

Increasing Your Program Capacity for System's Change

Maren Woods, Praxis International

with Kim Bruce, Shelterhouse

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(smooth jazz)

- **[Computer]** Your call is now live.

- **[Maren]** Hello, everybody. Welcome to this Rural Routes for Change Webinar offered by Praxis International and the Office on Violence Against Women. Rural Routes to Change feature rural methods and strategies to strengthen our inter-agency responses to violence against women. My name is Maren Woods. I'm the program manager here at Praxis for our Rural TA Project, and I'm happy to be your host and facilitator for our conversation today, subbing for Liz Carlson, my co-worker. And we'll be talking about, oh, I'm hearing a scratch-y noise on my line. Can everybody hear me okay? Maybe you can just, Beth or Kim, you can just let me know if you can hear me okay. - Yep, you sounds good. - You're clear to me.

- **[Maren]** Okay, good. It's just, then, in my audio. Today, we're going to be talking about increasing your advocacy program's capacity for systems change work. And we'll be talking with Kim Bruce and I'll introduce her in just a minute. But first, I'll ask my co-worker, Beth McNamara, who is on the phone today with us too, to go over the technical details of the webinar, so Beth, I'll pass it to you.

- **[Beth]** Awesome, thanks, Maren. Welcome, everyone. Happy you joined us. So we have most, well, a few people on webinar and audio, and then, a few people just on audio. So I'll just give you a couple of overviews, just in case some technical glitches come up for either scenario for you today. Either way, no matter how you're connected, if you have questions or technical problems bubble up for you, or you have a question that you want to get into the webinar, I'm happy to do that for you, if you email me at beth, B-E-T-H, at praxisinternational.org. If you're logged onto the webinar, there is another feature called the Chat feature. So for anybody who's new to this webinar, I'll just direct you to your screen at the very bottom of the left-hand corner is the Chat screen. If it's collapsed, you can just push the little far left arrow, right next to Chat and it should open up for you. There's a public window that you can type in, and that way everybody can see your comments. If you have something private to share, a question or some little glitch that bubbles up, you can hit the Private Tab, and highlight whoever it is that you wanna connect with. And we can chat that way as well. If you lose your webinar connection, you can just go back to your original way, your link will stay live throughout the call so you can just re-connect the same way you got on in the first place. Same with your audio connection. If for some reason, you get a phone disconnection, you can use the same way and the operator will make sure you're in the right session. And to let you know, one final little detail, is the session is recorded today and we will post that recording on our website under the Rural tab of Event Recordings. So, we're so glad you're with us and enjoy the call.

- **[Maren]** Thanks so much, Beth. You probably already said this, Beth, but she'll be monitoring the chat during webinar today, and she knows a lot about today's subject through her work in the Advocacy Learning Center, which is her primary program. She is, kind of, being my buddy on this webinar today. But feel free to ask questions during, question or, and share your experiences with us through that chat, about any part of the conversation that we have today and she'll bring them into the discussion with Kim and I. So the primary purpose of coordinated community response work or sexual assault response teams, is to reform practices in criminal, civil, and other systems in your community that respond to violence against women. And to do this requires an understanding of how the systems currently function and their impact, the way that they're organized to do work and that impact on victim safety and offender accountability. And while it's every agency's role to know how to best respond to cases involving violence against women, advocacy programs are frequently the best situated to identify and prioritize the gaps that need to be addressed to improve outcomes for survivors. So today, we're gonna talk with Kim Bruce from Shelterhouse in Midland, Michigan about how their program reorganized their work to incorporate a focus on institutional advocacy to really strengthen and enhance their coordinated community response efforts. Kim Bruce is a licensed Master's level social worker and is the Director of Clients and Community Advocacy and we'll learn more about what that title means at Shelterhouse, where she's worked for more than 12 years. She's a graduate of the University of Michigan and has extensive experience in the areas of domestic violence, sexual assault, and shelter services. She is a member of Class G of the Praxis and (indistinct) Advocacy Learning Center and when did Class G graduate, Kim?

- **[Kim]** Oh goodness, I was trying to remember that today and I think we were done in . Like the spring of .

- **[Maren]**, is that-- Alright, so Kim and Shelterhouse have been very busy since graduating from the Advocacy Learning Center and doing a lot of work that we're gonna hear about today. And I'm really, really excited to talk with her. This has just been a delight to find out more about the good work that they've been doing in Midland, Michigan. And so, thank you, Beth, for advancing the slides. I know I was going to forget to do that. This is, Kim and I really like this image of Michigan and its surrounding Great Lakes. The star there is where is the county of Midland. Midland the county, Michigan, and you see there the population stats, but Kim, can you describe a little bit to me sort of the context that we can't see in this image of your work in Midland County. What's your demographic? What's your geography like there?

- **[Kim]** Sure, Midland, our agency actually serves two counties. It's the one that the star is on, which is Midland County, and the county north of that, which is Gladwin County, and Gladwin is a very rural county. I think it has fewer than , residents and the, you know, very few, kind of, centers where people live. I don't even think the biggest city there is actually a city officially. Midland, our city has about , people, as this slide says, but if you removed the city, it's very rural. And in fact, it's one of the poorest counties in Michigan. So there's quite a contrast in our area between the city and the surrounding areas.

- **[Maren]** So that just, so it gives folks on the line a little sense of where Shelterhouse is located and their service area. And I know that a lot of you on the call are maybe in even more rural communities,

than what you're saying, described here. But I think we have a lot of lessons to learn from Kim and the work at Shelterhouse in terms of strengthening their role and ability to make some good systems change work. So as a, and I'll just say too, personally, as a TA provider who organizes a lot of national training events and is part of developing tools and resources for use in rural communities, it's been super exciting to get to know Kim and the work at Shelterhouse. She sort of represents one of those perfect unions between the right seed being planted in the right soil, with the right conditions, the sun, rain, et cetera, and the right farmer, and been able to see one of these seeds that we've planted across the country really begin to take root and blossom. As advocacy, as community-based advocacy programs, we can't contribute to an end to violence against women by working only with individual women, one at a time. Social problems call for a multifaceted approach. One that works on multiple levels at the same time. Yes, responding the needs of individual women is crucial, and we obviously have to continue to do that and that's the bulk of our work, especially in rural programs as we're sometimes the only service agency in a large geographical region. But so too is working with the systems that respond to those individuals and having really good connections with them. We can't just keep training and training and training cops and police, prosecutors either. We have to build something more lasting into the structure of the institutions and also into our own organizations to support this kind of systems change work. One of the core pieces of Praxis' support to programs across the country is to teach a way of creating systems change work that transcends the reality of the individual cops or prosecutors who don't just get it, or who just don't get it. If you know that, generally in your community, women are having disappointing experiences with patrol officers or if you know that prosecutors aren't charging any cases, there are places to look within that system that point to both the source of the problem and solution. And the same is true at our own advocacy programs. We're structured and guided and directed by certain methods that produce certain outcomes. And when we analyze and assess those methods, we can see how we're contributing to the safety and well-being of our community. So I flipped to this next slide now to talk about these methods that I'm alluding to. And that, when these eight methods are used in advocacy programs and law enforcement agencies, they're used in businesses and public institutions to standardize the way that people do their work. And we can't go over all eight of these methods on our call today. We're gonna highlight a couple of them but you see, you see what they are then. I think they'll seem, sound familiar to you. Rules and regulations are state-wide or they're determined by the city or within case law that sort of thing. Concepts and theories are sort of the big overarching philosophy about sort of the goal and, of how we do this work most effectively. We're gonna talk about, more about mission, purpose and function today. Accountability is the piece of accountability between agencies and to the community and to survivors. Administrative practices are the forms that we use, the texts we produce. Education and training is obviously a place that we go to a lot as a potential solution. We think that if we train and train that people are gonna get it and start to do the right thing but we know that, we know that all of, all of the good practice and the best practices that we know to date need to be built into the structure of the work in these ways to sustain them. So we are going to go over the key methods that Shelterhouse used to build and enhance their capacity to advocate for systems change on behalf of women in their community. And we're gonna start first with, a primary guiding method for us as advocacy programs about the mission, purpose and function. It's a big, overarching driving force for us. Everything that we do within our advocacy programs is guided in a large way by the mission. What is our role in the larger movement to end violence against women? These

kinds of questions, and this, the purpose piece, guides our, the specific processes that we're engaged in as an organization. So we might, our mission might be to end violence against women. Our purpose is to advocate on behalf of women and children who've experienced battering, let's say. And then our function is that of an advocate for engaging in specific aspects of advocacy. So this is a piece that was a starting point, I think, Kim, at Shelterhouse, and so, hi (laughs).

- **[Kim]** Hi.

- **[Maren]** I realized I've just been going on and I didn't give you an opportunity to say hi, except for, to describe your community. We're so happy to have you here.

- **[Kim]** Thank you.

- **[Maren]** So can you talk, Talk with us a little bit about the steps that you all took to look deeply into your organization's mission, purpose and function, related to strengthening your capacity for systems change work.

- **[Kim]** Definitely. It really started-- and did the Advocacy Learning Center at true Praxis. This was eye-opening for those of us who attended. It was a real mental shift for us. We had been able to get good at direct service for survivors and really were committed to empowerment and I think we were doing a lot right on the individual level. And we had enough resources in our agency to be able to provide direct service pretty well most of the time. But the Advocacy Learning Center really opened our eyes to what's possible as far as a coordinated response and working with other systems. We were aware of the frustrations of the survivors we worked with tended to have with other systems but we hadn't felt empowered or like we had a path to address them in our community. So through the Advocacy Learning Center, we got a new vision of what's possible, a new vocabulary and really, we were able to imagine a way to begin to address the bigger picture of things. Our organization, our mission, already included, it starts with eliminating domestic and sexual violence. That's the opening phrase so... On paper we were committed to it but we were, kind of, always reacting rather than being proactive. Through going to the Advocacy Learning Center, and kind of simultaneous thinking with our board of directors and our executive director about how to really make a difference, we were able to move system change to a higher place on the agenda. Part of that was changing my role. I had had a role where I was called Director of Client Services and I was focused very much internally, overseeing our shelter and our advocates who are our frontline staff, but we shifted some of the away from me and I got a new job title called the Director of Client and Community Advocacy and new duties written into my job description that really helped me focus on some new things related to our outside partners and advocacy with them.

- **[Maren]** Yeah, and I'll just note that this is one of the pieces that was sent out to you ahead of time for the webinar, is her job, her actual job description, as it is now so you can have a sense of how they're capturing the systems change work. So talk a little more about your function, you know, the purpose and function of this new role that you had carved out and developed.

- **[Kim]** Yeah, I've really had to kind of figure that out as I've gone along and it's been about a year now that it's been in place. But goals that I set for myself for this year were to really just establish positive relationships with important partners like law enforcement, prosecutor's office, our child advocacy center, and . We didn't necessarily have poor relationships as far as conflict or disagreement, we just didn't have a lot of communication or connection with these partners. So I set out to build those relationships and we can talk about how I did that but just one example is, we have a new prosecutor coming into office. Our prosecutor, our existing prosecutor, didn't run again. And so we reached out to both of the candidates, invited them in for a get-acquainted meeting, learned all about them, shared our needs and expectations. We developed a written survey with the help of even our state coalition and others, and asked them to, kind of, commit on paper to what they'll do as prosecutor to help survivors. And then we had that published in our local newspaper and we promoted it to our board and on our Facebook page and things like that. We also started a systems concern log, which is just a form, a place where survivors' concerns with systems can be recorded in one place and it goes to me and I collect them. And I'm able to follow up. Then, you know, if it's appropriate and as appropriate, so I can address an individual problem but I can also look for gaps and ongoing issues and, kind of, be ahead of the curve and responding to those.

- **[Maren]** Yeah, and this connects too to the, I think a lot of the work that you've done in the last year has been also to strengthen the linkages, the functioning linkages between Shelterhouse and your local police department and so we'll shift now to talking about this, another one of the methods that organizations and agencies use to structure work and this is through linkages. There are both informal linkages, just like the relationship piece like you were describing, but there are also formal relationships. Maybe through a memorandum of understanding or working agreements between agencies, and so, Kim, what's been your focus in the last year? You alluded to strengthening relationships but talk a little bit more about how you'd, you went ahead strengthening those informal linkages and then we'll talk a little bit more about the more formal linkages that you've been establishing.

- **[Kim]** Yeah, I think we were excited to set up some formal linkages. That was our goal. That was right away what we wanted to do but as soon as we started thinking about that, we realized, we don't even know each other's names. We've never even talked about how we're doing, our work with our partners and other systems. So we started with just trying to build that relationship and that involved get-acquainted meetings and kind of where I went to learn from our other partners. So I've done that over the last year with the police, prosecutor, and . Where I've just asked to come in and learn kind of all about their work and what the challenges are, what's enjoyable about it, what's working, what's not working, how things work. And, you know, I tried to make that a positive experience for them and for me. And then, that kind of, the door was then cracked open so that I could maybe send them an article or maybe a link to a training or, because we then knew each other, I kind of tried to find ways for the conversation to continue. So getting those, just conversations started was really important for us. Other agencies are probably at different stages of that. Maybe ahead of where we were but that's where we had to start. We also scheduled some ride-alongs with our law enforcement, both our police and our sheriff department. And so that was another way that was pretty informal as far as just spending time together but it was building trust and communication and we really learned from law enforcement what

some of their challenges and limitations and barriers are, that we would have never been sensitive to if we hadn't seen it up close and personal.

- **[Maren]** So hey, Kim, can I interrupt you for just one second,

- **[Kim]** Sure.

- **[Maren]** and ask you, like some of the logistics around the ride-along piece and describe that. There might be some folks on the call who don't, maybe don't exactly know what that looks like. Did you go out on Friday nights after payday? (laughs)

- **[Kim]** Yeah--

- **[Maren]** Like did you, how did you (laughs). And I'm laughing, it's sad but it does, they do, there are trends around that at one point in a project I was working on. We were wondering if it was connected to the cycles of the moon, you know, so,

- **[Kim]** Okay. We ask ourselves that too.

- **[Maren]** Yeah.

- **[Kim]** Yeah, so with our ride-alongs, we just asked if we could, first, I asked if I could have a ride-along and I knew that was something that was done sometimes. We've had, like, some citizen police academies and things in our town and so, I was vaguely aware of the concept. And when I asked, they were happy to allow me to go. They suggested that I come on a Friday or Saturday evening, because there'd be a bit more action, maybe? And so, that's what I did. I think I, with the first one I did was on a Friday evening and I did have to sign a form, kind of releasing them from liability and there was a little bit of training as far as what I should expect. It was a really, really interesting experience and I talked, even though my goal was not to educate the police officer I was assigned to go with. I wasn't there to educate him about us. I was able to have a good conversation with him, kind of about, how he thinks about domestic violence and sexual assault, and some of his experiences and, but I also just really learned a lot about him and how they think and how they do their work and why they do it certain ways. And since then, they've agreed that some of our key staff can have ride-alongs so we've kept that going as a way to just keep more conversations and more trust and more education happening between us. Did I get cut off?

- **[Maren]** Oh, I'm sorry, I was, I unmuted my, I thought I unmuted myself but then I muted myself, I'm so--

- **[Kim]** Oh, okay! (both laugh)

- **[Kim]** I hear, I hear a crackle-y sound and it disappeared and it made me very nervous but okay. - Oh, yeah. - We're good.

- **[Maren]** I think, I think we're still all together. So I just think that's, I think that's really interesting and especially in rural communities, you get, you can, when you're driving those long distances between

calls, there's huge opportunity, like you said, to build those relationships and provide some information and correct some maybe misunderstandings or misinformation about the role or what you all do in the community so, I appreciate you sharing that. So let's transition out of talking a little more about the formal linkages that we've been alluding to. You mentioned one about the systems response complaint procedures and we also sent out a handout, which is sample that you all can take and adapt and use in your own advocacy organizations. But let's specifically talk about the advocacy-initiated response.

- **[Kim]** Yeah, this was a really exciting thing for us over the last year. Advocacy-initiated response is just the practice of law enforcement forwarding the names of victims to the advocacy organization. So to us at Shelterhouse. And then we reach out to them. We initiate contact. That's why it's called advocacy-initiated response. And that really simple idea has been radical because we have been able to connect with survivors that we would never be working with otherwise. It's considered a best practice but in Michigan, it's only happening in, that I know of, maybe six or eight communities. So it's not the norm around here. And in fact, when I first began to bring it up, they were kind of open to wanting to try something new and be innovative and do the best work that we can. But there were real concerns about the legalities of giving us the victims' names and phone numbers without the victims' permission. And so, we had look into that as a, you know, as partners, we met with the city attorney and he did some research for us, and said it was totally, there's actually, it's written into some legislation that that's allowable. When I first began to talk about it with law enforcement, I really highlighted how it would enhance their work, and that I knew how difficult their work was and how difficult it is to response to domestic violence. I could talk about that with a little bit of credibility because of my ride-alongs and my conversations. I knew some stories and some situations and so I kind of fold it as something that would give the officers a sense of having a resource out there that, where they're not just leaving somebody with no help. But I also was able to really say that, it also is a good practice because the system, as it is right now, wasn't meeting the needs of survivors. So there were, kind of, many reasons that it was a good practice and in the end, we did sign a formal agreement and we've had it in place for about a month.

- **[Maren]** Yeah, and Kim and I have been giggling because while we were planning our, planning this webinar today, we started crying when we, when she was sharing stories about the impact, that in just four short weeks, this practice has had. And you know,

- **[Kim]** Yeah.

- **[Maren]** I know, for those of you who've been on our webinars month to month, you've been hearing us, sort of, really drive this message home about advocacy-initiated response and it's, maybe, Kim, you could share one story about how advocates are responding to this new practice, and what they're seeing already, just in the--

- **[Kim]** Yeah...

- **[Maren]** just in the month.

- **[Kim]** Our advocates, which are our frontline staff, our client advocates are just thrilled about it. And the very first call that came in, the advocate who took the call, recognized the name of the survivor right away because it was someone she had worked with before. So she took the name and phone number and then she made the outreach call, and when the person answered, the survivor said, "How did you ever know to call me?" And our advocate said, "Well, the police are giving us "names and phone numbers now "so that we can reach out to people." And the survivor said, "I'm so glad you called me. "I would have never called you "because I'm so embarrassed that "this happened to me again." And we've been working with her ever since. Her assailant is very dangerous. He actually assaulted the police also, high bond, et cetera. But she's just somebody that wouldn't have called, from what she said, so just that story, much less some of the later ones, have been so energizing for our advocates and I think they feel really respected that the police call us. So it's a, it's just a win-win in lots of ways.

- **[Maren]** Yeah, I appreciate you sharing that story. It's just, it's just, it speaks to that, to the, even the services to individual women that we offer are so crucial and then this window of time, you know, immediately following an incident, there's such a big piece of trust that you can establish by saying, hey, our community informed us that has happened, we wanna reach out to you and provide you with the support and resources that you need right now. So, and then, and Beth, in the chat, for those of you who aren't participating through the webinar, gave a link to a page on our website that has a lot of tools for implementing this practice at home. There are some considerations and, to make locally, about how to roll this out, like Kim talked about, maybe some hesitancy about the information sharing laws in your state. That sort of thing that you'll, that you can iron out, but for the handful of communities that we've been working with across the country, it's just been a really powerful linkage to have made. And I'll just make one other point about this and then we can talk about the systems response complaint procedures. And that is that yes, we're providing these individual services to victims by being able to call them right after an incident but at the same time that's happening, you can see how, month after month, of responding to these calls, advocates and Shelterhouse is going to have a much broader base of knowledge and understanding about what women are experiencing with the system, and that really positions them well to advocate for certain changes within the system so let's talk about the systems response complaint procedures a little bit more. You talked about that and people can pull up the handout where it gives a sample log. But talk about how that's being used so far, Kim, and your hopes and dreams for what this could be.

- **[Kim]** Yeah, this is brand new to us and really, it's not as well developed even as our advocacy-initiated response, but it's a simple idea and so staff have access to it, which is a form that they can fill out right with the survivor, to record a problem with a system. One that I can think of right away was, we had sexual assault exam that occurred and the way the state trooper questioned the sexual assault victim was very inappropriate, and you know, the advocate and client were unhappy at the end of it and so they, you know, talked about that, wanting some official awareness of it and passed that onto me. So that's just one simple example. But I will say it's so darn new that I don't have much experience yet at what I'm, I will be doing with it. But what I'm envisioning doing, besides advocating for individuals and problem situations, is really looking for themes and consistent problems and then looking at the eight

methods and kind of, where things fall so that we can build into our system better ways of working with and meeting the needs of survivors.

- **[Maren]** And you know, it's just like us, as advocates, to have a system response complaints procedures form and log but I was just thinking, as you were talking about how this, this formal linkage between the advocacy program and the law enforcement agency also, gives the advocacy program windows into what's working really well for women, and so you can use that as information too to bring back to the cops and say, hey, your cop did an awesome, stellar job last night and here's what, you know, here's what we've heard about this particular response and well done, good job. You know, so it's both,

- **[Kim]** Yeah.

- **[Maren]** It can work both ways.

- **[Kim]** Totally, and that actually is something for the last year, I've really tried to note positive experiences, and officially send emails to the chief or deputy chief about them 'cause I feel like it's way too easy to notice the you know, problematic issues, and I want them to be open when those come up so when the good stuff happens,

- **[Maren]** Right.

- **[Kim]** we try to definitely report that also.

- **[Maren]** Yeah, that's great. That's great. And Kim, I'm noticing, or, yes, Kim, I'm noticing that a question's come up in the chat. And Dondy, I might have to ask you to just be a little bit more clear in the chat about the other facilities that you're talking about but Kim, her question is, whether there's inter-agency confidentiality agreements with the other facilities or other inter-agency agreements. And I will, I'll just start by saying that the working agreements, we have a sample working agreement for advocacy programs and law enforcement agencies and we'll send that out to you after the webinar, Dondy, but Kim, can you talk about that question?

- **[Kim]** Yeah, that's a really good question. Since we were on the topic of the systems log, built into the form that the survivor and advocate complete, there is a question of, does the survivor want to be part of conversations about solutions or would she like, in other words, would she like to participate if there's a meeting or a phone call to raise this issue, or would she rather we did it without mentioning her name? So there's, like, some different choices they can make as far as their involvement. But if it does involve sharing any identifying information, we have a signed release. With advocacy-initiated response, we do have a signed working agreement with law enforcement, with our city police, but we actually don't release any information to them, other than statistics from the program so we take information from them. Take victim names and phone numbers. But we aren't releasing, you know, we don't give them any specific information about how we're following up or what we hear from any person. So we don't have any releases from clients related to that program.

- **[Maren]** Dondy, maybe you can just chat in if that addressed your question so we know that we're getting at what you're talking about. Back when I was doing on-call advocacy in northern Minnesota, we had a form that we would talk with women about and this is, sort of, like the consent to share information, saying for the initial day that that women could sign and say, yes, you can talk to the prosecutor about the concerns that I brought up during our phone call tonight. That sort of thing. Now Dondy's asking a followup question. Do you participate in SARP meetings and when do you have the attendees fill out the inter-agency confidentiality?

- **[Kim]** We do participate in SARP meetings. It's not something I oversee but I think that the, that as part of our providing services, medical services to a sexual assault victim, they give us permission at that point to talk with the team, just those team members who relate to their particular investigation. And we do have inter-departmental agreements related to our sexual assault program response.

- **[Maren]** And there's a lot of, a lot of information and resources that we can gather for you, Dondy, about that as well. Another OVW-funded TA provider, the Sexual Violence Justice Institute at the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault has lot of resources on that. And Maryanne is saying that the attendance sheet also has a confidentiality statement attached, to the SARP meetings. So when you're sharing information about particular, I'm sort of filling in the dots here, when you're talking about a particular case at a SARP meeting, there's confidentiality statements that are agreed to, is what I'm guessing. Is that your assessment, Kim?

- **[Kim]** Yeah, yeah, that makes sense.

- **[Maren]** Yeah. So one other piece I wanted to talk about, related to the formal linkages is that through the advocacy-initiated response, you're not only able to call women and provide, you know, advocacy and support to her immediately following arrest, but there's another piece that's detailed in the working agreement between the police department and Shelterhouse and that is that you get copies of the police reports, is that right?

- **[Kim]** Yes. And there's a couple of purposes for that. One of them is, it allows us to be aware of what's in the police report so we can, kind of, if there's any inaccuracies or additional information needed, we can make sure that that, with the survivor's consent, is forwarded to people that need to know that. For example, if there's nothing written about a weapon being used but there was a weapon used, the prosecutor would need to know that. So it has that kind of individual benefit. But it also will, and this is new to us, but we believe it's gonna allow us to really look for, how are these reports written? What's being asked? How are investigations done? How are things recorded? So that we can be looking for improvements or gaps or places where survivors needs aren't being met.

- **[Maren]** Yeah, and it's the police report, it's such a foundational work product of the criminal legal system, and it really stands in for, it really stands in for the victim and for the offender. And so, so you're right. I mean, you're gonna be reviewing those police reports and you're gonna be seeing some really, I'm guessing, if your police response is kinda similar to that which is across the country, that you're gonna be seeing some strong ways that they could be improving their documentation of risk and danger and context of the violence, and you might, and it just, again, it's just another way that you strengthen

your credibility when you go back to the law enforcement, when you go back to the chief of police and you say, "Chief, you're doing so good "in these ways, and here's another way "that we can really strengthen outcomes, "you know, case depositions and domestics. "If you could shift, how you're training your, "how you're directing your officers to write reports." Very powerful tool.

- **[Kim]** Yeah.

- **[Maren]** Do we have any questions? About that from our audience? You can chat in and if you're listening by just phone, you can email beth@praxisinternational.org, if you have any questions about anything we've talked about so far. And I'll just have a sip of water while people are thinking about any questions. Oh, Maryanne's asking about, a struggle in receiving the police reports and is asking how you worked out getting that linkage established, wondering if you did it through the contact with the city attorney or if there was another way.

- **[Kim]** That was something that was the specific thing that had to go through our city attorney and I, going into that meeting, I thought, oh, this is the stopping point of the whole concept. Because the city attorney's job is to protect the city and the police from any, you know, possible complaints or problems later. So I couldn't think why he would be open to this concept at all. But he had done research before we ever sat down, and just said it was written right into whatever legislation he was reading, that it's allowable for police, that they're confidential except for advocacy organizations like ours. So it was crystal clear to him that it was an okay thing and it really didn't turn out to be a stopping point for us here in Michigan. The other thing I did, before ever having that meeting, is I had found out other places in Michigan, where this was in place, and forwarded that to our law enforcement leaders and city attorney so they kinda knew that other communities were doing this and I thought they could check in there, if they wanted to.

- **[Maren]** Hm-mm, that was a really good strategy. Maryanne, I just noticed that you're in the state of California. I know there's, across different states, there's different interpretation, and it's definitely something that you wanna seek, if you think that it's happening in other communities but you're having trouble establishing this linkage in your community, it might be something to connect with your state coalition about, to see if they've got guidance for your local attorneys, to provide that interpretation that gives the green light for this. Definitely, you know, across... across states, there's different interpretation or even within a state so, it's definitely something that you have to work through. But, and then, Kim, did you say that, in the neighboring county, you were, was there a different interpretation in a neighboring county, or they, or they were a little hesitant about establishing advocacy-initiated response?

- **[Kim]** Yeah, our county to the north, right now, has said that they're not interested in doing it, but they're happy to, kind of, be updated on how we're doing in Midland County and you know, continuing to have conversations about it. But they were very leery and I guess they had some bad experience before about releasing a police report that kind of came back to be a problem so... That's where we're at in Gladwin.

- **[Maren]** Yeah, yeah, and I don't know the exact language that's detailed in our sample working agreement or sample procedures, Maryanne and others who are listening in, but I am, I believe that in those templates, there, it does address this piece proactively, within the working agreement, that it, it says that the advocacy program, that this is a function that the law enforcement agency wants the advocacy to play as part of the coordinated community response, because quite frankly, especially in rural communities, law enforcement agencies are really understaffed. The quality control piece is, might be sparse, or loose, and they might be happy to have an outside entity to, kind of, take on that responsibility because they are ultimately accountable to the community so...

- **[Kim]** One more thought about that, too?

- **[Maren]** Yeah, yeah?

- **[Kim]** It is possible to have an advocacy-initiated response program without the police report. You can just get

- **[Maren]** Sure.

- **[Kim]** the victim's name and number emailed.

- **[Maren]** Yeah.

- **[Kim]** But best practice is to have the police report, and I'm really glad we do. But if that seems like a, the door is just slammed and no possibility there. It doesn't need to mean you can't have the concept in place.

- **[Maren]** Absolutely, absolutely. And you can have that service to victims provided and then as you're building more trust and working on the interpretation piece of whatever state laws is up, has room for interpretation, then you can, it's something you can work toward eventually, is getting that other piece of the linkage established. It's a great point. So I'm gonna move us along then to the next method that you all worked on to increase your capacity to engage in this kind of work. And that is resources. And resources isn't just funding. Although we all know that, especially in rural communities, funding resources are really important and dwindling. But it's also resources in terms of workforce, in terms of personnel, in terms of time, general organizational support and that becomes a big resource within advocacy programs that is the advocacy program can provide the support necessary to engage in this kind of work. Then there's a big resource there. And so, Kim, let's talk about what Shelterhouse did relative to the resources piece, to free up some of your time to engage in this new area of work.

- **[Kim]** Yeah, for me, I would never have been able to devote the time and energy into doing this work unless some things were taken off my plate. But I dunno, it felt like the stars aligned about, a little bit more than a year ago, because of new thinking on the part of our board and executive director, graduation from the Advocacy Learning Center, maybe, I can't quite remember now, but some staff, shifting around or exiting the agency or something, where there were some ways to re-allocate job duties. But I did, I did stop overseeing our shelter and somebody else does that now, and I also had been

overseeing our volunteers and somebody else did that, does that now. So I had big chunks of my work taken off my plate so that I could really work on this instead.

- **[Maren]** Yeah, and how much time would you say on average you dedicate, you've dedicated in the last year during your typical workweek?

- **[Kim]** I would say, at least 10 hours a week. Some weeks, it's been a lot more, like when we were really working on the working agreement with law enforcement. That was a time when it took more work, and then there's some weeks where it's just a little bit. But on average, I would say probably about a quarter of my time is spent on systems change. So I do have other job duties related to everything else we do around here. But 10 hours for the coordinated response and systems change.

- **[Maren]** And I'd like to just sort of point that out. 10 hours of a full-time work week is a quarter of those hours, and yet, so much can be accomplished just in this year that you've been doing that, if that's the average. Look at these great practices that have been established and how, you're positioned so much, with so strength, being able to have these connections. Was there, was there, was it just, like, total green lights? No matter, was everything just so easy for Kim Bruce? (laughs) Within Shelterhouse to embark on this work or were there people even within your organization who were a little uncertain about, about this kind of thing?

- **[Kim]** Yeah, I would say, the most uncertain person was me. (both laugh) It's hard to, it was so undefined what I was supposed to do, and I was used to being very much in the heat of the moment, the urgent decisions of the day were just in front of me all the time and it was a funny feeling to go from that to very big picture, long-term thinking where I didn't have to address anything on a certain day. And so that was nerve-wracking to me, to make that change and just a different way of thinking but I also think, for some of my co-workers, there was a little bit of sense of "What's Kim doing?" and "Why does she seem to be reading all the time?" "Or out of the office all the time?" I've heard that a little bit. But I think, you know, I just made a point along the way to share the vision and explain some things I've been doing and to kind of educate our staff about where this can go and what systems advocacy can look like. But I definitely remember a few people kinda questioning a little bit what I'm doing or what's my time being used for now. It was quite a shift for me.

- **[Maren]** Sure. Yeah, no, I can imagine. And kind of wandering around in the wilderness, which we frequently do, in this work. But it sounds like you've, you're getting some solid ground under your feet and getting a much, you know, stronger sense of where to go and where you can take this. And so let's talk about funding. You're not funded by the Office on Violence Against Women right now.

- **[Kim]** No.

- **[Maren]** How are, How is your work supported?

- **[Kim]** Yeah, we do get staff funding for part of a position. And that's our court liaison who's our, kind of, our person who's most expert about our court system and she's actually the one that follows up with our advocacy-initiated response calls. So she is staff-funded but we just have the usual mishmash of

funds from you know, the federal dollars that filter down to the states through our Domestic and Sexual Violence Treatment Board, VOCA funding, United Way funding, donors, and local foundations and things. So my position isn't funded by any certain grant. It's kind of a combination of those pieces.

- **[Maren]** Hm-mm, and also related to the resources question is the staff support for the on-call advocacy basically. How did you have to re-org to make that work?

- **[Kim]** Yeah, mostly it was a matter of training. That we needed make sure our staff understood the concept, and bought into the concept, but then also had, right in front of them, what to do when a call came in. And so, I can share more of those details but that was the piece that needed to be put in place for our staff.

- **[Maren]** Sure, because they were already, 'cause, were you already organized to provide -hour services--

- **[Kim]** Yes.

- **[Maren]** You just didn't have this linkage immediately following law enforcement involvement so, right?

- **[Kim]** Exactly.

- **[Maren]** Right. I'll just make a sidenote to say that I know that in some communities where they maybe didn't have -hour services like that, they employed a volunteer pool to make those calls in the middle of the night when those, when the law enforcement linkages came in, they had, you know, a crisis line, maybe through the shelter or whatever, but then the actual, the advocates who would call out to the women, you know, were just in their homes, and there were volunteers that sort of thing. There's lots of different models for making that happen. Yeah. So... Did you have something else to say about that?

- **[Kim]** I was just gonna say, for us, two nights a week, we have volunteers here at our shelter. So five nights a week, it's paid staff and two nights, it's volunteers and if we do get a middle of the night advocacy-initiated response call, they're the ones that make the follow-up call.

- **[Maren]** Alright, cool. Cool. Well, so let's shift to training done. You talked about training staff was a piece of the resource for responding to the calls from law enforcement. And I started out saying that we can't train ad nauseam, we can't, we could train until we're blue in the face, and still we might not see concrete change happen within our systems response, right? And so it's not the only way to do it but we wanna highlight the successful training that you had, have re-organized at Shelterhouse, and then with this new information that you're getting, how you think you might be shift training for criminal justice system practitioners. So let's start with the, our outline and, let's start with external staff training and that meaning, you mentioned that staff right now are able to go on ride-alongs. So talk about how that's a piece of training.

- **[Kim]** Yeah, well, one neat thing about ride-alongs, besides the things that an individual staff member observes is he or she comes back and talks about it with everybody 'cause usually it was really

interesting and really a new experience so there's kind of that trickle down effect of lots of people learning from one person's interesting experience. And I would just say that, up close and personal observation of law, the role of law enforcement, and in general, you know, the really good work that they do and the concern that they have for doing a good job, you know, seeing that isn't something you forget about so I think it's kind of just shifts how you think about other systems and just naturally helps with our ability to work with other systems. So it just, all around, was a really good experience for staff. The other place we've connected with similarly is sit-alongs with . So far, I'm the only person that's done that. And I also did, kind of, a get-acquainted meeting and joint webinar and things but I have another staff member working to get her sit-along with 911 scheduled and we're hoping that can be kind of a regular thing for staff that would really benefit from that experience.

- **[Maren]** Yes, and then I was thinking about I'm confusing myself about how I'm thinking about internal or external staff training. Because the other piece that we've talked about and during our conversations today, has been about the Advocacy Learning Center, and so talk a little bit about your staff's experience in that program.

- **[Kim]** Yeah, that was just a great life experience for all three of us. I don't know if, I think that some callers will have attended that and some won't have, is that correct?

- **[Maren]** Yes, I think that's right.

- **[Kim]** Okay. Yeah, so--

- **[Maren]** Hm-mm.

- **[Maren]** I'll ask in the chat who has been a part of the Advocacy Learning Center.

- **[Kim]** Okay.

- **[Maren]** But go ahead.

- **[Kim]** Yeah, so for us, it just, I don't know, in the end, I just think it made us all better people really. It was just such a great experience. But that also trickled down. We really tried to make a point of bringing back whatever we learned and share it with other staff and our executive director so that it would benefit everybody. And it's still something we talk about all the time, the concepts that we learned and the ideas that we brought back with us so that was a very significant, I don't know, to call it a training experience doesn't seem big enough, for how it impacted us.

- **[Maren]** Hm-mm. Beth, are you, are you in a position where you could jump in here and sort of describe the Advocacy Learning Center curriculum and program?

- **[Beth]** Sure. So there are several people, not individuals on the call, that have been a part of the Advocacy Learning Center but many of the organizations that you represent have been a part of the Learning Center. Well, "many" probably is an over-exaggeration. A couple organizations have been a part of it. But the Advocacy Learning Center is an intensive -month course. It's kind of equated to a

graduate-level course. So if you think about going through a university graduate course, that's how it's organized. So that you have a team of people coming through this course together. A frontline advocate and a manager, or an executive director, are part of that team and then, you can have up four team members. So some combination of other advocates or other roles in your organization, and that team is the team will then do the course together but the expectation, as Kim said, was then this team comes back to the organization and facilitates in depth conversations, critical thinking, you know, so your team, your local team, is much bigger. And we go through a process, through the 18 months, to start examining individual advocacy and the practices. And then we move through an in-person event, four days, first, of what we call an immersion training, where we get grounded and we just kind of dissect and roll up our sleeves and think really critically about how we are in the movement, where we are, what we need to look at, what we need to examine, and then it gives you a bunch of stuff to say, let's look at. What you wanna look at in your organizations and how you're doing individual advocacy. And then you get time and space to go and think about how to do that, what you want to do with it, and then we come together on monthly calls, and what we can strategy sessions. And that just gives you more to chew on, more to think through, what we're gonna do together, to focus on that. And then we shift gears, and start thinking about institutional advocacy. And how system advocacy basically, is then the focus of what we're going to do next. And then we do that same kind of process. We come to an in-person event, and then we get a monthly call. In between that, we also have distance learning. So you'll have an opportunity to do some online, e-learning courses and some additional reading, that kind of stuff. And then, the last part of the Advocacy Learning Center is community advocacy. And so, we start thinking through that together. Another in-person event and then calls. And interspersed throughout all of that, we have, kind of, keynote lectures, is what we call them, quarterly. And that's a time when we have these, kind of, deeper emerging issues, and really thought-provoking guest lecturers come in and help us think through, kind of, not your normal thing that you would ever, you know, your day-to-day work, it kind of jumps you out of that and gives you a deeper level of thinking and thinking about something a little bit different. And interspersed there, among the 18 months, then we also have affinity discussions. And those are kind of those times when we have topics bubble up, that people wanna dig into deeper so we spend some time thinking through all of that. And at the end, we have this graduation ceremony where we celebrate, you survived 18 months of (laugh).

- **[Maren]** It's like getting a medal at the end of a marathon (laughs). - That's right. (laughs)

- **[Maren]** Yeah. What's great about, I mean, this is sounding a little bit like an advertisement for the Advocacy Learning Center, and is that too because we're, I think, we're opening applications up again in November, right, Beth?

- **[Beth]** We are. The beginning to the middle of November, the next class will be open for applications.

- **[Maren]** We'll definitely be sending out information to you all about that but it's also a really unique opportunity that's sponsored by the Office on Violence Against Women, that's really focused on advocates, and advocacy. A lot of, a lot of what you get across the spectrum of TA providers is about a lot of inter-agency and collaboration work, which is super important and best practices in the criminal justice system's response to violence against women. But this Advocacy Learning Center is really a

retreat for 18 months to focus on how your organization is providing advocacy on those, the individual, institutional, and community levels so thanks for that overview, Beth.

- **[Beth]** And just one little tidbit, just to add.

- **[Maren]** Yes?

- **[Beth]** You don't need to be funded by the Office on Violence Against Women in order to participate.

- **[Maren]** Right.

- **[Beth]** There's always spots for those who aren't funded so...

- **[Maren]** Yeah. And there's always a little rural contingency within each class and we do what we can to capitalize on that in-person opportunities for the rural programs to network with each other so definitely something to keep in mind for your organization. But then, Kim, back to you about, in the last year then, as you've been positioning yourself and Shelterhouse to have this strong systems advocacy work. What have you been doing relative to training criminal justice system practitioners?

- **[Kim]** By that, do you mean, like our external partners? Like our partners, not our staff that work in the criminal justice system in our agency?

- **[Maren]** Correct. Correct. Yes.

- **[Kim]** Okay. Yeah, we're still finding our way with that but one thing that came out of our better relationship with law enforcement was their open-ness to having us be a part of their orientation for new officers. So we haven't done that yet but we have an agreement that next time they have an orientation, we'll be able to do a part of it and then it's also going to be on their training checklist that they will come to Shelterhouse and have a tour, and just, you know, firsthand learning about us, right from the horse's mouth, kind of thing, instead of hearing about it secondhand or whatever.

- **[Maren]** Yeah, and that's, I can't remember if at the beginning of the webinar, you shared this story about being on a ride-along with a patrol officer who really had a fundamental misunderstanding about what Shelterhouse did.

- **[Kim]** Yeah--

- **[Maren]** Oh wait. Go ahead.

- **[Kim]** I didn't share that but when I did my ride-along with the sheriff's department, as we drove by Shelterhouse, I said to him, "So what do you know about Shelterhouse?" And he said, "Well, I know that "you don't want men coming up to your door "and if we need anything or need to go by there, "we should send a woman." Which is not the case. And so, right away, I said, "Oh my goodness, that's not the case at all. "And we'd love to have you stop by." And you know, I kinda could correct that and so out of that grew the idea of having people come for a tour as part of their orientation so they can just meet us and see how wonderful we are. (laughs)

- **[Maren]** Well, and to see what sort of a resource exists for women because, like you said,

- **[Kim]** Yeah.

- **[Maren]** you know, responding to domestics is one of the hardest calls patrol officers have, one of the hardest parts of their job, and especially needing to, you know, leave a scene and not know whether the victim in that situation is gonna have the resources and the support that they need to get through it and so--

- **[Kim]** Yeah.

- **[Maren]** The more you can send out that message of who, you know, the accurate message, of who you are and what you do within the law enforcement response then the better resource you are for women and children in need--

- **[Kim]** Very much so. It's really crucial that they understand who we are and feel positively about what we're offering.

- **[Maren]** Yeah. So I'm just going to pause here again to see if listeners have questions so go ahead and chat, questions or comments or experiences that you wanna share about this kind of work in your community. You can also email beth@praxisinternational.org. And while people are thinking about that, Kim, let's transition to, sort of the big picture lessons learned about your work in the last 18 months.

- **[Kim]** Yeah--

- **[Maren]** Impact, you know, like the impact this has had for, you've mentioned, you mentioned that, you mentioned what the impact has been on staff but talk a little bit more about that.

- **[Kim]** Yeah, I think, our staff feel energized by this and it kind of, in some ways, brings us back to the heart of our work, to be, I'm thinking of the advocacy-initiated response in particular, just to be right there to help somebody who survived something horrific right when it's occurred, is exactly what we wanna be doing and so being able to do that, is energizing. And staff just couldn't have been more positive and appreciative and I mean, it's just almost a celebratory feeling around here to have this in place right now. And I know our executive director has said how thrilled she is and the board is, and you know, there's just been lots of energy, happy energy around it. We're actually gonna have a little article in our newspaper about our agreement with the police. We hope within this month for Domestic Violence Awareness Month. So lots of good ripple effects, just as far as energy and motivation and feeling like we're on the right path. I also, just for me personally, I've just thought, one big thing I've learned is that I, and our agency, has every right to see ourselves as a partner who has a right to expect certain things from our other partners. And so, there's nothing wrong with that. That's exactly how we should be doing our work and I think I didn't have the confidence or the, I don't know, the right frame of mind to see things that way until the last year or so and going through the Advocacy Learning Center. We've kind of grown into a partner where we really understand our role and feel like it's right that we're doing our role and that we don't need to be afraid of negative feedback from others if we do it in a respectful way, which we do. Somewhere along the way, somebody asked me, "Are we changing the

system? "Or is the system changing us?" And I think we had been, fallen prey to the, letting the system change us a little and we'd gotten a little too timid or a little afraid to ask for much. And so that's just been a shift for us, that's been a really needed thing.

- **[Maren]** Hm-mm, yeah, I think that, that happens so easily and especially when those partnerships might be tied to funding that you know, we err on the side of too much caution and we lose sight of our role. But I also think, I mean, with what you've shared with me and then on this webinar too, is that there's strategies for, for doing it in a way that is mutually beneficial, right? And I think you've been really skillful at building those intentional relationships, sharing with them how Shelterhouse can be a resource to them and then that opens the door because there's a ballast of trust there, to take on the harder things and to weather those storms so...

- **[Kim]** Right, right, I think so. I think we're expecting that there'll be some bumps in the roads, and we've tried to just say that out loud to people and that we're ready to talk about 'em when they come up and solve them together. It doesn't need to be a stopping point.

- **[Maren]** Yeah. Yeah. And so what're next steps for Shelterhouse?

- **[Kim]** One thing is our systems concern log. We really haven't even come close to maximizing what we can do with that and I think the staff aren't even used to using it regularly so that's, over this next year, we wanna be very proactive with keeping that in the forefront of everyone's minds and then using it in a helpful way for our community. Another is, evaluating police reports, once we have enough of them to really see some themes. We wanna be looking at that and seeing what that tells us and teaches us about the current state of that system and our response. And then we're hoping to really begin to look at risk assessment questions that can be used all along the way, in the whole criminal justice system response. So from 911 to sentencing and beyond. And I can't even say much about what that will look like 'cause I need to learn about it. But I understand there's good practices that we should have in place that have to do with every system asking questions about context for the violence, safety, and that those types of questions will enhance safety for victims in our community.

- **[Maren]** Hm-mm, yeah. Yeah, there's a, it's endless, endless work. The good news for us as advocates is that we have job security (laughs). There's always ways to improve and do better. And I really appreciate you sharing your strategies with us over the last, that you've been engaged in over the last year. You alluded to the risk assessment piece and different models and strategies. I will just share a little overview of support that's available to you all, as rural grantees, from Praxis. Obviously, this webinar's being hosted through our Rural Technical Assistance Project that's funded through the Office on Violence Against Women. But we also have several other programs. You heard from Beth about the Advocacy Learning Center. We also are funded through OVW to offer assistance to communities who are interested in employing a method that we've developed called the Praxis Safety and Accountability Audit. And that program is referred to as our Institutional Analysis TA project. There's, Kim has been employing specific methods that we teach within the context of this overall process. Ride-alongs, observations, interviews, those types of things. But together, the Safety and Accountability Audit is a process where you pull together inter-agency teams to do that work together. So you might have

community-based advocates and law enforcement officers and prosecutors, a small group of people going out to do that kind of work together and through that peer-learning and assessment about a specific aspect of your community's response that you wanna improve, then you're co-developing solutions to problems. And we'll send out more information about that process too, that OVW grantees across the country are funded to do and write grant for. So we'll send out some more resources for that. Also, we'll send out the templates and sample forms and sample working agreements for some of the practices that Kim talked about today. Advocacy-initiated response, you already got the systems response concerns sample forms and whatnot and there's lots of other resources that we have available on our website relative to this kind of work. And we're really, and and what's not on here, and it's a presumed thing for me, but I should specifically say that we are available to talk with you all any time about how to strategize, to employ any of these things back home in your community and we have a lot of experience working with the diverse range of rural settings and contexts and navigating through local circumstances and jurisdictions to help establish these kinds of practices so we're here to provide that one-on-one support to you as well. Kim, final comments?

- **[Kim]** No, just thank you for having me. You made this easy.

- **[Maren]** Aw! Well, it was just a delight to get to know you and your work better, and you made this easy on me too because you're doing such incredible work there. And Beth, any closing comments from you?

- **[Beth]** No, I don't think so. Other than, the last slide has Maren's contact information and my contact information for those of you that are on the phone. Please feel free to email us at any time. beth@praxisinternational.org and maren@praxisinternational.org if you have any followup questions or needs. Thanks, everybody.

- **[Maren]** Alright, and somebody's meditation chime just went off. That must indicate (laugh) the conclusion of our webinar today. Thank you so much for joining us and we look forward to hearing about the good work in your rural communities, and love to hear about that so give us a call, drop us an email, let us know. We'll be following up within the next couple of days with all of these resources that we've mentioned today. Thanks again, Kim, and thanks, Beth. And have a lovely afternoon. We'll talk to you later. - Thank you.

- **[Maren]** And Crystal, our operator, you—

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