine the need to create lasting interdependence between Vera House and ARISE through finding joint solutions to key, short-term initiatives.











**2. Vera House and ARISE will move towards increased access for all survivors with disabilities (including mental health) and Deaf survivors.**

**Connection to Vision and Mission**

Creating accessibility and a holistic response for survivors with disabilities and Deaf survivors is the center of what Project EMERGE seeks to accomplish. Staff at every level within Vera House are very aware of the physical limitations at both the shelter and Administrative office. Policy and practice review of the direct service programming at Vera House will focus on making it routine for staff to begin the conversation and provide an opportunity for the consumer to voice what is not working if they are in need of an accommodation. At ARISE, integrating trauma sensitivity into all programming will be a culture shift. The months of planning that Project EMERGE has conducted has laid the foundation for screening, assessment, and crisis response around domestic and sexual violence at ARISE.

**Sustainability**

Project EMERGE will utilize this implementation phase of this grant to institutionalize the changes listed in this initiative at both ARISE and Vera House. Vera House is committed to find community resources to improve our physical accessibility and fund ASL Interpretation. At ARISE, Project EMERGE will also institutionalize changes and train program managers in supporting these changes as a new way of delivering more comprehensive services. Conducting ongoing Listening Circles at each agency will become part of our routine client service evaluation. Administrative staff at each agency who focus on program reporting and evaluation will attend and begin to facilitate Listening Circles so that they can be continued post funding.

Action	Steps	Responsibility	Timeline												
a. Project EMERGE will support Vera House and ARISE to update outreach materials and methods to be more accessible at Vera House and trauma sensitive at ARISE.			Sept 08	Oct 08	Nov 08	Dec 08	Jan 09	Feb 09	March 09	April 09	May 09	June 09	July 09	Aug 09	Sept 09
Conduct a review of Vera House and ARISE outreach materials and develop new, targeted, joint outreach materials with Accessing Safety Associate and the	Gather all Vera House and ARISE outreach materials. Prioritize materials that should be reviewed first.	Project EMERGE Core Group, ARISE and Vera House Development Departments	█	█	█	█									
	Arrange, with Accessing Safety, a site visit from an Associate to assist with the review of outreach materials.	Project EMERGE Director			█	█	█								
	Hold site visit with Accessing Safety Associate and MDT.	Project EMERGE Staff, ARISE and Vera House Development Departments						█							

















## Key Long-Term Initiatives

Project EMERGE has developed four initiatives to focus on beyond the scope of our current funding. These initiatives focus on expanding our accessibility at our own agencies with survivors who are d/Deaf and with mental health disabilities as well as promoting systems change within our broader community.

These initiatives were selected by a team of ARISE and Vera House staff who are positioned to make change within the agencies. The team also included participation from crucial stakeholders at other agencies in the community. These long-term initiatives will rely on the successes of our short-term initiatives.

1. Project EMERGE will engage survivors with mental health disabilities and mental health professionals in partnering to specifically create increased access for survivors with significant mental health concerns at Vera House and ARISE.
2. Project EMERGE will continue to develop partnership with local law enforcement and the criminal justice system, prompting increased understanding of the intersection of disability, Deafness, and domestic and sexual violence.
3. Project EMERGE will explore and implement strategy for a team of d/Deaf women to serve as on-call Advocates for d/Deaf survivors of domestic and/or sexual violence.
4. Project EMERGE will support community efforts to expand the pool of qualified ASL Interpreters and develop protocols and budgets with our community partners to ensure that ASL Interpreters are increasingly available.

## Plans to Sustain Collaboration

Vera House, Inc and ARISE are committed to sustaining our partnership and interdependence. This will be done in several ways.

### Project EMERGE

As outlined in the goals and actions of our key short term initiatives, Vera House and ARISE are working to fully integrate our collaboration into all programs and services at each agency. Administrators and direct service staff at each agency will not view these initiatives as a 'special grant project', but rather a partnership between our two agencies that is working to redefine how we each deliver services. Project EMERGE will utilize the implementation funds to institutionalize joint new staff orientations, ongoing direct service staff training, person centered service delivery technique, and a general focus on the intersection of domestic and sexual violence and people with disabilities and Deaf people.

### The Syracuse Area Domestic and Sexual Violence Coalition- Accessibility Task Force (ATF)

The SADSVC is a community coalition with subcommittees dedicated to addressing prevention and education about domestic and sexual violence in different populations. The Accessibility Task Force has been formed with the goal of bringing people together from the disability and d/Deaf community and the domestic/sexual violence community. The ATF plans to give power to people of all abilities to create healthy relationships and to make systems work better for people of all abilities who need help because someone is hurting them. For the past two years, and continuing at the termination of the grant funding, Project EMERGE will have *consistently ensured that staff at Vera House and ARISE attend the Accessibility Task Force* of the Syracuse Area Domestic and Sexual Violence Coalition. This will ensure that the leading community agencies in service provision for

domestic and sexual violence and disabilities have a prominent voice in determining needs of both populations.

### Human Services Leadership Council

Leaders at both Vera House and ARISE have served on the Syracuse's Human Services Leadership Council (HSLC) and will continue to do so. Participation in HSLC provides local agencies an opportunity to inform each other about plans for and struggles with the local service delivery service system, and with particular populations. Given that the executive directors of Vera House and ARISE serve as co-chairs of this group, we are uniquely positioned to influence other non-profit leaders in our community. HSLC will be a great springboard with which to launch the work of the collaboration of Vera House and ARISE into the rest of the community. Project EMERGE plans to utilize this platform to share the best practices that we establish within our own agencies in our broader community.

### **The Wildfire of Culture Change**

*"It often takes more courage to change one's opinion than to stick to it." Geoffrey F. Abert*

Since the inception of Project EMERGE, our collaboration has been focused on inspiring change. We have been thinking, talking, planning, and preparing for change. This plan outlines our commitment and the tasks at hand that will create new standards and practices at Vera House, ARISE, and our greater community. Much of this change will involve Project EMERGE mentoring and supporting staff in examining deeply engrained 'opinions' on domestic and sexual violence, disability, and Deafness.

Vera House and ARISE recognize the responsibility to utilize this funding opportunity to develop best practices that all at Vera House and ARISE can commit to over the long term and other agencies in our community can make work in their settings. Keeping in line with the values of each agency and Project EMERGE, survivors with disabilities and Deaf survivors will be leading the way in this effort to create culture change at ARISE and Vera House. Vera House and ARISE, along with our community partners, will utilize this Strategic Plan to create an inclusive system to provide comprehensive services to people with disabilities and Deaf people who are survivors of domestic and sexual violence. This project, launched through by a grant from the Office on Violence Against Women, will strive to ensure access, equality, empowerment and safety through the efforts of knowledgeable providers for years to come.