



Survivor Input for Community-Based Advocates

Survivor Input on Advocacy

Though we didn't specifically ask about support from DVSAS (or other DV/SA advocacy agencies), survivors talked about services they received, or didn't receive, and how that impacted their experiences.

- 33% of respondents said that they went to a victim-serving organization for support or help
- 38% of respondents named service providers as a helpful system (they specifically named: DVSAS, CPS, CASAS, and Northwest Network) and 17% named them as a harmful system (they specifically named: Guardian Ad Litem, DVSAS, CASAS, LAW Advocates)

"I did a group at DVSAS, and hearing other people talk about their experiences, and more specifically their thoughts that they had experiences and their experiences of shame or guilt. It was very validating. In terms of justice, during my group at DVSAS, I wrote him a letter and did have someone send it. I really felt like I needed him to know what the impact of what he did was."

"I went to DVSAS to do group – it worried me that it was at night, it felt unsafe for a group of women to leave at night."

"It's tough that you can only stay at the DV shelter 3 months because it's hard to find a place to live in that amount of time."

"I haven't found any help yet, I'm not sure if DVSAS is able to help me or wants to help me, if it costs money or if they have time for me."

"I would like to connect with the DV agency but I hope they will be fair enough, but hopefully it will be okay enough and they will listen to my story. I would really appreciate learning about that organization that can provide support."

“I have really strong emotions that come up when I think about going to a support group, like I would be interested but I don’t know how I would feel about it, I am unfamiliar with support group structures.”

“I was calling DVSAS, trying to get help, trying to get answers [so my workplace would know how to support me]. If I had a packet to give them, that would be so helpful.”

“And just because he didn’t leave a mark doesn’t mean he didn’t hurt me, because my kid was there and a kid is involved. I know there are protocols but they didn’t do anything, just gave me a DVSAS pamphlet. I felt like if the police can’t help me, then maybe they can, otherwise I will just have to keep enduring all of this pain and exposing my son to it.”

“I connected with DVSAS and they helped me do a restraining order.”

“There are great resources, like DVSAS and on campus, but knowing about those is a huge part of feeling supported by the community, that there are people there to help you. I wish I’d know more about those in my experiences.”

“I went to DVSAS and felt heard – that started the process of healing. For justice to happen, I needed to be stable, I needed to be heard.”

“A follow up would have been nice from law enforcement afterwards, to see how I was doing, if I had connected with DVSAS, offering me a ride to DVSAS, letting me know it was for me and my safety.”

“Not just for me, but making it known about DVSAS. I didn’t know until the police gave me that pamphlet. Making it more known. I have

a friend who went through the same thing after me, and I told her about DVSAAS, and she had never heard of it.”

“I did not go to DVSAAS or anything because it had been a lot of years and I had a lot of shame.”

“DVSAAS is helping with a protection order.”

“The guardian ad litem told me that if I tried to get help from DVSAAS or went to a shelter, they would give custody of my son to his dad. In order to keep my son, I couldn’t get help from DVSAAS. I had to do it on my own.”

“DVSAAS was a lifesaver for me. They supported me throughout the entire process. They made such a difference, came to court with me for the protection order. I couldn’t have done it without them. I was in a support group after that and it was so helpful.”

“With the DV in my marriage, I reached out to DVSAAS and they helped a lot, helped me make decisions and navigate leaving.”

“My boss was my friend and...encouraged me to go to DVSAAS...The DVSAAS advocate was amazing, she helped me with every process of the protection order form, examples, remembering every situation that happened, what the court needs to hear and what they don’t want to hear, helped me be aware prior to court, explained to me the process of the one-year restraining order, she wrote me notes and gave them to me during court. I needed that so I knew it was okay. And she did a follow up email after me and checked in.”

“But at the time, I wasn’t ready to do anything about it, wasn’t ready to leave. I was talking with DVSAAS and they were encouraging me to leave the state to be safe. But I didn’t want him to leave my

daughter, my family. I didn't want him to have that level of control over me."

"[DVSAS] told me I could have better than that in my life, that I didn't deserve to be treated that way."

"DVSAS going to court with me has been really amazing, especially before I had a lawyer."

"I didn't know what I was doing, but the police officer was amazing, and talked me through the steps and suggested I contact DVSAS."

"I'm having trouble with housing and I don't know if DVSAS has any safe houses open or not, I don't know what else to do."

"I think this is a huge issue...is finding resources. Knowing about DVSAS. They feel intimidating. I don't know what the process is. I'm scared to call these people and have this vulnerable conversation."

"I always appreciate it when the DVSAS advocates will go to places with the survivor, like to court...It feels impossible to imagine that going well if there wasn't immediate support available."

Relevant General Input from Survivors

- 37% of respondents talked about the difficulty of getting free from the abuser
"He kept begging me to take him back and I would take him back, I didn't know what was going on, I stayed with him after breaking up 12 times, I don't know why I did that."
- 21% named societal and cultural norms as being a part of allowing the harm to happen to them, and 21% named societal and cultural change as part of healing and justice for them

“We really need a massive cultural transformation in order to fully address sexual and domestic violence, we have to address all the other intersecting issues, like capitalism, intergenerational trauma, racism, ablism, all these wounds we all carry intergenerationally.”

- 19% of respondents had challenges with naming what happened to them
“The others are more ambiguous, but I have been on every side of domestic and sexual abuse...”
- 19% described the community response as positive
“[The] police involved said, ‘I will do everything I can to find out who did this.’”
- 19% described the community response as negative
“I feel like the questions they’re expected to ask are very – they don’t have a survivor’s mental state in mind. I know it’s a systems thing, they’re just trying to get succinct information or evidence, but it’s really intimidating and doesn’t feel – it feels like an interrogation.”
- When asked about what needs they had (or still have) for support and healing: 74% of respondents said they needed therapy; 41% said a support group; 38% said financial resources; 33% said time off of work or school; 26% said housing; 24% said medical care; 21% said help with making a report (police, school, etc); 17% said a healing circle; 14% said direct communication with their abuser; and 14% said indirect communication with their abuser.

“We need so much help.”

What does healing look like to you? What does justice look like to you?

- 30% said therapy or counseling for the survivor
“Healing for me took a lot of inside work, personally just for me, a lot of therapy...”
- 26% said validation and belief

“Justice would be if I was believed by my family and others, not being blamed for it and having to deal with it internally...”

- 23% said well-being and security (joy, success, art, nature)
“Healing looks like being believed and supported by my community, having that energy being put into me recovering my autonomy and safety.”
- 21% said self-compassion
“For me, healing looks like...a lot of it looks like acceptance. Accepting that I can’t change other people or how they behave. What I can change is how to relate to what happened to me.”
- 16% said structural supports
“The only difference now is that I don’t get beat up. But I still feel like a victim, because I have been living in poverty since I left, and I can’t get out of it.”
- 12% said support groups with other survivors
“I found community in that as well, talking with other survivors of violence. It’s a sad thing, finding others who have experienced violence. Having a space to talk safely and feel validated.”
- 7% said community support (family, friends, coworkers)
“I knew that [my dad] believed me and wanted to help me. That was the most supportive part of the whole process.”

What was helpful in support for you?

- 61% said validation (including being present and engaged)
“The first healing thing that happened was just having someone validate for me that it was a negative experience and that it wasn’t my fault.”

- 39% said tangible and logistical support (money, time, effort)

“They got me beds and clothing to replace the things he destroyed after I left him.”
- 29% said healing through therapy or counseling

“I’ve had lots of therapy. I worked on it really hard in my twenties. The process of healing for me is...being able to talk about it. To have your feelings affirmed.”
- 26% said advocacy and information

“They supported me throughout the entire process. They made such a difference, came to court with me for the protection order. I couldn’t have done it without them.”
- 21% said connection with other survivors

“Really just friends who continuously give me support and who have had similar experiences that should not have happened.”
- 13% said autonomy and agency

“I wanted to have autonomy in how I wanted other people to respond, in how they related to them. It helped me when people asked me how I wanted them to move forward.”
- 11% said connection to services

“...they helped me get to the next step in my journey.”

What was harmful in support for you?

- 44% said barriers to services and support (services or structural support were not provided, hard to access, or non-existent; and/or the survivor was discouraged from seeking help)

“The guardian ad litem told me that if I tried to get help from DVSAS or went to a shelter, they would give custody of my son to his dad.”
- 34% said receiving responses from people who didn’t now how to support a survivor

“People and the systems tell you, ‘Sorry, so sorry’ but they don’t help you. The last thing you want to hear is ‘sorry.’ You need help.”

- 17% said they faced additional forms of discrimination

“It was so hard to understand the system because of my language and culture and being a woman alone in a house taking care of the family, because I have no social security card.”

- 10% said having consequences to the survivor for their self-protection or retaliation

“I also ended up going to jail because I retaliated to get away from her. I had a DV charge and wasn’t able to get a job because of it...I can get it expunged but it would cost me...”

Background

In the summer and fall of 2022, the S/DV Commission sought feedback from survivors of domestic and sexual violence. We did semi-structured interviews and surveys with more than 40 survivors, after which we conducted thematic analysis of the responses and developed this survivor input report. This feedback was gathered and analyzed in conjunction with and under the guidance of Dr. Christina Byrne, a researcher and psychology professor at Western Washington University.

In the interviews and surveys, survivors shared their experiences, what justice and healing could look like for them, and their feedback about restorative justice processes.

Survivors described experiences that included:

- One-time violence and persistent, on-going violence
- Lethal physical violence and severe emotional abuse
- Abuse that lasted for months, years, and decades
- Sexual violence experiences across the lifespan
- Sexual violence committed by trusted adults, friends, partners, neighbors, and dates
- Manipulation and coercion as a part of domestic violence (30%) and sexual assault (16%)
- Abusers using children to manipulate and abuse the survivor (19%)
- Retaliation from the abuser and from the broader community
- Systems responses that helped (17%), systems responses that compounded harm (17%), and systems that were absent or inaccessible
- Co-occurring substance abuse and mental illness

- Repeated victimization experiences, by the same abuser (77%) and by different abusers (30%)

“As this was happening to my body, I had a thought that I joined the many generations of women that I come from, in this culture.”

Read the full report [on our website](#).