



Rhode Island Strategic Plan for Two Communities of Focus

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OVERVIEW OF THE ACT COLLABORATIVE

In October of 2006 the ACT Collaborative received funding from the Department of Justice's Office on Violence against Women, through its *Education & Technical Assistance Grants to End Violence against Women with Disabilities Program*. The ACT Collaborative is made up of three project partners: Day One (The Sexual Assault & Trauma Resource Center of Rhode Island), PAL (An Advocacy Agency for Families & People with Disabilities), and the RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence plus two affiliated member agencies: Advocates in Action (RI's statewide self-advocacy organization) and Blackstone Valley Advocacy Center (a domestic violence shelter and member agency of the RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence). These five agencies are working together in support of the mission and vision jointly created under this initiative, building on a strong collaborative partnership fostered through previous work together.

The Guiding Vision & Mission for the Work of the ACT Collaborative

The **VISION** of the ACT Collaborative is to create an accessible system that is person-centered in its service delivery, provides a comprehensive spectrum of services, and is delivered by informed and accountable professionals to individuals with disabilities and Deaf individuals, who are survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

Our **MISSION** is to ACT together through Advocacy, Collaboration and Training to better respond to violence against individuals with disabilities and Deaf individuals with the **PURPOSE** of fostering an environment that works to:

- Improve accessibility to advocacy and safety planning services for individuals with disabilities and Deaf individuals;
- Develop a collaborative network through open dialogue to improve the quality of supports individuals with disabilities and Deaf individuals receive;
- Provide cross-training, cross-fertilization, and bridge-building opportunities for professionals working in the fields of sexual assault, domestic violence and disability services to better detect, react to and reduce violence in the disability and Deaf communities.

The ACT Collaborative is working towards creating systems change by providing intensive technical assistance, support and open forums to disability advocacy and violence response/prevention agencies in two Rhode Island Communities of Focus (COFs): the city of Warwick and Newport County. Specifically, this initiative will focus its efforts on the large community of individuals with cognitive and developmental disabilities who receive services in the two COFs.

All work under this initiative is toward this goal of systems change and the better understanding of how to respond to the needs of individuals with disabilities who have experienced abuse. Intensive technical assistance will be provided specifically in these two COFs to increase knowledge of sexual assault, domestic violence and disability, and to help professionals achieve an increased level of comfort around the issues at the intersection of disability and violence. Assisting agencies to identify existing resources and positive cross-discipline connections will allow the COF agencies to work more collaboratively to respond to violence in the cognitive and developmental disability community, and begin work on moving sound policies into practice.

PLANNING FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

The ACT Collaborative began laying the groundwork towards systems change by creating a ***Collaboration Charter*** which outlined in great detail the way in which the five partner agencies communicate, make decisions and work together in support of the mission and vision jointly created through this initiative. The same guiding principles that built the framework for the ***Charter*** were also at the core of the Collaborative's final selection of the eight agencies to be included in the two Communities of Focus. Specifically, the ACT Collaborative and its COFs have pledged to:

- Utilize a person-first approach for responding to violence against individuals with disabilities and Deaf individuals;
- Look beyond crisis intervention to also include long-term futures planning and support for and around these individuals who have experienced violence in their lives;
- Build community relationships and valued roles for individuals who have experienced violence in an effort to keep them safe in the future;
- Include Rhode Island's strong network of self-advocates in the planning and implementation of all ACT initiative goals;
- Include survivors in the planning and implementation of all ACT initiative goals;
- Always ask the question "what will keep people safe?" and assure that it underlies all proposed interventions and implementations;
- Serve as the facilitator of conversations in an effort to create systems change, because it is our belief that change happens one conversation at a time;
- Foster a learning environment;
- Focus on the possibilities, and not on the deficits, within the service provider system;
- Always ask the question "what can we do together that we cannot do alone?"

These guiding principles were also the criteria by which the Collaborative narrowed in on its focus for the ***Needs Assessment Plan***, which outlined how the Collaborative would engage the COFs in conversations to better understand their capacity to respond to women with cognitive and developmental disabilities who have survived abuse. The guiding principles also provided the map for how the resulting ***Needs & Strengths Assessment Report*** was organized. Moving forward into the next phase of this initiative, the Collaborative used these guiding principles as a lens through which to filter the needs and strengths assessment key findings to identify the strategic next steps for short-term, mid-range, and long-term goals for implementation.

Global Questions

During the needs assessment process the ACT Collaborative identified specific areas of inquiry around which the COFs were engaged in conversation. The key findings were also organized around these four primary questions:

1. What are the existing strengths, best practices and possibilities that exist in our COFs for a person-centered, cross-discipline response to abuse?
2. What are the barriers survivors with developmental and cognitive disabilities face when trying to access advocacy and safety-planning services?
3. What are the entry points, if any, into the violence response system for individuals with developmental and cognitive disabilities, and how can we improve access to these entry points?
4. What capacities, skills and competencies need to be nurtured in agencies and staff who work with individuals with developmental and cognitive disabilities, who have survived abuse?

Key Needs Assessment Findings and Implications for Implementation

It was our goal to paint a picture of survivors' experiences with navigating the current service delivery system; uncover the unmet needs of both survivors with cognitive and developmental disabilities and the agencies that are trying to help them; and identify community strengths, best practice approaches and resources available within our Communities of Focus.

The ACT Collaborative held 22 conversations with 151 individuals across the two communities to uncover the possibilities and needs for individuals and agencies. One-on-one interviews were conducted with members of leadership in the COF agencies; focus groups were hosted for direct support professionals, paid and volunteer advocates, and clinicians at domestic violence, sexual assault and disability agencies; and women with developmental and cognitive disabilities were welcomed into café conversations – a focus group format that is a reasonable accommodation in itself and is an accessible and hospitable format for group discussions. The table below tallies the number and range of individuals who participated in the needs assessment process.

Leadership Interviews		
DATE	PARTICIPANTS	# of Participants
9/12/08	Executive Director – Disability Agency	1
9/24/08	Executive Director - Domestic Violence Agency	1
10/14/08	Executive Director – Sexual Assault Agency	1
10/22/08	Director of Policy – Sexual Assault Agency	1
10/27/08	Executive Director – Disability Agency	1
10/28/08	Program Director – Disability Agency	1
10/29/08	Executive Director & Assistant Executive Director – Disability Agency	2
11/6/08	Executive Director – Domestic Violence Agency	1
11/6/08	Executive Director – Disability Agency	1
11/7/08	President of the Board of Directors – Disability Agency	1
TOTAL LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS		11
Open Space Technology Groups		
DATE	AGENCY/PARTICIPANTS	# of Participants
8/20/08	Disability Agency Direct Service Providers	7
9/9/08	Disability Agency Direct Service Providers	21
9/10/08	Domestic Violence Agency Service Providers	5
9/10/08	Disability Agency Direct Service Providers	5
9/19/08	Domestic Violence Agency Service Providers	7
10/23/08	Sexual Assault Agency Service Providers	17
10/24/08	Disability Agency Direct Service Providers	16
11/5/08	Disability Agency Direct Service Providers	24
TOTAL OPEN SPACE PARTICIPANTS		102
Café Conversations		
DATE	PARTICIPANTS	# of Participants
9/11/08	Women with Cognitive & Developmental Disabilities	9
9/18/08	Women with Cognitive & Developmental Disabilities	15
10/8/08	Women with Cognitive & Developmental Disabilities	6
10/28/08	Women with Cognitive & Developmental Disabilities	8
TOTAL CAFÉ CONVERSATION PARTICIPANTS		38

What follows is a summary of the themes and key issues that emerged from these conversations organized around the four primary areas of focus: the existing strengths and possibilities that exist in the COFs; the extent of access to advocacy, safety planning and clinical services for women with cognitive disabilities and the staff assisting to help them navigate the system; identified entry points into the response system and where entry is hindered; and areas of needed knowledge- and capacity-building for improved response.

Existing Strengths and Possibilities:

- People appreciated and were open to the invitation to discuss abuse and its responses.
- All Community of Focus (COF) agencies are actively working toward a person-first approach to their service delivery; expressing a desire to meet the individual “where they are.”
- A state-wide incident management model for responding to abuse in Developmental Disability (DD) agencies already exists, but there is a disconnect between this policy and its actual practice.

Accessing Advocacy, Safety-Planning & Clinical Services:

- Domestic violence and sexual assault agencies report that women with disabilities are not coming to their agencies.
- Women with DD/cognitive disabilities feel they are not believed when they disclose abuse, or may feel it is their fault.
- Women with DD/cognitive disabilities have difficulty participating in “traditional” counseling and safety planning services currently available at domestic violence and sexual assault agencies.
- There are very few clinicians in RI with experience in both trauma counseling and disability issues, and many feel uncomfortable and unsure working at the intersection of violence and disability.
- There is a disturbing lack of education for individuals with DD/cognitive disabilities around healthy relationships, anatomy and health, appropriate boundaries, recognizing abuse and available resources.
- Individuals with DD/cognitive disabilities are afraid they will get into trouble for disclosing abuse.
- There are very few options for emergency or long-term placement, and domestic violence shelters are not being utilized.
- Disability agencies are often faced with the challenge of supporting both the victim and the perpetrator.
- Disability direct support professionals (DDSPs) report that families exhibit attitudinal barriers which prohibit individuals with DD/cognitive disabilities from accessing services.

Understanding Entry into the Response System – Outreach, Referral & Cross-Discipline Collaboration:

- Most disability agencies report there is an immediate internal response and investigation when an individual discloses, or when abuse is discovered, but referrals are not often made to domestic violence and sexual assault agencies.

- Disability agencies investigate themselves in abuse cases.
- The system is perceived to be overloaded and overwhelmed with too few agencies able to provide needed abuse-specific response services.
- Domestic violence, sexual assault and disability agencies tend to work in isolation with little knowledge about the services provided at the other agencies or the protocols they are mandated to follow.
- Individuals with DD/cognitive disabilities and the staff that support them do not know about the services available at domestic violence/sexual assault agencies or how to access them.
- Women with DD/cognitive disabilities, because they are subject to mandated reporting, do not have an option of their entry point into the system.
- Women with DD/cognitive disabilities often disclose to each other; they want to be a resource for each other and for the service provider agencies.

Strengthening Capacity and Skills:

- Domestic violence and sexual assault providers lack knowledge about the intersection of disability and violence and have little experience working directly with individuals with disabilities.
- Disability direct support professionals (DDSPs) lack knowledge of the dynamics of sexual and domestic violence, the definitions of abuse, and the effects and symptom manifestation of abuse.
- DDSPs are challenged with balancing “dignity of risk” versus “safety” for the individuals they support.
- Domestic violence and sexual assault advocates and clinicians need assistance in improving their communication skills to work with women who use “non-traditional” methods of communication.
- DDSPs indicated they specifically needed more skills in how to better handle a disclosure, both in terms of being a caring listener and following proper protocol (minimal facts).
- Staffs at domestic violence, sexual assault and developmental disability agencies want consistent, documented response policies on how to respond to abuse, and the opportunity to practice that response.
- DDSPs indicated that they are unprepared to better educate individuals with DD/cognitive disabilities about abuse, abuse prevention and available resources.
- RI’s mandatory reporting statute is ambiguous and domestic violence, sexual assault and disability advocacy and support professionals do not know to whom it applies.
- DDSPs need an understanding of the effects of violence on individuals with DD/cognitive disabilities.

- DDSPs and domestic violence/sexual assault advocates need a better understanding of the effects of secondary trauma, and the COF agencies need to recognize the role of interpersonal violence in the lives of their staff members and how that impacts their ability to provide support to others.

The next steps for the implementation of activities leading to systems change in the two Communities of Focus will focus on working to alleviate the barriers to violence response services for women with disabilities, building the capacity and skills of agencies and individuals to provide immediate and appropriate responses to abuse, create clear and welcoming entry points into the violence response system for women with disabilities and the agencies who support them, and establish response policies within the COFs that are truly survivor-driven and informed.

Taking the totality of the needs assessment findings, and the implications and possibilities that follow from them, the ACT Collaborative approached the strategic planning process by prioritizing and focusing in on initiatives and goals that support the following recommendations:

1. Great energy and opportunities are needed to build trust and partnerships among domestic violence, sexual assault and disability agencies. Work has been done in “silos” for many years and now is the time for moving towards a system of shared resources, collaborative learning and co-advocacy.
2. Staffs at domestic violence, sexual assault and disability agencies still need basic skills and understanding about the intersection of disability and violence, providing a ripe opportunity to build a foundation of cross-discipline networks that facilitate the exchange of ideas and knowledge, and create the roadmap for a collaborative journey of discovery.
3. Clarification for sexual assault, domestic violence and disability advocates is needed on the nature and intent of the state’s mandated reporting statute¹,

¹ § 40.1-27-2 **Duty to report.** – (a) Any person within the scope of their employment at a program or in their professional capacity who has knowledge of or reasonable cause to believe that a participant in a program has been abused, mistreated or neglected shall make, within twenty-four (24) hours or by the end of the next business day, a written report to the Director of the Department of Mental Health, Retardation, and Hospitals or his or her designee. The report shall contain: (1) The name, address, telephone number, occupation, and employer's address and the phone number of the person reporting; (2) The name and address of the participant who is believed to be the victim of the abuse, mistreatment, or neglect; (3) The details, observations, and beliefs concerning the incident(s); (4) Any statements regarding the incident made by the participant and to whom they were made; (5) The date, time, and place of the incident; (6) The name of any individual(s) believed to have knowledge of the incident; and (7) The name of any individual(s)

specifically regarding to whom the mandate applies. The ability to provide confidential response services hinges on the clarification of this issue.

4. Women with cognitive and developmental disabilities must be given a stronger voice in selecting their entry into the violence response system, which is currently very challenging under RI mandated reporting. These women want to be a resource for each other and agencies in the community, and direct support professionals need skills on how to ensure incident management through better facilitation of person-centered safety planning.

RHODE ISLAND ACT COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIC PLAN

In this current economic climate, particularly in Rhode Island where we are facing historic highs in unemployment, and a devastating state budget deficit that is severely impacting the way both statewide and municipal government departments and community agencies are functioning, the over-riding impetus for the activities chosen for implementation in this strategic plan is to ask and answer, “What can we do together that we cannot do alone?”

The ACT Collaborative has selected short-term and mid-range initiatives that respond to the most pressing needs and wants of the COFs as narrowed and recommended from the needs assessment findings, encapsulate the guiding principles of the ACT Collaborative, complement and build upon each other, and sequence in a logical way to build towards long-term initiatives and systems change. The selected activities supporting the implementation goals of this project are also manageable and feasible given current available resources.

Overview of Short-Term Goals and Activities

The goals that make up our short-term initiatives follow a clear sequence: we first need to create the opportunities to build community connections across the disciplines, allowing individual agencies to explore both their own internal capacity, while discovering new and complementary information about each other. A better understanding of how other agencies in the COFs operate and approach supporting individuals with disabilities who have experienced abuse will set the stage for a shared journey of discovery and collaborative learning about the intersection of disability and

believed to have been responsible for the incident. (b) In addition to those persons required to report pursuant to this section, any other person may make a report if that person has reasonable cause to believe that a participant has been abused, mistreated, or neglected.

violence. Once the COF agencies have a shared baseline understanding of the dynamics of abuse for this community, they will begin to work on creating and piloting a best practice, cross-discipline, person-centered approach for the incident management of abuse cases. This shared and unified vision earned through collaborative work across the disciplines and various stakeholders in our COFs is at the foundation of systems change.

Goal #1: Build community connections among COF agencies and connect the silos that have historically worked in isolation.

The need for activities around collaboration-building and community connection was loud and clear during the needs assessment process. On a very basic level many of the staff members at the sexual assault and domestic violence agencies were unaware of the existence of so many agencies serving individuals with cognitive and developmental disabilities in the state, let alone those that were located in their own communities. Conversely, many of the disability agencies did not know that sexual assault and domestic violence agency services were even available for the individuals they support. Most of the participants in our COF needs assessment process asked very specifically to learn about each others' agencies. Both the professionals and the women receiving services in these communities want an opportunity to tell others about the work they do and how they can be a resource to each other.

First and foremost, the COF agencies have been asked to identify a consistent staff member and/or self-advocate to act as a point of contact for project initiatives, however, ALL COF agency staff members and the individuals they support will be encouraged and extended the invitation to participate in all project events. The COF agencies will be provided with a full schedule of events and topic-specific agendas through September 2009 on a shared GOOGLE calendar (accessible only by log-in), so that agencies can identify the appropriate staff members and individuals supported (in addition to the appointed COF Collaborative Team member) to attend each bi-weekly event. The COF agencies have already agreed to attend bi-weekly Collaborative Exchange Meetings in the COFs which will be utilized for several purposes (as outlined in Goals #1 – 3).

The ACT Collaborative will then begin the work of providing the forum to connect the “silos.” We have asked the agencies in our COFs to “get on the bus” together for a journey of shared discovery. The COF agencies all participated in just their small part of the needs assessment process (either a focus group or interview), so the ACT Collaborative will begin our collective work together by outlining the totality of the needs assessment findings, so that agencies have a sense of where their strengths, capacities and concerns fall on the full spectrum within their COF. The ACT

Collaborative will then facilitate a discussion with the COFs about how these needs assessment findings were narrowed to create the implementation plan, and how the *ACT Collaboration Charter* will guide our work together. Because all COF agencies were selected based on their organizational demonstration and support of the *Charter's* guiding principles, mission and vision – the COF-level work that will be done in these initial Collaborative Exchange Meetings is on establishing a Membership Roster in our COFs which outlines the roles and responsibilities of the COF agencies in the implementation of these initiatives, and disclosing self-interest and contributions of each COF agency. It is anticipated that establishing these expectations for the COFs working relationship together will create mutual respect and sustainable trust as the COFs move into the deeper work of creating solutions and identifying needed actions.

As a means towards this goal of community connection, the ACT Collaborative will create a “Moveable Feast” where each agency in the COFs will have an opportunity to host a half-day site visit from their COF colleagues. These site visits are not only an opportunity for the host site to provide some background history, an overview of their agency’s mission and structure, and philosophy and approach to supporting women who have survived abuse; but an opportunity for the visiting sites to ask questions, visually absorb “a day in the life” at each agency, and immerse in another agency’s “culture.” Agencies will begin to create a reference guide of each COF agency during these site visits which will lead directly to our pursuit of Goal #2.

Goal #1: Build community connections among COF agencies and connect the silos that have historically worked in isolation.

Anticipated Outcomes:

- *Capacity for trust-building among COF agencies is strengthened.*
- *Collaborative relationships among COF agencies are created and nurtured.*
- *Knowledge of each others' agencies is increased.*
- *Resource pool available to service providers is increased.*
- *Network of colleagues upon which service providers may call is increased.*

ACTION STEPS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE						RESOURCES	OUTPUTS
		Apr. 2009	May 2009	June 2009	July 2009	Aug 2009	Sept 2009		
Assist COF agencies to identify the key staff members and self-advocates who will serve as both consistent points of contact for project initiatives and core participants in project activities.	ACT Collaborative members will facilitate this decision-making process at the Strategic Planning Retreat and in its follow-up.	X						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COF Leadership • COF Staff • <i>ACT Strategic Plan</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COF Collaborative Teams are established and ready to begin intensive work together by May 2009
Share findings of the Needs Assessment with COF agencies and outline strategic plan initiatives.	ACT Collaborative with the VERA Institute of Justice	X	X					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of <i>ACT Needs & Strengths Assessment Report</i> • <i>ACT Strategic Plan</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COF agencies are provided a clear outline of collective work both within the grant period and beyond

ACTION STEPS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE						RESOURCES	OUTPUTS
		Apr. 2009	May 2009	June 2009	July 2009	Aug 2009	Sept 2009		
Schedule and implement bi-weekly Collaborative Exchange Meetings.	ACT Collaborative in consultation with COF agency contacts.	X	X	X	X	X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time for bi-weekly meetings • GOOGLE shared calendar • Accessible location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A consistent and structured forum is established for information-exchange and learning • Relationships between organizations are nurtured
Establish rules and roles for collaborative work in COF Collaborative Exchange Meetings.	ACT Collaborative will facilitate based on the <i>ACT Collaborative Charter</i> .	X	X	X				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>ACT Collaboration Charter</i> • <i>Collaboration Handbook</i> from the Fieldstone Alliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COF Membership Roster outlining disclosed self-interests and contributions; • Documented roles & responsibilities of COF agencies • Increased capacity for collaborative work and trust-building is fostered

ACTION STEPS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE						RESOURCES	OUTPUTS
		Apr. 2009	May 2009	June 2009	July 2009	Aug 2009	Sept 2009		
Schedule and participate in “Moveable Feast” site visits.	ACT Collaborative in consultation with COF agency contacts.	X	X	X				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GOOGLE shared calendar providing on-line scheduling access for all COF agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documented reference guide history of each COF agency (to be utilized under Goal #2) Provide context for collaborative work across disciplines Increased knowledge of each others’ agencies

Goal #2: Improve referral networks across disciplines.

In many conversations it became apparent that agencies felt overwhelmed with too few resources to appropriately support women with disabilities who have experienced abuse. Information requests and referrals were not often made across disciplines, and the support an individual received was dependent almost exclusively on which agency received the first phone call.

The site visits undertaken under Goal #1, and the subsequent debriefing meetings the COF groups will do together will set the foundation for resource mapping in these COF communities. It is as important for agencies to articulate their self-interests, strengths and what they can do for each other in the community as it is to be very clear about their limitations and where they lack capacity. Community Resource Mapping builds on our initial focus for all implementation goals – what we can do together that we cannot do alone. Mapping will allow the COFs to address several of the gaps identified through the needs assessment process: identifying existing resources; identifying previously unknown or untapped resources; creating a clear path for accessing resources; avoiding duplication of services; encouraging collaboration and the building of new organizational relationships; and exchanging information across disciplines. This mapping will allow us to build a baseline of COF resources, specifically as they relate to providing violence response services to women with cognitive and developmental disabilities. Creating this baseline map will move the COF agencies from thinking only about their own internal resources (or lack thereof) to being able to identify the *community's* resources, laying the groundwork for a shared responsibility for responding to women who have experienced abuse.

The ACT Collaborative will begin this work by researching the existing tools and guides for Community Resource Mapping. Under this short-term initiative, the COFs will be focusing on the mapping of resources specific to identifying and responding to abuse in the cognitive disability community. Establishing this specific focus for mapping will also provide resource support to the recommendations and policy work the COFs will embark on under Goal # 4 – 6. By the end of September 2009 the COFs will be able to identify existing internal resources for responding to women with cognitive disabilities who have experienced abuse, as well as resources appropriate for referral to and information-sharing with other COF agencies. This is a feasible and obtainable goal because each COF has representation from the only domestic violence agency in that community, as well as representation from Day One – the state's ONLY sexual assault agency/rape crisis center. Because there are so few agencies in the state that provide violence response services, the opportunity to create a sustainable, long-term systems change is great. A step towards creating a defined system for referral and case management within the COF will begin with the

formalization of inter-agency confidentiality agreements for referral, advocacy and case consultation. These models can be referenced and utilized in other areas of these agencies' work, and can serve as a model for similar work in other Rhode Island communities.

Goal #2: Improve referral networks across disciplines.

Outcomes:

- *Resource pool available to service providers is increased.*
- *Network of colleagues upon which service providers may call is increased.*
- *Formal agreements for handling inter-agency confidentiality are created.*

ACTION STEPS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE						RESOURCES	OUTPUTS
		Apr. 2009	May 2009	June 2009	July 2009	Aug 2009	Sept 2009		
Research best practice models for creating community resource maps.		X	X	X				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools for community resource mapping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify specific information to be collected for mapping • Identify tools for collecting resource mapping information
Facilitate resource mapping in the two COF communities.	ACT Collaborative will facilitate in COF Collaborative Exchange Meetings in response to <i>Needs & Strengths Assessment Report</i> findings		X	X	X	X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Samples of community resource maps • <i>ACT Needs & Strengths Assessment Report</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COF-specific resource maps for referral and information-sharing
Create formal inter-agency confidentiality agreements for referral, advocacy and case consultation.	ACT Collaborative will facilitate in COF Collaborative Exchange Meeting; agreements will be submitted for OVW approval.				X	X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Samples of MOU and inter-agency agreements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signed written agreements approved by agency leadership and OVW.

Goal #3: Support capacity- and knowledge-building in the COFs by providing collaborative learning opportunities and fostering a learning environment.

Throughout the needs assessment process there emerged a clear need for increased comfort levels around issues of violence and disability. Different parts of the “system” hold different pieces of the knowledge necessary for a person-centered response to violence; now is a time for a more collective approach to educating each other and the system. Once the groundwork is laid for agencies to understand more about the culture and structure of each other’s agency, the next opportunity is to create a foundation of collective knowledge about the intersection of violence and disability.

Several Disability Direct Support Professionals (DDSPs) stated that they are very hesitant to make referrals to sexual assault and domestic violence agencies because those agencies do not have the same experience working with women with cognitive disabilities; sexual assault and domestic violence advocates echoed this point. At the same time DDSPs specifically requested assistance from sexual assault and domestic violence agencies in learning how to be better listeners when someone discloses abuse. It is clear that all agencies involved in the COFs have knowledge and experience to share with each other. These exchanges of knowledge are yet another step towards breaking professionals and agencies out of their “silos” towards collectively working in an informed manner to support individuals who have experienced abuse.

Bi-weekly Collaborative Exchange Meeting time will be utilized to lay the foundation of knowledge regarding several critical areas identified in the needs assessment:

- understanding the dynamics of abuse at the intersection of disability and violence
- the parameters of RI mandated reporting and how it impacts an individual’s ability to choose their desired advocacy approach
- the scope of incident management and the responsibilities of sexual assault, domestic violence and disability community provider agencies under the current model
- the philosophy of person-centered safety planning and its essential components for practice.

The ACT Collaborative will create topic-specific learning agendas around each of these four critical areas, specifically regarding how they currently play out in policy and practice in Rhode Island. The ACT Collaborative will identify appropriate local and national experts to facilitate these Collaborative Exchange Meetings. These shared learning experiences will provide the baseline of knowledge to prepare the COFs to engage in work around our next goal: Critical Ownership Conversations to generate recommendations and best practice around these critical issues.

Goal #3: Support capacity- and knowledge-building in the COFs by providing collaborative learning opportunities and fostering a learning environment.

Outcomes:

- *Provider knowledge of the intersection of sexual assault, domestic violence and disability is increased*
- *Comfort levels around issues of violence and disability are increased*
- *Shared learning and understanding prepares COF participants to make informed recommendations and calls for action*

ACTION STEPS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE						RESOURCES	OUTPUTS
		Apr. 2009	May 2009	June 2009	July 2009	Aug 2009	Sept 2009		
Review Needs Assessment to identify key areas for cross-training and shared learning experiences.	ACT Collaborative in consultation with the VERA Institute of Justice Accessing Safety Initiative.	X						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of <i>ACT Needs & Strengths Assessment Report</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACT Collaborative is ready to create informed bi-weekly learning agendas that support collaborative problem-solving
Create topic-specific learning agendas for bi-weekly COF Collaborative Exchange Meetings.	ACT Collaborative will create and submit to OVW for approval. ACT Collaborative will facilitate approved learning agendas at bi-weekly meetings.	X	X					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>ACT Needs & Strengths Assessment Report</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion, submission, approval and implementation of seven (7) learning agendas.
Identify local experts, COF agency staff, and national experts to facilitate the learning agendas.	ACT Collaborative in consultation with the VERA Institute of Justice Accessing Safety Initiative.	X	X	X				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VERA Accessing Safety Initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmed facilitators and presenters appropriate to the day's learning agenda

ACTION STEPS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE						RESOURCES	OUTPUTS
		Apr. 2009	May 2009	June 2009	July 2009	Aug 2009	Sept 2009		
Schedule and implement bi-weekly Collaborative Exchange Meetings.	ACT Collaborative in consultation with COF agency contacts.	X	X	X	X	X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time for bi-weekly meetings • GOOGLE shared calendar • Accessible location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A consistent and structured forum is established for information-exchange and learning • Relationships between organizations are nurtured • Increased knowledge about the intersection of disability and violence • COF agencies have an increased understanding of learning agenda topics, preparing them to make informed recommendations and calls to action

Goal #4: Encourage ownership and build capacity in the COFs for creating a truly person-centered, incident management response policy for when abuse happens.

There already exists a statewide policy for responding to allegations of sexual and physical assault in DD agencies. This *Incident Management Model* was created in June 2000 and has been the model adhered to by DD agencies, including those in our COFs. Our conversations during the needs assessment with individuals with cognitive disabilities, DDSs, sexual assault and domestic violence advocates indicate, however, that while the model does provide specific guidance to agencies on how to handle abuse disclosures in a sensitive fashion, the individual herself is completely removed from the decision-making and action steps of the model.

It is at this point the COFs will utilize the knowledge they obtained through the learning agendas in previous Collaborative Exchange Meetings to make informed recommendations for best practice around mandated reporting and incident management. The COF agencies will review both the *Incident Management Model* as well as other agency-specific policies on handling and responding to disclosures. The COFs Collaborative Teams will work together to identify the gaps in these policies, and where they have been difficult to implement in actual practice due to the issues mandated reporting does necessitate. These reviews will allow the COFs to focus in on best practice for revising these policies through the structure of our subsequent Critical Ownership Conversations.

The format for these Critical Ownership Conversations (three total in each COF) will model the Open Space Technology facilitation process that was utilized in focus groups during the needs assessment. The group will be given a focusing statement around which they will generate possibilities and solutions. The narrowing work done previously in the Collaborative Exchange Meetings will assist the ACT Collaborative and COFs in identifying this focusing statement. Through these Critical Ownership Conversations, the ACT Collaborative and its COFs will explore ways to revise this current model in a way that is more person-centered and individual-driven, and prepare it for pilot testing in the COFs.

The work under these short-term initiatives will culminate in a two-day retreat that will combine the opportunity to engage in a final learning agenda and Critical Ownership Conversation on the facilitation of person-centered safety planning. The ACT Collaborative has been working on issues related to the facilitation of person-centered safety planning for several years. When the Collaborative created its ***Collaboration Charter***, the team made sure to define the different components of this concept, definitions which will be the structure upon which conversations are facilitated and recommendations made:

Person-Centered – the individual is the primary focus of the system of services. Service providers need to be sure that they are not reinforcing old patterns of isolation and powerlessness for the individuals with whom they are working. It is helping individuals to increase their capacity and to understand available choices. When services are person-centered, they are responsive to the unique needs of each individual accessing them.

Person-Centered Planning – strengthens the voice of an individual in the planning of his or her future. Person-centered plans find and develop the gifts of the individual, develop a vision to express these gifts, foster a support network to help realize these ideals, and change services to be more responsive to the needs and interests of individuals. Person-centered planning means planning with, and not planning for, a person.

Safety Planning – an individualized plan for someone who has experienced violence that helps reduce the risks of future violence. Safety plans are a choice and must meet the needs and life goals of the individual.

Recommendations made by the COF regarding this triad of issues – mandated reporting, incident management and person-centered safety planning – have the great potential to directly influence system change on a statewide level by demonstrating collaboration and success in the local COF sites. The Office of Quality Improvement (QI) at the Division of Developmental Disabilities, which handles all of the mandated reporting calls and investigations of abuse for the state, has had the size and capacity of their staff greatly reduced due to the state budget crisis and widespread state employee retirements. This office is eager to learn directly from the COF agencies and the individuals they support what the communities truly want in terms of a person-centered incident management response to abuse, and the COFs are eager to demonstrate success of a collaborative, cross-discipline approach to abuse.

Goal #4: Encourage ownership and build capacity in the COFs to create a truly person-centered incident management response policy for when abuse happens.

Outcomes:

- *Collaborative efforts to influence the policies and practices of key components of the system are identified.*

ACTION STEPS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE						RESOURCES	OUTPUTS
		Apr. 2009	May 2009	June 2009	July 2009	Aug 2009	Sept 2009		
Review current agency policies on “handling a disclosure” and “reporting a disclosure”.	ACT Collaborative will facilitate in COF Collaborative Exchange Meetings.				X	X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current agency policies • Sample policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COFs will identify existing best practice and gaps in current policies.
Review current statewide <i>Incident Management Model</i> that DD agencies are required to follow and make recommendations for how to make it more person-centered.	ACT Collaborative will facilitate in COF Collaborative Exchange Meetings.				X	X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Rhode Island Incident Management Model</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COFs will make recommendations for revisions to current model.
Host Critical Ownership Conversations on pressing issues identified by the needs assessment: best practice around mandatory reporting, incident management and person-centered safety planning.	ACT Collaborative will facilitate these goal-oriented conversations for COF agency participants.					X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible location for conversations • RI’s Duty to Report statute • <i>Rhode Island Incident Management Model</i> with revision recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COFs make recommendations for best practice

ACTION STEPS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE						RESOURCES	OUTPUTS
		Apr. 2009	May 2009	June 2009	July 2009	Aug 2009	Sept 2009		
Create and implement topic-specific learning agenda and Critical Ownership Conversation for 2-day COF retreat on person-centered safety planning facilitation.	ACT Collaborative will create and submit learning agenda to OVW for approval. ACT Collaborative will facilitate approved learning agenda and Critical Ownership Conversation.					X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time for bi-weekly meetings • GOOGLE shared calendar • Accessible location • COF recommendations for best practice around incident management • COF resource maps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion, submission, approval and implementation of learning agenda. • COF agencies have an increased understanding of the components of person-centered safety planning, preparing them for the piloting of best practice recommendations

Overview of Mid-Term Initiative

With permission from the Office on Violence against Women and should resources allow, the ACT Collaborative will seek a no-cost extension for the current grant to engage in a mid-term initiative within the COFs from October 2009 – March 2010.

Goal #5: Revise *Incident Management Model* based on COF recommendations for a person-centered incident management response policy.

The COFs will begin the continued, collaborative, focused work together on these mid-term initiatives by creating a new schedule of monthly Collaborative Exchange Meetings. The COFs at this point will have engaged in intensive Critical Ownership Conversations, looking at the triangulation of mandated reporting, incident management and person-centered safety planning. During this mid-term initiative the ACT Collaborative and COFs will take the recommendations from these critical conversations and revise the current *Incident Management Model* to create a new model for piloting in the COFs.

As a companion project, because staff at sexual assault, domestic violence and disability agencies specifically requested to be a support and resource for each other when abuse happens, the COFs will work on creating a facilitation guide for agencies to use post-event to debrief cases of abuse. One disability agency Executive Director during the needs assessment said:

We embrace our imperfections through incident management. We look at our mistakes to figure them out and engage in conversation. We owe it to the people we serve to look at our practices.

This facilitation guide is an opportunity to engage in conversation and identify the strengths and shortfalls of a response to abuse. The guide would go hand-in-hand with the new revised *Incident Management Model* and allow agencies to seek cross-discipline feedback and exchange of information in the debriefing of an abuse incident.

Goal #5: Revise *Incident Management Model* based on COF recommendations for a person-centered incident management response policy.

Outcomes:

- *Collaborative efforts to influence the policies and practices of key components of the system are identified.*
- *Survivors with disabilities are given a stronger voice and role in directing the advocacy response to abuse.*
- *A new model for incident management is created and prepared for pilot-testing.*
- *A model for post-incident debriefing of abuse cases is recommended.*

ACTION STEPS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE						RESOURCES	OUTPUTS
		Oct. 2009	Nov. 2009	Dec. 2009	Jan. 2010	Feb. 2010	Mar. 2010		
Schedule and implement monthly Collaborative Exchange Meetings	ACT Collaborative with COF agency contacts.	X	X	X	X	X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time for bi-weekly meetings • GOOGLE shared calendar • Accessible location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A consistent and structured forum is established for information-exchange and learning • Relationships between organizations are nurtured
Based on recommendations from Critical Ownership Conversations, make revisions to current <i>Incident Management Model</i> , incorporating best practice for a person-centered incident management response.	ACT Collaborative and COF agencies in consultation with the VERA Institute of Justice Accessing Safety Initiative. Revised policy will be submitted to OVW for approval.	X	X					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Rhode Island Incident Management Model</i> with revision recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new model for incident management is ready for pilot testing.

ACTION STEPS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE						RESOURCES	OUTPUTS
		Oct. 2009	Nov. 2009	Dec. 2009	Jan. 2010	Feb. 2010	Mar. 2010		
Create facilitation guide for cross-agency, post-incident debriefing of abuse cases to complement the revised <i>Incident Management Model</i> .	ACT Collaborative					X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New model for incident management • Case studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A facilitation guide for agencies to evaluate their response to abuse.

Goal #6: Pilot the newly created policy and provide opportunities for COF agencies to practice this response.

Over and over again in the needs assessment process the ACT Collaborative heard that sexual assault, domestic violence and disability advocates are uncomfortable and unsure of how to work at the intersection of disability and violence. In many cases it is because of the sheer lack of exposure to incidents. Women with cognitive disabilities were very clear that they did not want their abuse situation or that of a friend to be what professionals use to “practice” their response for the first time. Agencies did not want times of crisis to be the first time they encounter each other and work together.

Training modules on the new revised *Incident Management Model* will be created and delivered to all COF agencies with opportunities to practice and navigate case scenarios.

Goal #6: Pilot the newly created policy and provide opportunities for COF agencies to practice this response.

Outcomes:

- *Collaborative efforts to influence the policies and practices of key components of the system are identified.*
- *Confidence of COF agency staff in handling and responding to disclosures of abuse is increased.*

ACTION STEPS	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE						RESOURCES	OUTPUTS
		Oct. 2009	Nov. 2009	Dec. 2009	Jan. 2010	Feb. 2010	Mar. 2010		
Create and provide scenario-based training to COF agencies on incident management and person-centered safety planning.	ACT Collaborative and COF agencies.			X	X	X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New model for incident management • Case studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased confidence by COF agencies in handling and responding to disclosures of abuse

Roadmap for Long-Term Strategy and Progress

The sequencing of the short-term and mid-range initiatives will position the ACT Collaborative and the COFs to continue work beyond this grant period towards sustainable systems change. There were several pressing issues that emerged during the needs assessment process that require much more lengthy debate, deliberation and inclusion of a wider range of stakeholders than is possible under the current grant initiative. The ACT Collaborative and the COFs are committed to continue engaging in Critical Ownership Conversations to position ourselves and the state as a model for how to facilitate true person-centered safety planning.

Goal #7: Share the findings and best practice recommendations that emerged from this initiative with the larger statewide audience; invite additional stakeholders into critical ownership conversations.

The ACT Collaborative and its COF sites embarked on this grant initiative to produce examples of collaborative efforts for best practice. Being able to demonstrate change on the COF level is the precursor to expanding our conversations to a wider range of stakeholders. The ACT Collaborative is committed to sharing our successes and disappointments with the larger RI community and fostering additional community collaboratives and partnerships.

Goal #8: Expand resource mapping efforts statewide.

The ACT Collaborative will evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of cross-agency referrals in our COFs, and share the lessons learned with other communities. The resource maps created in the COFs under this initiative will in time be expanded to include resources statewide. Rhode Island is a tiny state and resources are often required to cross city and county lines.

Goal #9: Address the ambiguity of the mandatory reporting statute on a legislative level.

All of the short-term and mid-range initiatives under this project seek to improve the person-centered response to abuse despite the ambiguity of the mandated reporting statute. The ACT Collaborative will work with the COF agencies and the state's mandated reporting office under this current grant to create a baseline of understanding as to the nature and intent of the current statute, so that all stakeholders are working from the same understanding. Work in the next few years will turn to efforts to clarify the language on a legislative level.

Goal #10: Create a statewide model of co-advocacy that truly builds on the strengths of both the disability advocacy and violence response agencies, and the desires and choices of survivors with disabilities.

Ultimately, the work of the ACT Collaborative and the COFs in regards to person-centered safety planning will lead to our ability to craft a true co-advocacy model of response for women with disabilities who experience abuse. Women themselves asked to have more choice as to their entry into the response system, who gets to know they have been abused, and who they want by their side when navigating the system. The ACT Collaborative is looking down the line towards a system of co-advocacy that truly provides the individual with the best of the violence response and disability advocacy agencies. It will be a system of informed choice for the abuse survivor, provided by informed and accountable professionals and advocates.

Goal #11: Create and utilize cross-discipline work groups to research and cultivate alternatives to “traditional” talk therapy counseling and safety planning for women with cognitive disabilities.

Clinicians need to be skilled and comfortable working within the disability community and understand the dynamics of sexual and domestic violence for this community. Traditional counseling and safety planning are not always an option, and clinicians need alternative approaches to work with individuals with developmental and cognitive disabilities. The ACT Collaborative will facilitate cross-discipline discussion and exploration of non-traditional counseling and therapeutic approaches.

Goal #12: Engage self-advocacy groups to help guide the revision and creation of domestic violence and sexual assault agency outreach materials and cultivate ideas for improving print and web-based materials.

The ACT Collaborative is committed to host Café Conversations for women with disabilities so that they can share with domestic violence and sexual assault agencies how they want to be contacted and made aware of advocacy services.

CONCLUSION

The ACT Collaborative is excited to be working with such committed and gifted Communities of Focus on these initiatives. The time for action is now, and the needs assessment process demonstrated just how invested professionals and women with disabilities are in improving violence response services. While the key findings that emerged from the needs assessment were broad and sobering in their scope – the ACT Collaborative is confident that it has selected feasible and manageable activities that will lead to systems change. The current strategic plan will lay the foundation for intense cross-discipline collaboration and learning, allowing for focused ownership conversations that will get to the core of being able to provide person-centered safety planning for women with developmental and cognitive disabilities.