

Strengthening Rural Advocacy: Focus Groups for Social Change  
**Elena Anderson Eggert, Bree Adams Bill, and Maren Woods**

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**BREE ADAMS BILL:**

Hello everyone. Welcome to strengthening role advocacy focus groups for social change. We are so happy you could be here today. I am Bree Adams Bill, my pronouns are she/her/hers. We acknowledge the elders, both past and present. (Land acknowledgment)

This webinar today is supported by the against "is women. Folks like you and others may view this webinar at a later date. We will be recording today. I am so happy could join us today as we explore how we may strengthen our social advocacy through the use of focus groups, providers, we know that rural advocates such as yourself engage with and learn from survivors every day to create solidarity and strengthen your community.

Each connection provides opportunity for survivors to join us and our collective action to improve the social conditions within our community. I am so excited to spend this afternoon with you all. This is brought to my Praxis International, many of you likely know Praxis and have been tied to us at some point if not all of our 20+ years doing this work.

For others, this might be the first you joined us. For those of you who do not know us, Praxis is an international training and capacity building organization that works to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence through local, statewide, national social justice initiatives.

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We promote social efficacy at individual, institutional, and community levels by engaging with gender-based violence organizations based around the country through our programs you see here on the slide. The advocacy Learning Center, our institutional analysis, and the program that is bringing this webinar to you today.

There will be more information about our work at the end of our time together today. Before we begin, on behalf of all of us we want to just take a moment to honor the 10 people murdered on Saturday at the grocery store in Buffalo, New York. We mourn their lives and send our heartfelt condolences to their families, for the three people injured and for the entire community in Buffalo. These people were tragically killed as a result of antiblack racism and white supremacy and we are horrified, outraged, heartbroken at the unrelenting assault on Black, Native, Asian, and other colored communities as a direct consequence of white supremacy.

We seek advocacy into justice and say again that Black lives matter. Black women's lives matter. Black trans lives matter. I will work based on ending gender-based violence by creating equity. I will work to end gender-based violence is inextricably linked to antique racist suppression and changing the police -- beliefs and policies.

We challenge everyone today to take action, however small, against violence and racist suppression and we invite you to join us by standing solidarity with Black communities and all of those feeling fear and outrage into the aftermath of this violence.

We believe in uniting in solidarity and our pursuit of a just and equitable society, we are guided by these words by Desmond Tutu. "Justice requires three things.

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The truth to be told, partly repaired to the greatest extent possible, and that the right to the violence be eradicated."

The time to act is now. Thank you. I am now going to invite Shelley, one of our staff members to give us some technical reminders before we jump in.

**SHELLY:**

Good afternoon everybody. I will just go over all of the tech reminders. First of all, to meet and unmute your microphone or camera just click on the microphone or camera icon located at the bottom corner of your Zoom screen. You can also adjust your settings and to troubleshoot any problems if you click on the ropes next to those icons.

If you join as microphone you will need to use \*six to mute. At some point you will receive a notification to join a breakout room. We ask that you disconnect from your computer and join with your phone microphone, you won't lose your connection and you communicate with everyone.

We have interpretation and close captioning available. Services will only be available in one of the breakout groups. If you didn't requested when you registered if you could just sent me a message in the chat or an email and I will be sure that you get into the correct room whether services are provided.

I will put my email into the chat once I'm done talking. To enable the closed captioning just click on the CC button on the bottom of your Zoom screen. To view interpreters use the speaker view versus the gallery view and you can select between a speaker and gallery view by clicking on the icon in the top right-hand corner of your screen where it says view.

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If you have any issues you can either email me and I will put my email in the chat, and that is I think all we have. Thank you.

**BREE ADAMS BILL:**

Thank you. It is so nice to have you there backing us up and speaking of backing up, we have a lot of Praxis staff on the webinar. You will get to see and hear from them in a just a moment. Let's review what our time together today will look like.

You will hear from Elena Anderson Eggert and Maren Woods, both Praxis staff. Both of whom will be delivered the maturity of our content today during the first half of our time together. They will talk about how and why focus groups are a dynamic method for rural advocates to become involved with advocacy.

Amanda Watson will then join me and Elena to ask survivors during a mock focus group which Maren will moderate. We have Kata Issari who will help us move up within the breakouts and here to back up Shelley in her role as well. As you heard, the breakouts are serving as a way to interact more directly with each other and explore the ways in which rural advocates like yourself we replicate the focus group process within your communities. You paragraph

lastly, we have LaShae Lopez the newest member of our team who has experience working with multiple rule programs. We begin our webinars with our working agreements because a part of our social change advocacy work is thinking about we can embrace a social justice approach and interacting with each other as Praxis staff and board, the faculty and participants, when we are together just like we are today.

So, just before we dive into the contents of today's session our staff will read the working agreements for us.

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**SPEAKER:**

Hello there buddy, we are here to learn together, to exchange ideas, to think critically, ask questions, dialogue and post solutions respectfully. We acknowledge that all forms of oppression exists and are likely to surface from time to time.

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

We acknowledge that one aspect of institutionalized oppression is that we have systematically been taught this information about our own groups and about members of other groups. We agreed to actively pursue opportunities to learn new information that questions would have been taught to listen respectfully to unfamiliar perspectives.

**SPEAKER:**

We agree not to leave ourselves or others for the misinformation we have learned to and to accept response ability for repeating this information after we have learned otherwise. We agree not to blame those...

**SPEAKER:**

We assume that everybody is doing the best we can. We do not demean, devalue or in any way put down people for their experiences.

**KATA ISSARI:**

We will actively challenge the myths and stereotypes about our own groups and other groups so that we can build our connections while also breaking down the walls that separate us.

**AMANDA WATSON:**

We want to create a comfortable atmosphere for discussion, anyone is welcome to ask for the command not to be repeated. Please share others personal information and/or comments only with their explicit consent.

**BREE ADAMS BILL:**

We embrace the differences and similarities among us. Encouraging everyone to self monitor to ensure all have equitable opportunities to purchase meat. We challenge ourselves to communicate in new ways, including making time for silence, reflection, and processing. We agreed to attend to our needs by nurturing ourselves mind, body and spirit.

I want to thank all of our staff in sharing with us and for reminding how we will be sharing our time together today. We hope that those joining us feel comfortable using the working agreements as a guide for our interactions with each other throughout the seminar.

I will now turn to Maren to walk is a brief overview.

**MAREN WOODS:**

Thank you to all of us for joining us here today. We wanted to start out by defining what we mean by social change advocacy to make sure we are on the same page about what we are speaking to learn about today.

At Praxis we define advocacy as a way of standing with and giving forces to those who have been a subdued, marginalized, or overpowered in some way. Advocating for survivors of gender-based violence means we are working with them for their safety, agency, autonomy over their lives, to remove obstacles in

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their paths, seek changes within society that tolerate and uphold gender-based violence and other forms of oppression.

Social change advocacy promotes the interests of those with less power in order to achieve the goal of justice. In our need to promote the needs of survivors of gender-based violence in order to influence change that ends the phenomenon of gender-based violence altogether.

When we see gender-based violence as a byproduct of society, of oppression, power and privilege differentials it means that social change advocacy needs to engage on those multiple levels. For the individual or survivor we may need to engage the landlord, Doctor, or put a judge does in relationship to that individual.

For those suffering from a common problem we typically seek to change what institution does it negatively impact their lives. We cannot without engaging community they live resources for advocacy efforts. The core of all of our work and which Bree shared earlier about what Desmond teaches that, that the truth of our lives and what has happened to us, that the harm we experience the greatest possible extent be prepared, and which gave rise to the violence in the first SB eradicated. this is social change in a nutshell, but let me spend more time in these areas of systems and community advocacy. Individual advocacy, when we are advocating directly with an individual, survivor, we help shape and change what is happening to her or them. It helps responding to what is going on anther situation, relative to the person who caused harm, relative to their family and to the institutions and other communities that may be involved in their lives. It is tailoring what we know that is generally helpful for survivors, the unique expanses of an individual.

Community activity seeks to change the conditions that are helpful, or support of an art protective to survivors. -- Art, if they collude with, reinforce or challenge

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those that cause harm. It is working to change society and culture on behalf of all women and survivors.

An institutional or systems! You see, we are working to change how an institution organization is helpful to individual survivors and two groups of survivors who experience violence. Institutional advocacy examines and changes how institutions organize the work, organizes its workers, most conceptually in terms of the assumptions they make about why gender-based violence occurs in the institutions world -- role and intervening in that but also administratively and the way they are. As they process cases that involve gender-based violence. We look at what is their mission? Their purpose, their function. What policies and protocols do workers have to follow? What forms do they have to fill out? Who are the links to across the system and other agencies? Institutional advocacy seeks to change those types of things on behalf of all women and survivors of the group who have to interact with those interest fusions benchmark institutions or systems. -- Institutions

In all those levels of advocacy, the social change advocacy, we need to cultivate our collective power as women, survivors, those who experience gender-based violence and oppression. To philosophically institutionally organize our advocacy, so that it does this harnessing of the collective power. It requires that we don't see, we don't individualize the problem of gender-based violence but instead, see it as an issue of oppression anchored in and perpetuated by society, culture and institutional forces. We also seek to change the conditions that lead to violence against women. In other words, to deal with the root causes of violence.

To organize our work in advocacy so that it harnesses this collective power, as advocates we need to stay grounded in community, to work collectively with survivors and to stand outside and independently of the institutions and communities that we are trying to change. So we are in the best position to put pressure on the community and those institutions to change.



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Finally, we need to stay focused on survivors experiences and needs and not on our own needs and the needs of the institution, but squarely centered on survivors needs.

Today we will talk with you about a doable way to harness this collective power, of both advocates and survivors in rural communities. And really in communities all over, all types of communities. As a way to learn about survivors experiences and needs. This is through the use of focus groups, that are anchored in the purpose of engaging in social change and advocacy.

Allen outcome I will pass the mic to you, to define what we mean by focus groups.

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

Thanks Marvin, with all of that in mind, we do want to share a bit to find a focus group. Particularly a focus group or social change. What might that look like? What is a focus group? It is an amazing opportunity to learn from those who are most impacted by gender-based violence and to involve them in our work to end it. We know some of you have likely already led to a focus group in their community but let's talk about how praxis defines them.

We view focus groups as one way to highlight survivors voices to practice the social change advocacy. Posted -- focus groups are used in a variety of ways outside of work. -- They will use focus groups in product development and marketing. Focus groups can also be used for academic research and feels like sociology. What we are talking about today is different from both of those, I do know that most of -- advocates are familiar with support groups. There might be overlapping scales and support groups and focus groups but they are still different. We will get into that a little bit more later on.

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Focus groups are on exploring a specific topic, the purpose of them is healing or necessarily for talking about the violence that occurred. Let's break this down into a clear definition. Generally speaking, a focus group is an interview with a small group who have a shared experience. It's topic specific discussion and it is planned and facilitated. It can be used to bring about collective experiences of particular groups and to identify themes across participants. Focus groups can also help us hear from those who may not be represented in official statistics. Particularly those in underrepresented or underserved communities.

For example, advocates may want to learn more about the experience of members of the LGBT Q community who access their services. In that case, they would seek survivors who identify as queer, trans and so on to participate in the focus groups. You don't even have to call it a focus group if that name doesn't resonate to you or in your community. These gatherings can be referred to in many ways, including community conversations, listening sessions, group interviews and talking circles.

When it comes to different types of focus groups, we think of them in three pockets. In each connects to a different element of social change advocacy, which Marvin just described for us. That is individual, as additional and community advocacy. Based on what aspect of social change advocacy or pursuing, there is different types of focus groups you can too.

For example, if you want to learn more about your individual advocacy as an organization, you may hold a focus group with your staff members to discuss the services you provide and the needs of staff. Those needs might relate to the fact that many advocates are survivors ourselves. We believe survivors voices should be included in every type of focus group.

With that fact in mind, let's talk about considerations for a program that is planning a focus group with survivors. In a focus group, you will be addressing

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certain topics and roughly following a predetermined outline. Those topics can be as specific as using resistant violence, to more general like where did they turn for support in the community other than the criminal legal system?

Either way, you will want to go into your focus group with some questions in mind. Focus groups, as we teach them can resonate across cultures ? as they provide opportunities for story telling, sharing collective experiences and for sharing intersecting social problems. So, you can see how identity does become a very important when considering participation.

For example, a rural program that praxis works with conducted a focus group with survivors about their experiences with enforcing protective orders. In this program, recruited survivors with different racial identities to attend to and recognize how culture plays a role in that experience. Likewise, this program sought out survivors whose exes or partners also had different racial identities and explored how those identities impacted the institutional response. The point here is to seek representation from the survivors, who may not be represented in official statistics, no matter the topic you are covering.

So, in the focus group, participants will share their experiences and their knowledge about the impact of violence on their lives. They are free to share what matters the most to them, even if it goes off of the predetermined outline. Rather than what matters to the person, who puts together or facilitates the focus group. In this process, both group participants and facilitators develop awareness and knowledge of others experiences. Here you might be thinking there are some clear similarities to support groups but, the difference is the outcome and the intention.

A focus group is an activity to gain knowledge, and it's a chance to trust the expertise of survivors lived experiences. The outcomes of focus groups have really shaped our movements. For example, the power and control wheel, which many

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of us know well ? it came from focus groups with survivors. Doctor Ellen Pentz who founded praxis, work to translate the learnings from survivor focus groups into that tool, the power and control wheel which continues to guide advocates in her work today.

I will now turn it back to Maren, to talk more about groups for social change.

**MAREN WOODS:**

I'm so happy you brought up the control wheel and Doctor Ellen Pentz. It is such a powerful example of how focus groups can lead to social change. As Alina said, Elena brought so many survivors in the 1980s to talk about their experiences in battery. At the time, the predominant framework for understanding battering and domestic violence is a cycle of domestic abuse that Linda Walker developed to explain the experience of living with a batterer. And this idea of -- the idea of tension building, in a relationship there would be an incident of violence, the couple would reconcile that she might bring her roses and write her a love letter. Then there would be calm before tension would rise again.

As Ellen explained her experiences talking with survivors, she introduced his theory of the cycle of abuse to survivors. They said there is something not quite right about that, they identified the reality that even as the couple might reconcile, the ongoing perpetual threat and experiences of violence is present and shapes every interaction they had with their partners. Identifying the power and control and male privilege, with dominant characteristics of battering, it fundamentally change the way advocates institutions intervene in cases of domestic violence. Starting in Minnesota with the (unknown term) model, that organized around ongoing safety for survivors and accountability for harm doers, including providing them opportunities to change through better intervention programs. It has now been internationally recognized as an effective intervention to reduce domestic violence.

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We see then again again, not all results become rush ? I internationally recognized three groups of survivors. Hearing from survivors is transformative, helps to tell the truth, gives us an opportunity to repair the harm and ultimately change conditions. -- Harm

Focus groups can be transformative for participants, Elena has touched on many of these parts. It is an opportunity for participants to connect, with others who had shared experiences. We know being -- shared experiences, it can be isolating, you feel it's your fault. Particularly in rural communities where isolation can be geographical, as additional to the psychological sense of being alone in this. Bringing survivors together to share their stories is really powerful.

It provides an opportunity for survivors to contribute to change, they can be a part of healing for survivors. It turned something bad that happened to them, and to do something good for others and for the community. Again, I can help with the healing or the recovery process, working for justice, acting active, improving responses can help situate survivors' experiences, in a way that makes them feel like they are contributing to something good. Of course this can transform our community focused advocacy and can be transformational for our partners and other stakeholders in our communities. Because we can hear from survivors inside that we can't get from other places.

It can help us see what is working and what is not working for survivors for the intended focus of our work and ultimately can lead to real lasting change and impact. I want to say just a little bit more about how transformative this can be for participants.

It is grounded in our philosophical approach and social change advocacy. That true focus groups and bringing survivors together to talk about their shared experiences gives them an opportunity to engage in an experience that is

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liberating, counters the abuse and depression that they have had in their lives, because we are asking the expertise and center their needs.

This is both for advocates and survivors. Especially as the government advocates has the ability to dialogue... this is it superpowerful because it allows them to speak about what is most important is and I think it's really powerful because it is allowing us to perceive the information.

We can center their expenses. Again, many experiences are in isolation and in rural communities especially. A platform to get together with others with shared experience to keep them connected to community can help establish connections with others with this experience.

There is nothing more powerful to get bring survivors together to help them see it is not about them as individuals but their experience is rooted in the social issue, not an individual problem.

Conducting focus groups with survivors allows us to build relationships. It gathers information about those experiences survivors are having, so we can center the changes survivors are saying they want to need, what they want to learn as well.

If you have ever engaged in group conversations with survivors, they very easily say "this did not work for me." It illuminates the gap in what we are offering. Either advocacy programs or within various responses.

Of course, we get to see how we are doing in our programming and it is an evaluation opportunity. We can proactively be centering their voices and engaging with them to help figure out how to end gender-based violence.

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We can't get you altogether knowing that you are coming from rural communities across the country without recognizing some of the realities of doing this work in this rural communities. Some can be more challenging and it is worth highlighting them here.

Survivors need a lot of support to connect with each other and reflect on their experiences. Focus groups allow a venue to bridge the difference and bring people together to explore their community's response to gender-based violence.

Many communities are slow to change but relationships are highly valued and slowly built meeting we can capitalize on the stakes survivors have into the community and that others have in them and how their collective voice cannot resonate across the community to engage in social change advocacy.

It means we don't have to do this work alone as advocates and I feel that so often we get together with rural advocates that they feel that they are the only shop in town that is focused on these issues. But in fact communities are a rich resource that we can tap into and our greatest allies in seeking change are communities.

So, a couple of other features or realities are the strong connections, the expertise at making do, and the resourcefulness of rural advocates and survivors in rural communities and other stakeholders mean that changing the conditions that give rise to gender-based violence is doable. It feels that way.

My parents live in a rural area and every time I go there I think that there is a strong connection, resourcefulness, and a can-do attitude. This can happen in communities. It might be slow but it is very doable. So are focus groups and in rural communities. Alayna, how do you do focus groups?

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

After all of that wonderful information might be wondering how to start. It is a lot more simple than we might have made it into some of the logistical aspects before getting into the weeds.

Here are some concrete things you can think about to get the ball rolling. Here are some common barriers that folks worry about when they were planning to focus groups that included recruitment, funding, accessibility, roles, and implementation.

So here I will stop and give a quick caveat. I know that there's a lot of information on these it's like that that is intentional. These slides are something to take with you. You will get the PowerPoint after today's session, the presentation right now is just a quick review. Generally, here are some things to keep in mind.

Consider the ideal group size which is usually 3-5 people. Consider the demographics in your area, and the representation of those demographics in your group. Consider how you do outreach to have this representation in a group. While we encourage you to recruit diverse participation it is important to keep in mind that no individual can represent their neighborhood, race, gender, etc.

People often ask us how much it costs to conduct focus groups. It's not a terribly expensive activity but there are some costs associated. When you are thinking about how much it might cost you, good place to start is what you can offer participants to make it easier for them to attend.

Ultimately, the most important cost is to compensate group participants for the time. Survivors who agree to participate, like Maren said they information you can't get somewhere else. We like to think of them as expert consultants and so we are getting paid to be there and conduct focus groups and they should too.



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One of the first things we should figure out is if you are doing your focus group virtually or in person. Based on that there are different accessibility needs to keep in mind. Here I'll just point out two or three years ago we would have never thought to do focus groups virtually. A lot has changed.

We used to think "no way whatsoever." We have learned that we can do them on Zoom or another platform. This might especially be relevant in rural communities. For example, virtual might make more sense in your area depending on travel funds and how doable travel is for where you are.

Or if internet is a concern in your area, in person might beat the necessary root for this focus group. This is all an important consideration. You can ask folks if they need any accommodations when they sign up to attend and based on their answers that will direct your next steps.

It takes a few people to make a focus group happen. Some of those roles might overlap, like for example advocates are often focus groups planners and if they are not they can provide significant input into the planning process and help whoever is responsible for planning the focus.

The advocate can also be available around the focus group before, during, and after for any support that might be required. The facilitator's role is to help guide discussion. Making sure that everybody gets the opportunity to speak and the note taker of course will write thorough notes trying to take the "not attribute the quotes to a specific person or using any identifying information."

Building off of that thought there are considerations to assure adjustment safety and well-being throughout the whole process. This might include scheduling a private space if you are holding it in person, having a consistent advocate

presence, and having consent forms inform participants of aspects like confidentiality and the fact that this is voluntary and that they can leave at any time for any reason.

Also, location and timing of the group are important. Such as being in an easily accessible space and making sure there is adequate time scheduled for the conversation. Let's pause here, I know I shared a lot of things and details but I promise it is not as (indiscernible) as it sounds and I will share this PowerPoint to help you explore these nitty-gritty considerations a bit more.

### **MAREN WOODS:**

We have lots of resources that Practice has developed that we share with you at the end of the slide you can reference in terms of the logistical details. We want to highlight one other important aspect of focus groups and conducting focus groups before we get into the demonstration which is about creating change.

Ultimately, that is what we want and that is what we are doing. There's obviously benefits for participants and obviously benefits for us as advocates... To create a change in your community once you have conducted a focus groups with survivors.

The first part is a debriefing. Debriefing the focus group sometimes means immediately after the focus group has concluded with everybody who helped organize the focus group to debrief, share insights, and decompress. Sometimes you hear very difficult things. He wanted to make sure the quotes are clear, make sure that the note taker captured the important moments.

You might find that survivors might linger and debrief of the book provide support and be there with them in any debriefing that might happen but don't take off the note taking hat because sometimes into the formal context of the focus group

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survivors might feel less comfortable and the debriefing is when separate information can come out.

Another important note is to have someone review the notes as soon as possible after the event. So many times of these discussions at the dialogue and back and forth can go very fast and it is hard to keep up with notes. You want somebody to sit down with the notes and review them and flush them out to provide as much detail as possible.

To do that as soon as possible after the focus group so that ? we are human! We lose context as time goes on especially when you get to my age. So do that as soon as possible after the That is using the notes that were typed up or written, where you want to reflect and ask yourselves about, what gaps did the participants identify? What themes came up across participants? What were standout statements in individual participants? What ideas did the participants generate that we want to follow up on because we think it was a good idea and we are glad we heard it? What might we need to hear more about? Who else do we need and want to talk with?

From there, many people elect and develop some sort of summary, a written report of some type that describes the group, the number of participants, the support roles that were present. They might summarize the key themes and the recommendations that came out. They include these quotes that Elena referenced, maybe see stories and experiences. Knowing of course that they are not identifiable, especially if you will be sharing them outside of the context of your advocacy program. Who you share the summary with, it depends on the initial goal of conducting the focus group. You might share it with your program staff, maybe your board members, you might share it with agency heads or supervisors or other teams. Maybe you will share it with your CCR/SART team. You can cancer about what you learn, and see if you want to share in other arenas in your community. You might have a one-on-one meeting where you learn the insights learned, you might share insights learned at his agency team meeting or

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at a staff retreat. From there, with your planning team at the stakeholders, you will want to work together to identify and develop a strategy for what comes next.

Looking at those gaps, what are you figuring out you need to do to close those gaps, explore possible solutions with one another? Maybe you are creating new programming or practices. Maybe you're changing the mission statements of your organization, the skies the limit of times of that fact types of things you can change the results of things you gather in the focus groups.

Finally, I want to talk about supporting survivor involvement, we have seen time and time again that survivors need extra support for coming to the focus group. Sometimes they need support during the focus group and sometimes they need support afterwards. The goal is not to treat participants as a data point, but as an opportunity to have them engage with advocacy and advocacy programming. You might want to share with them the insights you gathered at the changes you're looking to me, as a result of what they shared with you. You might need to provide advocacy as needed, throughout the whole process. It could be seen as many times, that it is the first time a survivor is been connected with the advocacy program because of the fire -- flyer someone put up of the focus group.

You want to reflect on your beliefs for what survivors need or might be ready for, in terms of ongoing involvement with activism or other community advocacy efforts. Maybe you want to invite them to think about and participate and protest the fight for legal changes. Or attending meetings with practitioners, or participating other future focus groups. ? Better organized around different focus. There are lots of ways for survivors to get connected to this change making that we are trying to do in social change advocacy. Focus groups are a way to hook them into that.

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Now, we are ready! We're going into the demonstration. Q the people in the green room, as they ground us in what we're doing here with this demonstration. In this discussion, we will not be talking about the participants personal experiences with violence. We will be talking about what has worked well and what hasn't worked well about a particular aspect of programming. We want to hear from the participants that's what they wanted or what they think they might participate in, compared to what they actually experienced. We are going to really pay attention to possible ideas, impacts of things that we are thinking about as an advocacy program. I will say more about that when we set up the focus group.

This mock focus group with survivors -- focus, I hope to facilitate approaches and mostly we want to show you the insights that are possible when you talk with groups of survivors. Just to give us some grace and to use our time to the best of our ability. To date, we will ask you to assume, we are starting in probably 15 or 20 minutes into this focus group we are about to demonstrate. We have skipped consents, risks and benefits of participation, we have paid people to participate, we've done icebreakers and introductions, we have and told the children ? they are often a childcare room. We have them all here, we have and hold -- handheld all of those details and that we are diving into the discussion.

I think we can stop sharing screen and bring up the participants now. Will

**MAREN WOODS:**

Hello everybody. Hello to all the participants and participant land. We normally wouldn't do a focus group with a big audience like this (Laughs).

So, hi everybody. Thank you so much for joining us today. I know we have taken care of a bunch of details relative to your participation. Again, we are so grateful to have you here.

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Our Town's Advocacy program, which is a community-based advocacy program is interested in exploring how we can strengthen collective action within and across communities, to advocate and end gender-based violence and oppression in our communities. We know survivors who have experienced violence, should be a central features of those efforts and bringing people together to identify and harness that collective power, it can really help to improve survivors lives in general and the community conditions where we live.

So, we want to talk with you all today about your experience of seeing what happened to you, in terms of the violence you experienced as part of a larger societal problem. We want to brainstorm with you, issues and actions that you would like to see addressed related to this kind of change that Our Town's Advocacy is trying to engage in.

So, does anyone have any questions before we get started? Is everybody comfortable? Are you feeling good about your participation? Great, awesome!

You can all feel free to unmute if you like, to participate openly and freely. We won't go in any particular order here. First I would like to hear from you about how did you start to see the violence you were experiencing, as part of a bigger social problem that wasn't just about you? Was a person or interaction you had that helped you to see that it's not just you that experienced it, there's a whole bunch of people who are experience in similar things? Whoever wants to start can dive in.

**COMMENT FROM FLOOR:**

I can go first, I have a clear memory of this. I think for me, it was one of my professors at the college. It was a women in the law class, she was someone who taught in both legal studies and women's studies. I wasn't taking that many classes in women's studies or anything but I think her perspective, that was the first time I started thinking about it. Just the way she talked about sexual assault, I

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don't know, it was different than anyone else I had ever heard and the way that they talked about it. No one in my family really talked about that kind of stuff, we are more kind of like bodily and type culture. I don't know, I just never heard anyone talk about that it had happened to them or that it could happen and how you might respond to that. It just wasn't a thing and so, yet, this was last semester and she talks really openly about sexual assault and also how common it is. How it is not just something that happens to individuals but I think because of her women's studies perspective, she framed it in this bigger way of talking about patriarchy and those kinds of they concepts. I don't know, that was the first time I thought that it could be an issue that was more than just me or just someone else and all these individual things. It might be bigger than all of us and connected to something bigger.

**MAREN WOODS:**

Did she talk about her own personal experiences?

**COMMENT FROM FLOOR:**

Yes, she talked about it about herself in a really open with. That was different to me than anyone else, she opened my eyes but then she talked about in a larger conceptual way.

**MAREN WOODS:**

How about others?

**BREE ADAMS BILL:**

I was at a family reunion, was with and asked who was not treating me the best. Both my grandma and my aunt T pulled me aside separately to check on me. They thought I was probably unsafe and wondered about me and the way that my ex was treating me, they didn't appreciate but also they too had been experiencing what I was experiencing at the time. I didn't know that! It was similar to what you

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were saying Elena, that it was hidden. I had no idea that even the people I was closest to, my family, that this was a problem. I always looked at it as it was like kind that me and I felt embarrassed about it so I did not say anything. I was at a family reunion and and I had already been married for 12 years so?

**MAREN WOODS:**

What did that mean to you that they share that with you?

**BREE ADAMS BILL:**

It reminded me, we all cook together. We are a large family and we organize and come together a few times a year. It reminded me of that because what happened is, we are altogether making tamales and talking and loving each other, for the most part. It often happens where you are kind of going off with them or maybe my grandma would pull me aside and say something to me like "I like your shirt." There were little individual imperfections that happened that's what it reminded me of at the family reunion. My grandma pulling me off and saying that she saw me. My auntie saw me. So, I'll just say that it was amazing and that I can't even describe how much it mattered.

**MAREN WOODS:**

That is incredible! That is a special moment that you got to have with one of your family members pulled you aside and then the impact of them sharing that information for you, you suddenly could see your experience in a bigger context.

Amanda, how about you?

**AMANDA WATSON:**

it is interesting because I feel like even when I was little, I always knew that sexual assault and abuse and domestic violence that it was a thing because I was just



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like, that was the way things were. Pretty much everybody that I knew, that was kind of our lives and it was always there. Honestly, there might have been some occasional joking or dark humor because that was just? That was our life and, they were hard parts and so it was just kind of there. I think that was maybe a little different than what bree or Elena were talking about but I have this clear memory, I think I was 19 and even growing up with that and seeing everyone. Because it was the way things were, I wasn't ? obviously it is not ideal but like, it didn't feel like it was a problem. Or that there was anything else out there, that is what I had -- all I had ever seen or known.

There was an older woman that I met when I was 19 or 20. She was talking about... she had grown up in a similar dynamic but she was talking about some work she was doing organizing people to reclaim traditional communities and three centering for her tribe, their family life. It just so happened she worked with the same native homeland as mine. I am a (unknown name). She had to work with my community as well.

Hearing her talk about was the first time it occurred to me that the way things are aren't the way they have to be. This isn't just the default, the normal. There are possibilities out there that had never even crossed my mind.

Suddenly it flipped everything from this is just the way it is to something where it doesn't have to be this way. That there could be this other world, or this other relationship. That for me was when I first was thinking "oh, this is just bigger than me and my experiences at putting it into the context of a more than just my personal experiences and violences and that's just how it is and what everybody and expect to happen."

Instead say, "it doesn't have to be this way and we can to something to change it."

**MAREN WOODS:**

It is that thing where because we are living did they end and they out it becomes normalized so we don't question its existence and when somebody throws a penny into the wishing well there is a ripple effect. It highlights the awareness that our families are experiencing this as we are actively doing something about different ways.

Your grandma and auntie Bree were doing something by pulling you aside in that special way. Amanda your older Native woman elder who was sharing with you these experiences and organizing to reclaim the traditional values gave you this ultimate perspective. Elena this Professor for you was so out there sharing her own experience and putting it in the context of what other women are experiencing and this course was very very powerful. I can feel that.

Can you share just a little bit about how this inspired something in you to speak differently about your experience or take action in a different way?

**BREE ADAMS BILL:**

I can say something about that because I don't know that I tried to take action right after the family reunion but it was definitely on my mind. I was more tuning and I think was it the way I would say it to the way other people were experiencing the way I was experiencing it at the time.

I remember reading in my local paper what I know now was in October, it was domestic violence awareness month. I think it was referencing domestic violence awareness month and I actually read the article, it was referencing advocates. We say survivors.

They were in my state demanding change and rallying together. That was something that right when I write about that and there were some photos, I

thought that they wanted to do that. I wanted to do that. I want to be with them, I want to help others like me.

That was the first thing I thought. "I go to my capital to demand change."

**MAREN WOODS:**

So it changed your awareness of the phenomenon and allowed you to tap in to what was going on up there. Do either of you have something to share about how that shifted your thinking? Or your approach?

**AMANDA WATSON:**

I don't know if this counts, but that professor was the first person that I told after what happened to me. I didn't really want to talk to anybody else about it but I felt she would get it. She was the one who encouraged me to go to the hospital and get an exam. The (indiscernible) exam.

That experience didn't go super good for me, and I think ? I don't blame her for that but I think the whole interaction with her is what spurred me to act for myself. Now that I had that experience, I think they are all doing their best and I really appreciate everyone who is working in the ER but it took so long and I was there for eight hours.

There was an advocate who came part way through and that was nice. The worst part is I got a bill after my exam which didn't feel right. I didn't think that was supposed to happen and they said it wasn't. It was for the STD test and pregnancy test that they did as a part of the exam, not the whole thing but I don't know I googled it and it didn't seem right.

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I talked to you at the advocacy program to confirm that for me. That whole experience made me feel... Even things that aren't supposed to happen or are supposed to help us are not always helpful and I just want to talk to other survivors or other people who went through something similar because I can't be the only one who has a something like that happened to me.

I didn't know how to find those people or what we do together if we were in contact with each other.

**MAREN WOODS:**

Super powerful reflections on resources that might have been suggested to help process what you had experienced but then how would opened up doors to bigger systemic ways of thinking about how other people experience this.

Amanda, just in interest in time I will ask another related question. Then you can jump in? I would just pause for a second, in a real focus group we keep going down this thread and you can see already we are learning some things but in the interest of times I will ask the next question to demonstrate.

You maybe know that we have been doing a lot of work with law enforcement response to gender-based violence. We found that in partnership with survivors through things like this. What we are looking to do because we know that we need to strengthen our advocacy programs and services to look outside the legal criminal system needs advocacy in the community or other systems.

What other systems you experienced as a part of the journey you went through as a result of the violence you experienced. I am wondering if there is something else you could say or if you want to say more about some of those things related ? the most pressing issue or the think that worked the least or was it the least

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supportive for you and your experience of violence. What you'd like to see improved relative to that.

Outside of the criminal legal system, thinking that other aspects of your journey. What was the least supportive and what would you like to change? What would you like to see changed? Anybody can jump in. Amanda?

**AMANDA WATSON:**

I think one of the things that was really challenging for me personally was that I am (unknown name), queer, non-binary, trans. Every time I would go to talk to somebody for support ? I didn't go to law enforcement because it didn't have any desire to do that.

Anytime I was talking to anybody it's felt like I was having... in order for them to understand what I was asking for us trying to educate about myself and think what it means. I am name ? And here's what's being queer means and how it would impact why and what to do certain things, and here's the awful experience with the healthcare system is someone who is nonbinary.

I was spending time explaining who I am as a person because so many people were really nice. I don't mean this in a bad way, they were white women, cis gendered women who had no frame of reference for my experiences.

So exhausting that I wanted to feel my own. It felt like it was taking up all of my energy. I was going to them for help and incentive and begin to help me I was trying to be like "OK, let me give you native Hawaiian 101..."

**MAREN WOODS:**

You have to educate them on all of your intersecting identities and what is meant to you and navigating your experience, right? How daunting that must have been and the difference it would have made if the program, the women were interacting with had a body of knowledge and approach. And/or where you were going someplace where you were reflected. Right? Where you were seen in this way that Bree was talking about.

**AMANDA WATSON:**

I think there is this piece to about... I'm not going to lie, there was some shady comments made. One time I had on a T-shirt honoring our sisters for missing and murdered Indigenous women and two spirited. Another person I was talking to rolled their eyes when they saw and I explained.

There were some not ideal stuff that happened and I think it was the education piece and those kind of more blunt and upfront comments and then other more subtle things and feeling like there's no place to go for someone to talk to who would do something about it. There is no accountability for any of it.

It seemed easier to just disconnect my losses. That I think for me was one of the least helpful parts of trying to seek support, was just nobody understanding where I was coming from with things. There is no path forward. If I am having to educate folks how can I open up about "OK, what you said was wildly offensive"? It was a mess.

**MAREN WOODS:**

There wasn't a place for you to go and process that experience. That makes sense. Elena or Bree, how about you?

**BREE ADAMS BILL:**

I can say something. I work in the program in our town and I know that we are so nice and I wouldn't be here today without you all advocates. It is so hard to say which is just that... I didn't need support groups all of the time and that was what was always offered to me.

I needed real help with my kids and I work nights and time, I needed food. I needed things that were the basic necessities. Needed help, because I worked nights I was wondering if you could all put together with other people like me and we could swap, I could watch their kids, you know?

I was looking for that kind of help and would also message other people like me, people who could help each other. You know, we need you too!

**MAREN WOODS:**

I appreciate you sharing that because it is one of our core aspects of programming and it meets the needs for some people but not for everybody. I recognize when you are single parenting, single caregivers for children so I really appreciate you sharing that.

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

I agree with what bree said, the support group wasn't really what I need it either, especially when obviously the assault part was bad but I think it was almost just as bad or in a different way kind of bad, the way it went down at the hospital. The bill and everything like that, that was trauma in the same kind of way. You can't really talk about that in a support group or it just didn't feel relevant. I didn't want to like get help on that, for my emotions because I think my emotions were right on that fact and I think I wanted or still want to do something about that. I didn't really feel like there were any ways into that that I could find for myself or that were, that anyone told me about in the program or even help me brainstorm.

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Even though I spend a lot of times, what I want to do is meet up with other people or connect with them somehow and make a change. I don't know if we could write an article or talk to her legislator, there is more power I think if we were to all talk together about what happened to us and like it might be the lot that you are not supposed to get a bill but people still do. I think if we could just talk about that, I don't know, as like a collective or a group that people would take it more seriously. I think I want to do that kind of work that I haven't been able to get involved with.

**MAREN WOODS:**

I love your thinking, I love the way you are going and if Our Town's Advocacy program had said "LA now this has had -- Elena this is happened to people. Do you want to participate?". Is that something you would have been interested in?

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

Yes. Maren Mike --

**MAREN WOODS:**

Bree you were needed support for life, everyday life getting through managing your kids. Managing schedules and all of that, do you have thoughts and ideas about like how could Our Town's Advocacy be, what are your ideas for how that could have happened or we could play catalyst role to getting other people like you connected together so you can create those support networks. It's not a support group but is just like support for life (Laughs).

**BREE ADAMS BILL:**

I wanted help but I also wanted to give my help. I could help to and so, I wanted to be able to give back and I couldn't always go to like the action things. I wanted to be invited but because of my work schedule, there are other ways I could give back and even support other people that wanted to take action like Elena was



saying and like you were saying Maren. I could support others that wanted to take it into action, I wanted specific help but I wanted to give it to! I even asked if I could volunteer with you all but I have to wait like a year or something like that so?

**MAREN WOODS:**

You would have been willing to start volunteering right away and would have precipitated? That's my -- participate?.

**BREE ADAMS BILL:**

My kids go to school during the day, I thought I could come in or babysit. At the shelter I could do a babysitting thing going so that other women and survivors could do something. I would babysit just so they can get time away from their kids. Maren Woods I'm so glad you raise that.

Amanda, in terms of thinking about your situation where you were in this role - the exhausting role of not only needing to educate but to manage overly racist comments towards you. Queer phobic comments towards you, what are your ideas or what would you like to be involved when-- it hidden to see a change?

**AMANDA WATSON:**

I feel like part of it is, even when I think about the fact that you are asking that question right now Maren. Is one of the first times that anyone I have ever interacted with, since I first started trying to seek support - that anyone has asked that. I feel like it is a piece of needing to make all of what I was talking about visible. I know it is not just me. I am light-skinned so I know that I pass and experience less blatant racism than a lot of other folks. Depending on how I am physically presenting in a day, I might be able to pass as straight or cisgender and I have a lot of privilege, that was still my experience so I feel like there is this piece of it needing to find ways to make all of those experiences visible. Whether it is

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doing more focus groups that are specifically asking people about their experiences and figuring out what are the path to change things.

I think it's not just about doing a one-off training and a cultural competence training and then check the box left my. I feel like having this more sustained ongoing conversation ? (Laughs), It could be a reciprocal relationship between the advocacy program for example. There are other places I have gone through like the native center in town. I feel like some of it isn't -- is in making it visible and figuring out what changes would be most helpful.

**MAREN WOODS:**

It can't be on one person's shoulders, right? It is a reciprocal growing evolution. OK, I'm going to bring us to a close in our focus group. I could keep going because this has been so enriching and engaging! I just want to highlight, you are all going to go off into breakout groups here in a minute now to process and debrief a little bit about what you learn. I hope that you can see, in 19 1/2 minutes what rich information we received from the participants of this focus group. In terms of the hook for them, what was important to them, what they wanted to contribute to, what they wanted to offer?

As an advocate, working at Our Town's Advocacy program, I am thrilled (Laughs) Four 19 1/2 minutes of my time to of gotten all of these ideas and take them back to my program to figure out how we can be responsive to what we just learned about and how we can carve out programming that is responsive and centers on what we learn here with the participants.

So, Bree do you want to set us up for the breakout?

**BREE ADAMS BILL:**

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Yeah, we will be going to breakouts now. We will be in our breakouts for about 25 minutes or so, 25 or 30 minutes. To debrief, as Maren had said we would debrief. You will also be able to hear about some specific thick rural advice is-- advocacy programs. About experiences and changes they made as a result of focus groups.

In a moment, we will go off in the breakout and we will come back together in this large room to just close out our time together today. Then, that's it! In just a moment, you will click on that joint button, please. You will see a pop up and take you into some breakouts with us.

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

Will give people a bit more time if they are joining. That looks like everyone. All right! I am Elena, now that we are in a small group. It is a little bit more casual, a little more personal, so I'm happy to see you all here. My pronouns are she and her and I will try to guide us.

It looks like maybe our interpreter cannot hear me.

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

Do you want to work with her to maybe dial in?

Can anyone confirm if captions are visible?

**SPEAKER:**

I cannot see any captions.

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

A captioner gave us a link in a chat and if you open that it will give us real-time captioning. Thank you for that. Sometimes there is an issue with the breakout room, I appreciate that Alana thank you.

So, if Jennifer is still? Are you able to hear me now? OK, that is great! Thank you. So, we will continue. Thank you for your patience everyone.

So, we want to start with taking a moment to debrief that focus group demonstration. You were part of it and you witnessed and try to think if we were the program that was hosting that focus group or who was absorbing or reading the summary of it. -- Observing. Think about the themes you could pull out, and what came out and what the participants spoke about. What themes did you notice? Did anyone want to start sharing?

**COMMENT FROM FLOOR:**

I can share something. Hi, I am a Naysayer in. I should put my pronouns on that little title but they are she or they. I will share that to me it seems like folks needed tangible support. I'm grateful for the emotional support but where is the childcare? Where is the help for who is meant to call the hospital and say "why are you sending my home girl built?" Where is the emotional support? --bill. Funding this and flooding that, how do we get people more tangible support while I guess honoring the tape of (indiscernible) and such.

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

That is a really good point. Anyone else have any other themes that you have noticed of what's out come about this?

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**SPEAKER:**

Hi Brian, I am from DeafHope. I pronounce are he/him. I appreciated learning but the focus groups. I did notice in the discussion that there was a lot of discussion about the system. The hospital, if I should contact the police, the courts.

Instead of just assuming that it's the only way. Maybe survivors don't feel comfortable or feel safe because of that systemic oppression based on their marginalized identities. Being trans, a woman, disabilities, person of color, all of those.

The stories about and involving the medical industrial complex, that experience of them taking advantage of that and they are billing me for service, it feels like it's not right. Even though they claim to provide care and services but the survivors experience could ? their experience could result in being more hurt because of that.

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

Thank you Brian, I think you articulated really well and a lot of what I heard overlapping from what I share and from what my colleague shared in their roles too. The issues of approaching the institutions and how that interaction went but also how they felt maybe a little powerless or hopeless to change those institutions.

That I'm just supposed to accept that this is a problem and don't see any pathways and for engaging with other people or my community about how to make that difference.

Anyone else? Any themes or something that stuck out to you about the focus group?

**SPEAKER:**

I can talk about something. I noticed in the beginning of this question that was asked and talked about, a lot of ? or all of that I believe talked about some kind of experience they had about learning their experience connects to some type of abuse in some way.

I feel like the education and awareness of the communities especially in rural communities can be a big deal and really helpful getting survival for those experiences into pathways.

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

That's a good observation, thank you Erin. Any other thoughts?

Great, thanks for that. We will turn to our next bit here. I am going to Amanda who is also representing someone else in this breakout room. Someday I hope you all can hear from Amanda herself because they are wonderful but they will be speaking on behalf of a program that we have worked with who conducted focus groups as a part of a larger project we have consent from this program to speak about the experience and Amanda will go into more detail about the barriers and what they can change.

That's good to be a jumping point for our next part to engage with the specific group with what the focus group looked like to be able to have more conversation.

**AMANDA WATSON:**

Thank you. I am here speaking on behalf of a program called the wellspring which is located in rural Louisiana. They are an agency that serves a 13 parishes or counties is what they are called in other states.

They provide a really wide range of services from a shelter, legal advocacy, assistance in navigating healthcare, law enforcement. They do some really phenomenal work and I am sad that you only get to hear about them through me today because they do some really great stuff.

So, we had the opportunity to work fairly closely with them over about a year and 1/2 long. From 2020 through middle of 2021 to do a larger organizational assessment where they wanted to figure out where might they as an advocacy program inadvertently have gaps for survivors.

Where survivors were coming to them and to support and the program wasn't meeting the needs of survivors. One of the activities that they did as a part of that larger process was doing focus groups with survivors. It was the first time that their program had ever done focus groups.

It was a new experience, it was a little intimidating for a number of reasons. Everything ranging from "oh, what if we can't get people to show up?" It was also during a pandemic. (Laughs). They were hit with multiple tornadoes and flooding and natural disasters that were making everything much more complicated as well.

So there were some barriers to trying get to work passed. One advantage of the left I'm thinking about and I want to share today is even thinking about what questions to ask in a survivor focus group because if there is it so much you could ask about.

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You could ask about the specific services that a survivor receives. You can do a whole focus group just on shelter and survivors practicing emergency shelters, all about calling a crisis hotline. They didn't want to get that specific, so they wanted to ask what the survivors experience was with whatever service they accessed.

Really to allow survivors to have the space to talk about what was the most relevant to them. There ended up being really great conversations. There were tangible changes being made to streamline different forms that are used. For example, the high risk assessment forms.

Wellspring was able to convince those so that it was a much simpler process for the survivors. The survivor wasn't being asked question after question after question after question where it turned into a 30 minute long interrogation. As a result of hearing from survivors and trying to figure out how to change the program, developed a new process and they are now at their monthly staff meetings they focus on accessing their program using a specific lens identity.

For example, "May we will look at how a deaf survivor might interact with our agency and where there might be gaps." The solution might be to provide competent and skilled interpretation, as if all of the resources are accessible.

They looked at trans survivors, limited English competency, immigrant survivors. Really taking that close look at being proactive and trying to identify issues rather than reactive after something has gone wrong. Which has allowed them to make some changes in terms of translating forms and policies and materials.

They have been looking at changing the physical layout of their offices to make it more accessible for folks who use mobility aids or wheelchairs. Just thinking



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about all of those things as a part of what came out of doing the survivor focus groups.

One example of a rural program who never done this before and been testing the water and talking more about how to get more involved, or what direction the program might grow in. It was a really good experience for everybody involved.

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

Thanks Amanda. I want to thank them for all the information they shared about their experiences as well because it is something that we hope is useful. You might start to think about a few words to lead a focus group in your community and what barriers there might be.

As you think about this question, I hope it is something you can shared this room and also something you can consult with Amanda about if there's any concerns and how to navigate in that specific way. It is definitely a chance to be interactive on behalf of a program that went through a lot of those concerns and those intimidating factors and a chance to share that and brainstorm together how we might address any of those.

So, if you were to meet a focus group in your community what would intimidate you about that and how much we address that? Does anybody want to share what they are thinking?

**SPEAKER:**

I've got something. How would you handle a focused group if the participants are very intimidated. How would you handle if the participants aren't as willing to voice and get things started?

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

Amanda, I think wellspring was as much worried about questions of development and general facilitation. General anxiety around if it was quiet, if it was awkward, just how you would handle that. Do you remember how they navigated that concern?

**AMANDA WATSON:**

Yes. Also, I apologize if it is loud. I put my headphones in because we had quarter sized hail coming down currently. So, if it is loud that is why.

Erin, wellspring had that exact worry about what happens if we get survivors together and ask the question independent there is silence nobody wants to talk.

There is different strategies that we talked with them. Some of which were that if it feels really quiet, one option is to maybe pause. "Take five or 10 minutes and think to yourself and reflect on whatever the question is. Maybe jot some notes down and then we will come back to share."

Just to give folks a chance to process because some folks don't like to be put on the spot. And that basically when you come back in 10 minutes for the question everybody will be able to respond. That was one possible strategy to help ease some of the awkward silence.

I think other questions... Not other questions, other possibilities that they strategized was that if you ask a question and there is a pin drop silence maybe when we are planning to have some follow-up prompt questions.

For example, if the initial question is "what were your experiences with seeking services from outside institutions? Like healthcare or law enforcement." And

there is no response have a follow-up prompting questions, "how about let's just look at healthcare, did anybody seek medical care after experiencing violence?"

Then that might be more likely to get somebody tighten. Then asking them to share about what it was like. Just having backup questions to help give people more to respond to was something that I think was nice for them and for the facilitators to feel confident.

They have a game plan, backup game plan, and it make it less stressful in the moment to navigate that.

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

There was a great question and some great strategies as well. Anyone else thinking about your community and that might mean your geographical community or your cultural community? If you were in a focus group ?-leading, what type of barriers might you anticipate or what questions might you have right now if you were thinking about doing that? We have a few more minutes to brainstorm, think together and strategize.

Anyone have any questions?

**COMMENT FROM FLOOR:**

I have something that might be helpful. So, I think that something I think about when I think about my agency and just like you know, agencies in general. I think sometimes there is like this trust, just to be real. Sometimes I think about "why might not people not be sharing?" Or different reasons why people are where they are. I think honestly, all agencies don't have these reputations so I wonder if folks have thoughts or feedback on - when getting started and wanting to do a focus group or like wanting to hear from folks who might not want to go view favorably. How do you work through that? Because sometimes that is the most

valuable information, the people who are not just going to tell you "you're doing great!" You know what I mean? That is something I would love some feedback and thoughts on.

**AMANDA WATSON:**

I will say that that is something we talked about with wellspring too. They actually considered, they ended up not doing at this time but I think they want to in the future still do a focus group with people in the community who didn't go to their programs or services because they were like "we know there are people that don't come to us because they don't see us as having a good reputation or because they don't think that we are for them." Just thinking about like, I think that was a helpful reframe mentally as well, to be like "we are actively wanting that critical input, knowing it will help us grow." It allows it to be less scary and less like "oh my gosh, people are going to tell us we suck." (Laughs) It will be hard because as advocates we are trying to do our best and want to do good work. Being very intentional like "how would we publicize that in the community?" Like "have you ever experienced sexual assault or sexual violence and didn't come to wellspring? Would you be willing to have a focus group talking about why not? What would you have been looking for instead? Is it that we did not offer the services you needed? Is it that you thought you might have to deal with racism or trans phobia or able-ism or whatever the case may be." I think that is an interesting thing to consider do with focus groups for survivors, is targeting those pockets of people that might be very critical.

I know another program that did similar focus groups also thought about doing a focus group with people who are asked to leave shelters. Because of whatever reason, just knowing that again, you will get a lot of different feedback from folks that have parted ways with the program under those circumstances. Versus someone who is like "five stars, two thumbs up, glowing reviews, you will change my life!" Again thinking about those groups, it might be harder to hear some of that but I think that doing it intentionally made it feel easier to be like "we really do want to hear this and it took some of the fear out of it", knowing that ultimately it will be really good information to make changes.

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

It looks like (unknown name) shared in the chat that they were thinking about the same length of your question. It is an important one and maybe one we can all relate to in some way of just the fear that our programs are meeting the needs of our community. We don't like to feel that way but in order to move past that and to be able to change and be more accessible, more available and actually responding to what survivors want. We have to hear that feedback, even when it's challenging and so? There are some strategies like what Amanda just stated, that we can think about for how to kind of brace for that or how to seek that out really deliberately as well.

In your community, what you think would support you in being able to lead a focus group? What kind of support might you need, in order to do something like this? This could be conceptual, like big picture "how will we talk about these topics and he support them from community?" Or even in the PowerPoint we talked about some of those logistical pieces. Those are ways that your community can support you in your endeavor of leading a focus group. What can you think of that would be supportive in your community that that you could maybe reach out to or brainstorm?

**AMANDA WATSON:**

I will say, anyone else feel free to chime in. One thing that I know, wellspring talked a lot about how they had to get creative when they started thinking about doing a focus group, I think they mentioned funding restrictions for services and the wellspring realized that to put prescript -- restrictions on if they can compensate survivors for participating in a focus group. They had to think very creatively because all of their funding streams had no compensating survivors, (Laughs), No paying for gift cards, no paying gas cards and things like that. It took them about a month of trying to figure out how they could still compensate survivors. They ended up I think reaching out and pardoning with some local grocery stores and chance to get grocery gift cards and other parts donated so

that they would be able to compensate the survivors but still work around the funding restrictions. I think that is one thing to think about, as folks might consider doing focus groups, who are your community partners and if you run into barriers with funding restrictions or red tape, being willing to get creative about this possible partnership opportunities. You are able to keep moving forward and don't just get stuck with either we don't do the focus group or we asked survivors to do it for free, neither of which are great options.

**ELENA ANDERSON EGGERT:**

Yeah, definitely. I think one of the other places that a community partner could come in handy is when you think about location, as well. Knowing that, we try to place our programs in accessible locations themselves. Particularly, if you were wanting to hear from those who didn't have access to services, does that make sense to get there in your programs building or when you need to partner in some way with another space or community that would feel more safe or accessible for participants. That can be in terms of getting that critical feedback of those who didn't attend but it also might mean, in terms of if you are trying to hear from folks on a certain count. Let's say your program serves multiple counties, could you go to them and partner with someone in that county, as opposed to asking everyone to come to yours? I know many of our rural programs are three, four, five ? I think in terms of wellspring, there is 13 parishes. There are things to think about in terms of location and how you might be able to get support from partners in your community for that as well.

I got the pop-up that we have 30 seconds left so any closing thoughts from anyone? Or from you, Amanda? No? OK. Thanks for engaging in this conversation, and this small group, folks and for sharing your questions and concerns. You can leave the breakout room now and go back to the main room and bree will close this out in the next few minutes here.

**BREE ADAMS BILL:**

I am just taking a second to see if everyone is back, giving it -- a moment for everyone to join further breakout. It looks like we might have everybody back but I am just going to confirm with (unknown name). I see that we do.

No worries, thank you Shelley.

Welcome back everybody, I hope that you were able to have a robust and meaningful debrief. I know that you were able to hear directly about or from summer rule programs that have access to conductive groups and some of their intimidating factors if you will and changes they were able to make. We can't thank you enough for joining us today! And for taking out the time of your busy, busy schedule, conducting social change advocacy yourselves to join us today.

As Elena and Maren has said, we will get -- you will receive a copy of this PowerPoint in the next couple of weeks. You will receive an email with the PowerPoint and links to this recorded -- webinar. We keep an eye out for that and we also encourage you to visit praxis's website, you can see on the screen here there is a couple of links that will guide you directly to the school kids that Maren talked about that goes deeper into the actual logistics on how to conduct focus groups, from recruitment, to implanting, facilitation and even the debrief and analysis of the focus groups summary.

We encourage you to visit there. If you are not already, we hope that you get on our mailing list and you can see that there is the -- [info@praxisinternational.org](mailto:info@praxisinternational.org) and asked to be on our mailing list. You can watch for other news from us and upcoming events of our webinars. We put out world that just (?) that hopefully information that you would find relevant and worthwhile to you.

Praxis International—  
*Rural Violence Against Women*

Again, thank you for your time! We want to hear from you, we want to know how we did. We ask that you fill out the valuation that you will see about your opinions, about this webinar today. We rely on your feedback to inform work and to relevant and relatable. Please fill out the evaluation and critique us. It follows a similar suit that we say with focus groups for survivors, it is really encouraging them to critique even us as advocacy programs. We ask advocates to critique us as practice.

Once again, thank you also much for being here! That was the end of our webinar today. Take care everybody.

**Live Captioning by Ai-Media**