



What Can Domestic Violence Shelters Do?

Understand the experiences of survivors of color. The disregarding of warnings by women of color, who were key founders of our movement, has been catastrophic for survivors of color. These are well-documented in many works, including *Compelled to Crime, the Gender Entrapment of Black Battered Women*, Beth Richie, 1996. Programs must know their own community data to understand what survivors of color are experiencing, especially when they call the police. We need to understand how many survivors are being arrested, and which survivors. We must carefully listen and face difficult truths when women of color tell us that they are experiencing racism in our organizations, and that our services are irrelevant to their needs. See: [Safety and Services: Women of Color Speak About Their Communities](#)

Understand that racial justice work is our work. Jill Davies (*Domestic Violence Advocacy, Complex Lives/Difficult Choices*, 2014) urged us to go beyond our good work to address “batterer generated risks” to also address “life generated risks” such as racism and poverty. When we know that survivors of color cannot safely use law enforcement, how are we expanding options beyond the criminal justice system for and with them? How are we advocating for racial justice within that system for survivors who choose to seek safety there? How are we pursuing safer policing, such as advocating for the use of body cameras and accountability for officers who abuse their power?

Serve ALL survivors. Do we know the ethnic makeup of people in our community, and are they fully represented among the people we serve? If we are not reaching all survivors, what new strategies can we use to ensure we leave no survivor behind? Once we understand the experiences of women of color with the police and criminal justice system, are we willing to help survivors who are arrested?

Apply our trauma knowledge to the legacy of slavery and daily racism. We understand how trauma works, and we use empathy as a key strategy in our work. How can we apply that knowledge to deepen our understanding of the historical and current trauma of people of color? When we understand racism also as a traumatic experience, we can be more fully present with colleagues, friends, and survivors of color and offer meaningful support to their exhausting experiences of racism.

Use a racial justice lens in all our operations. We can build more diverse and responsive organizations by strengthening our racial justice strategies. How can we more actively recruit interns of color, hire and promote staff of color, involve communities of color on our boards, and share resources with organizations of color? Who do we partner with? Who can we partner with? Are we willing to try new models of peer support, outreach, and handing over of services to community partners? What information do we need from survivors of color to ensure we are offering relevant services?

Continuous Learning and Accountability. Once we accept that we are continuously taught racism, we must engage in continuous anti-oppression training for our staff and boards as a core element of our training programs.

These are only some of the ways we can all work for racial justice. ODVN welcomes future conversations about how we can all make this a definitive moment in our movement to make change and increase safety for communities of color, and specifically, survivors of color. ODVN will continue to share resources on our website: www.odvn.org.