

Why Voluntary Services?

Someday I might grow old and my girls will be able to know where I came from. Hopefully they will say, "My mother taught me;" it still stands up here. I'll never forget it.

Lena Sooktis Northern Cheyenne

Tribal transitional housing programs that are funded by the Office on Violence against Women are required to provide *services that are voluntary*. While this can be a challenge for many programs to understand, it is a critical part of how to work with survivors in a manner that is survivor guided.



The Voluntary Services approach is based on the notion that participation in services should be voluntary and not a condition of housing or receiving other services. This approach emphasizes respectful and welcoming behavior in all aspects of the work. Services are driven by the needs, wants, and individual goals of survivors.

Through providing voluntary services, we must consider sovereignty and what that means to us as indigenous people.

At the very heart of voluntary services is the sovereignty of survivors. Sovereignty refers to Nations but also to the people as well. Native women were considered sovereign and self-governing. Historically, native women had the right to their own children, the right to divorce, and their own possessions. In contrast, European women had no voice in government or military matters. (Artchoker, 2000) As we think about what an indigenous woman's sovereignty is, a survivor holds her own unique path in life; without fear, but with freedom. She owns her own self-governance, maintaining the ability to make her own decisions. She can and is supported to speak freely for herself, in her own way defining her own reality and her own direction in life. (Sacred Circle, 2001)

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When advocating for indigenous women who have experienced domestic violence, sexual violence, dating violence, stalking or sex trafficking, there are five key points an advocate will incorporate into their work.

Five Key Points

1. The survivor's personal sovereignty;
2. Working in a manner that demonstrates respect for her;
3. Creating an environment with dialogue;
4. Open communication takes place; and
5. Working in partnership with the survivor to support the direction the survivor has chosen.

(Ybanez, 2017)

Participant survivors coming to the program arrive with no requirements to engage in the program services we offer. We are not mandating any types of services.

This does not mean we are not offering services, we in fact are offering the full range of services and the approach is that we will build engagement between the program staff and participants, so they realize we are there to be helpful as they envision their lives.

- Creating an environment with dialogue.
- Open communication takes place.
- Working in partnership with the survivor to support the direction the survivor has chosen.

We can work through a full range of trauma services. We work in a way that recognizes that everyone is carrying an impact from the violence they experienced, as well may also be carrying an impact from historical and mutigenerational trauma.

Over successive generations, American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) people have experienced a series of traumatic assaults that have had enduring consequences for families and communities. An extensive literature documents these assaults, which have included community massacres, genocidal policies, pandemics from the introduction of new diseases, forced relocation, forced removal of children through Indian boarding school policies, and prohibition of spiritual and cultural practices (Stannard, 1992) (Thornton, 1987) Although American Indian and Alaska Native peoples have demonstrated enormous resilience in light of such a history, these events have had a toll, not only on individual mental health but also on the healthy functioning of families and AIAN social structures as a whole (Evans-Campbell, 2008).

We will meet each person where they are at that moment. We recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma and how that may impact how they live their lives. We must also recognize how historical and multigenerational trauma is intertwined within this current trauma we are responding to. They are not separate. Our role is to work with this household to help address the trauma that is impacting them in the aftermath of violence.

We work from an approach that recognizes that each person has a right moment for creating change in their lives. We help facilitate a means for each person to engage in examining their lives and creating a new vision living without violence and imaging the possibilities of where they want their life to go. As advocates, we will support them as they walk forward in seeing their possibilities and helping them to recognize the options available to them. We help them to see themselves. Helping the survivor to recognize what their barriers are while building their sense of personal safety.

Adopting a trauma-informed approach is not accomplished through any single particular technique or checklist. It requires constant attention, caring awareness, sensitivity, and possibly a cultural change at an organizational level. (SAMHSA, 2018) These principles may be generalizable across multiple types of settings, although terminology and application may be setting- or sector-specific.

Trauma informed key principles

1. *Safety*
2. *Trustworthiness and transparency*
3. *Peer support*

Safety. When we consider basic needs, safety is a critical part of addressing basic needs. If a person is not safe, it is difficult to imagine a future. Our work must work to strengthen the safety of those we are working with, helping survivors to develop strategies for safety that provides security while also empowering them to make their own choice.

Trustworthiness and transparency. Trauma informed approach that builds trust come about with respect as well as gentleness. It is important for participants to come to a place of feeling trust in those they are working with; transparency is part of that trust. Being transparent can help to provide some predictability, and security in the working relationship.

Peer support. One major impact of abuse comes from isolation. Peer support can provide opportunities to learn from each other while also minimizing the negative impact from isolation.

Collaboration and mutuality. We are working together as a team. An advocate cannot do their work without the relationship and partnership with survivors they are working with. If we see things happening in their lives that that are hard, difficult things in their lives, we work to help the see the signs that we see. We are working to help stabilize

this household, part of our job is to work with the survivors so that they can hear what we have to say.

Empowerment, voice and choice. Central to our work is to strengthen and support the experiences and autonomy of survivors.

Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues. All issues around culture, historical experiences/historical contexts, and gender issues are rooted in each person. Our work must be rooted in it as well to work holistically with survivors.

The services that we offer are not forced on anyone. The process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights comes from survivor sovereignty, survivor autonomy..

What kinds of program activities can be offered to support voluntary participation?

	Activity	Timeline	Who
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			