

PROJECT OF



CENTER FOR SURVIVOR
AGENCY & JUSTICE

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE:

A Report on Innovative Pilot Projects

**THE CONSUMER RIGHTS FOR
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS INITIATIVE**



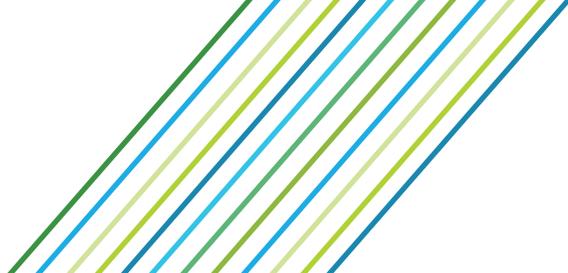
INTRODUCTION

This report details the activities and lessons learned in the first year of the Center for Survivor Agency and Justice’s (CSAJ) Building Partnerships for Economic Justice Pilot Projects. The Pilot Projects are on-the-ground implementation sites focused upon collaborative approaches that enhance economic and consumer rights for domestic violence survivors. The four project sites are: the Texas Council on Family Violence in Austin, Texas; Indiana Legal Services in Bloomington, Indiana; Women’s Resource Center in Scranton, Pennsylvania; and Columbus Community Legal Services, Catholic University of America School of Law in Washington, DC.

Each of these sites were selected based on a demonstrated history of forward-thinking strategic advocacy, strong leadership to support collaborative work, challenging but attainable project goals specific to their community’s context, and a strong dedication to building partnerships. Pilot Projects received specialized web-based trainings on building partnerships between the consumer rights and domestic violence fields, intensive individualized technical assistance from CSAJ staff and expert advisors on consumer rights for domestic violence survivors collaborations, and on-site training and strategizing opportunities with CSAJ staff and experts to develop and maintain collaborative economic and consumer rights for domestic violence survivors projects.

Partnerships between domestic violence and consumer rights advocates and attorneys are critical to achieving the joint goals of physical and economic safety for survivors. They require purposeful cross training, networking, and sustained communication. To that end, after hearing from hundreds of consumer rights and domestic violence attorneys and advocates during CSAJ’s Building Partnerships Needs Assessment, the organization selected these four precedent-setting local organizations from a rich pool of applicants across the country with which to collaborate in developing the Pilot Projects.

The Pilot Projects are the most recent phase of the organization’s Building Partnerships Technical Assistance activities, a component of the Consumer Rights for Domestic Violence Survivors Initiative. The Consumer Rights for Domestic Violence Survivors Initiative (CRDVSI) is a national project that seeks to enhance consumer rights for domestic violence survivors by building the capacity of and building collaborative partnerships between domestic violence and consumer lawyers and advocates. Consumer law can provide survivors of domestic violence with critical tools to restore themselves financially. While many economic justice efforts have focused upon maximizing income, consumer law remedies offer survivors of domestic violence with the tools to minimize expenses and assets by addressing issues such as debt collection defense, credit discrimination, bankruptcy actions, utility assistance, repairing and building credit, tax relief (including innocent spouse relief), foreclosure prevention and defense, and accessing educational opportunities for themselves and their children.



PILOT PROJECT #1

TEXAS COUNCIL ON FAMILY VIOLENCE

The Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV) is one of the largest domestic violence coalitions in the country with a membership comprised of family violence service providers, supportive organizations, survivors of domestic violence, businesses, communities of faith and other local stakeholders. TCFV trains practitioners throughout the country, develops and advocates for public policy in the Texas Legislature, and supports local programs' domestic violence prevention efforts across the state.

After attending CSAJ's Consumer Rights for Domestic Violence Survivors intensive training in Seattle in 2012, Molly Woodard and Krista DelGallo, TCFV's Policy Coordinator and Policy Manager, recognized the value of bringing the resources back to their home state. Though they had been conducting extensive economic justice work through initiatives such as their annual Economic Justice Summit and wide-ranging economic advocacy technical assistance, they had less experience working on consumer rights issues that required more technical expertise.

TCFV embarked on their pilot project with the goal of integrating consumer and other economic considerations into Texas's domestic violence organizations' safety planning and programming. They were also hoping to supplement their individual-level economic work, such as financial literacy

curriculum trainings, with projects that targeted policy-level change. DelGallo explained, "I was managing all of this work on financial literacy and doing curriculum rollout with our programs; but it seemed very disconnected from policy and from identifying legal protections for survivors."

TCFV focused their efforts on identifying family law and consumer rights legal services available to survivors in Texas with the goal of building collaborative relationships and cross-training opportunities. Their statewide outreach has been enormously productive and has generated many promising long-term strategies. They have connected with consumer lawyers at each of the three legal aid organizations in Texas and will be co-presenting with one new legal aid attorney connection at the upcoming Statewide Poverty Law Conference. TCFV has also had discussions regarding collaboration with attorneys at Texas Legal Services Center and, through this collaboration, will be providing training at an upcoming meeting of the State Bar's Housing and Consumer Law Taskforce. Moreover, TCFV has conducted in-person training to over 50 lawyers and advocates and has begun to partner with a faculty member at the University of Texas School of Law, who has written on coercive debt, on consumer law issues for survivors.

"I was managing all of this work on financial literacy and doing curriculum rollout with our programs; but it seemed very disconnected from policy and from identifying legal protections for survivors."





PILOT PROJECT #2

INDIANA LEGAL SERVICES

Indiana Legal Services (ILS) is a nonprofit law firm that provides free civil legal assistance to eligible low-income people throughout the state of Indiana. ILS helps clients who are faced with legal problems that harm their ability to have such basics as food, shelter, income, medical care or personal safety. ILS addresses a wide range of legal needs including those related to domestic violence, housing, consumer law, health care, and government benefits.

Fueled by the leadership of Jamie Andree, Managing Attorney and Director of the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic, Indiana Legal Services, Inc., is doing pioneering work, connecting their tax expertise to domestic violence experts throughout Indiana. While Andree was representing many taxpayers with a wide range tax problems, she noticed that the large majority of her clients were men and that none of her cases were related to relationships or marriage (such as joint tax returns). “There was a whole population of taxpayers that our clinic wasn’t reaching,” Andree explained. Indiana Legal Services’ Low Income Taxpayer Clinic launched an Innovative Partnerships Pilot Project as a way to fill that gap.

ILS’s plan was comprised of three components: 1) provide training and resources to domestic violence survivors’ attorneys, 2) connect with domestic violence organizations to offer to be a referral for tax-related services, and 3) help survivors with tax-related services and education.

Andree has made remarkable headway with the first goal; she developed a one-hour presentation titled “Tax Information for Family Practitioners Representing Domestic Violence Survivors” that has been presented in 4 forums to over 500 pro bono and

legal services attorneys across the state of Indiana. Andree’s presentations have already begun generating referrals, and she has consulted with 10 lawyers who had seen one of the presentations, received referrals from 5 of the lawyers, collaborated with 3 advocates, and worked with 11 survivors on issues such as identity theft, innocent spouse relief, and claiming children on tax returns. She also recorded two pieces for community radio, which were broadcast to innumerable listeners. Lastly, hundreds of her tax-related brochures and flyers have been distributed to survivors throughout the state, and the Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence has included information about the Tax Clinic’s services for survivors in its email newsletter received by over 100 coalition members.

“While Andree was representing many taxpayers with a wide range tax problems, she noticed that the large majority of her clients were men and that none of her cases were related to relationships or marriage...”



PILOT PROJECT #3

WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER

The Women's Resource Center (WRC) provides comprehensive services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking in two counties in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Their services include a crisis hotline, crisis counseling, emergency shelter, safe housing, legal services, support services, community education and advocacy.

The economic landscape had precipitated major changes in the WRC's programming, particularly as it related to housing; Carol Shoener and Judith Lewis, WRC's Economic Advocacy Director and Legal Director, saw the pilot project initiative as an opportunity 1) to reevaluate the way survivors were being served by the organization, 2) to institutionalize the economic advocacy work that was already being done internally, and 3) to engage the local community in reducing survivors' economic barriers to safety through institutional change.

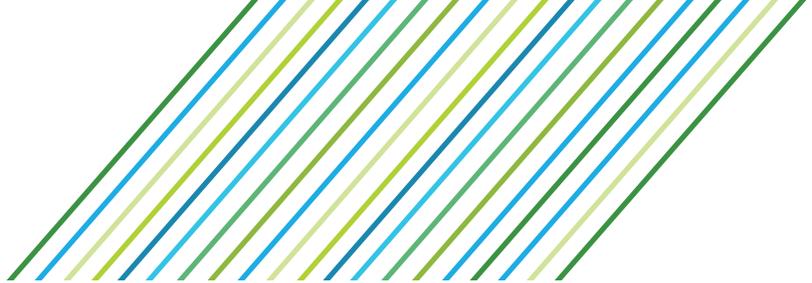
During their pilot year, the WRC has made meaningful progress both internally and in partnership with other organizations. They convened a cross-departmental economic advocacy committee to examine the economic needs of the women they serve and their success in meeting those needs.



“The WRC...convened a cross-departmental economic advocacy committee to examine the economic needs of the women they serve and their success in meeting those needs.”

They also made many strides toward systemic change:

- + Working with the ACLU and their state domestic violence coalition to grant domestic violence survivors exceptions to nuisance ordinances
- + Developing educational materials for survivors about economic relief in Protection from Abuse Orders
- + Partnering with fellow pilot project participant, TCFV's Molly Woodard, to present a seminar to domestic violence organization Executive Directors about strategies for institutionalizing economic advocacy
- + Reaching out to WRC Board Members to identify and collaborate with consumer rights attorneys
- + Distributing CSAJ's "Domestic Violence Screening Tool for Consumer Rights Advocates and Attorneys" to income tax professionals
- + Training legal advocates about filing in forma pauperis when custody evaluators are assigned during protection order hearings
- + Presenting at a statewide housing forum regarding the unique housing needs of survivors



PILOT PROJECT #4

COLUMBUS COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES

Columbus Community Legal Services (CCLS) is a legal clinical training program at the Columbus School of Law, the Catholic University of America. CCLS's Families and the Law Clinic represents abuse survivors in emergency civil protection order, divorce, custody, child support, and certain domestic violence-related immigration cases. CCLS's Consumer Protection Project represents low income individuals in matters involving fair debt collection activities and debt collection actions, fair credit reporting requirements, wrongful repossession, home repair scams, credit scams, identity theft, Chapter 7 bankruptcy, federal income tax preparation and federal income tax controversies. Both FALC and CPP also engage in systemic advocacy, including community legal education and policy work.

For CCLS, the Innovative Partnerships Pilot Project provided an opportunity to better serve the economic and physical safety needs of domestic violence survivors by strengthening the partnership between their Families and the Law Clinic and their Consumer Protection Clinic. In particular, they hoped to enhance their ability to screen and identify domestic violence clients who could benefit from consumer protection legal services and consumer protection clients who could benefit from domestic violence legal services.

CCLS has made progress toward stronger collaborative partnerships on a couple of fronts. They have engaged law students in developing intake guides to help identify clients' experiences that could be addressed in each other's clinics. They have also begun laying the groundwork for integrating material on consumer rights for survivors into their curricula.



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PROMISING PRACTICES GUIDE

The four Building Partnerships for Economic Justice Pilot Projects have served as case studies of collaborative initiatives to enhance consumer rights for domestic violence survivors. Case studies present rich opportunities to investigate new projects within their real-life contexts, particularly when the projects and their contexts overlap. Case studies are particularly useful for describing cutting-edge projects and exploring the factors that produce significant outcomes in those projects. While case study findings are not always applicable in other settings, they have the potential to provide valuable insight into the processes of new programs, offer information about promising practices, and generate ideas for innovation applicable to other communities.

The remainder of this guide will report some of the Pilot Projects' most significant insights, promising practices, and ideas for innovation. They are organized into three categories: process, partnership, and product.

This guide can be put to best use by practitioners with the capacity to shape not only individual advocacy practices, but organizational procedures as well. Building partnerships to enhance economic justice for survivors requires the active participation of individuals with the power to influence systems and institutions so that communities can create the infrastructure needed to transform interventions and sustain this critical work.

PROCESS

GATHER INFORMATION AND PARTNERS BEFORE DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS

The economic needs of survivors can be met most effectively when domestic violence and anti-poverty advocates work collaboratively and engage in deliberate efforts to build partnerships. The pilots' experiences demonstrated this principle quite clearly.

Indiana Legal Services was faced with a common challenge: they had the capacity to provide innovative, intensive services to domestic violence survivors but were not receiving many requests for those services. They made contacts at domestic violence organizations, passed out fliers, and delivered multiple presentations, but continued to receive few referrals for services. To get to the bottom of this puzzle, Director of the Low Income Tax Payer Clinic, Jamie Andree, decided to "contact [potential partners] to ask some questions and pick their brains and take an approach that is less, 'This is what I have to offer you. Who do you know who might be able to use this?'" she explained. "It took me awhile to realize that this was the problem."

"The real work of economic security lies in gaining a better understanding of partners' perspectives..."

Similarly, while Molly Woodard and Krista Del Gallo have done extensive advocacy work addressing family violence and economic hardship across Texas, they continue to find ally practitioners and projects about which they were unfamiliar. Ms. Woodard described, "The more we looked to see what resources were available to our programs and survivors, the more resources that we found that we were not aware of previously."

The real work of economic security lies in gaining a better understanding of partners' perspectives; by doing so communities are able to craft solutions that integrate multiple systemic barriers and therefore yield more nuanced and comprehensive approaches.

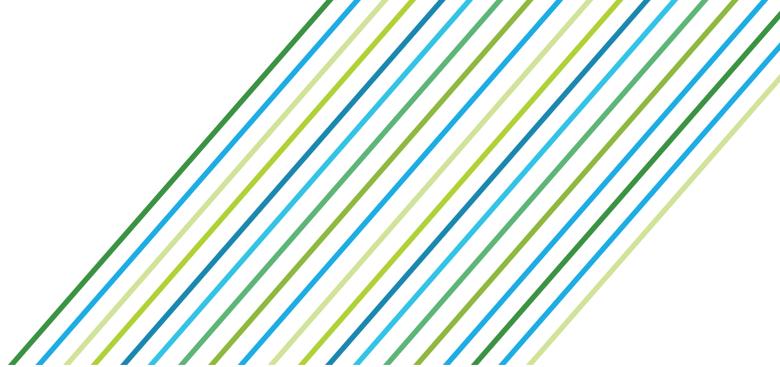
SET MANAGEABLE AND FLEXIBLE GOALS

Columbus Community Legal Service's largest challenge was finding faculty and student time to develop the new resources they had originally intended. In particular, faculty were concerned that student attorneys "already had so much on their plates" as new advocates that they could not foresee adding to their already full load. Likewise, while the Women's Resource Center quickly began convening their economic advocacy working group, unanticipated developments in the organization and the surrounding community demanded that resources be directed elsewhere.

CCLS addressed this resource issue at the same time that they came to a realization: the ground would only shift once practitioners gained a better appreciation for the need for economic advocacy. In other words, internalizing and implementing the philosophy was far more important than acquiring substantive knowledge of legal remedies (which would require far more instruction time). This efficacy lightbulb, so to speak, led them to shift their strategy from that of technical legal information and creation of tools to one of laying the groundwork needed for economic advocacy.

"...internalizing and implementing the philosophy was far more important than acquiring substantive knowledge of legal remedies."

The WRC pivoted in the face of the structural barriers they encountered in their individual client advocacy and used them as an opportunity to work for institutional change. While the economic summit they hoped to host is still in the planning stages, the WRC engaged in different community organizing that aligned with their pre-existing workload.



PARTNERSHIP & COLLABORATION

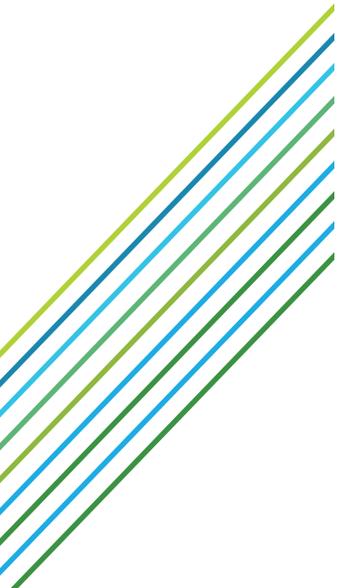
MATCH THE SIZE AND STRENGTH OF THE NETWORK TO THE INTENDED GOALS

The pilot projects' most fruitful networks were developed with a keen focus on the connection between the specific goals of their collaborations and the individuals, organizations, and resources best situated to meet those goals. In other words, advocates were most successful when they deliberately chose partners that had robust access to the people and information required for the implementation of their projects.

For example, TCFV had originally envisioned beginning the implementation of their project by growing dense local networks of attorneys and advocates across the state. One advocate at TCFV admitted, "I saw getting in there on the local level right off the bat." However, once they began, they realized that learning about the work already taking place across Texas and throughout the country was a critical first step. Once the

advocates built larger and looser statewide and national networks to collect information on the best practices and cutting-edge expertise, they felt better equipped to reach out to individuals to bolster infrastructures in their local communities.

Conversely, ILS originally designed a pilot project that focused on statewide collaboration, working primarily with its state bar association and state-level domestic violence coalition. While these partnerships were valuable for generating opportunities to conduct presentations and trainings to practitioners on a broader scale, it did not create many connections with survivors in need of representation. Consequently, the ILS project refocused on building closer local connections, rather than wider statewide networks, in order to pinpoint survivors' community-specific barriers to economic resources.



"Once the advocates built larger and looser statewide and national networks to collect information on the best practices and cutting-edge expertise, they felt better equipped to reach out to individuals to bolster infrastructures in their local communities."



PARTNERSHIP & COLLABORATION

ENSURE A SOLID FOUNDATION IS IN PLACE

During the course of the year, each pilot project benefited from taking inventory of the resources available to them and ensuring that the necessary infrastructure for partnership building existed. For some, such as the Texas Council on Family Violence and Indiana Legal Services, this required in-depth research and networking in their surrounding communities. Alternatively, the Women's Resource Center and Columbus Community Legal Services first focused internally.

For example, as CCLS began drafting screening tools, they came to the conclusion that for the tools to be most effective, the students using them first needed to understand the overarching approach guiding the tool development. As a result, CCLS began creating cross-training opportunities for family law and consumer rights clinic students learn from one another.

Similarly, as was mentioned above, TCFV ultimately found benefit in making contacts and collecting detailed information about existing resources in their state before beginning their own project implementation. As one advocate from the organization reflected, "You helped us identify the framework and build the groundwork before creating a huge network. It helped me understand everything more thoroughly, and now I have made connections that are invaluable."



"Meaningful economic advocacy requires that advocates resist the temptation to simply refer out on issues with which they are unfamiliar."

"CCLS...came to the conclusion that for the tools to be most effective, the students using them first needed to understand the overarching approach guiding the tool development."

BUILD PARTNERSHIPS, NOT REFERRAL SYSTEMS

Meaningful economic advocacy requires that advocates resist the temptation to simply refer out on issues with which they are unfamiliar. While it is true that a single advocate cannot possibly hold all technical knowledge, it is also true that advocacy for survivors is more thoughtful when domestic violence and consumer rights advocates coordinate their efforts.

For example, CCLS has two distinct clinics: one that focuses on family law and the other on consumer law. Although the clinics could simply refer cases to one another, during the course of the pilot project, it became clear that referring over was not enough. Thus, CCLS decided to develop a curriculum to train both sets of student attorneys in consumer rights for domestic violence survivors. They recognized a need to ground practitioners in a fundamental advocacy framework that simultaneously accounted for the unique considerations of both domestic violence and the consumer law.



The Center for Survivor Agency and Justice fosters systemic change that better aligns what communities provide with what works to meet the comprehensive, self-defined needs of survivors of intimate partner violence. CSAJ strives to meet this goal by developing transformative advocacy approaches that match institutional structures, organizational programs, and professional practices with survivors' lived realities.

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