



Rural Service Providers

Service providers in rural communities may endure professional challenges. They often feel isolated from peers in their field of work, endure significant travel time for collaborative meetings and service provision, and often have limited professional support due to limited funding and minimal staffing.

Challenges for rural service providers

- ▶ Newcomers or individuals who are not representative of the rural community population may experience isolation or feelings of unwelcome where they are providing services.
- ▶ Many research based programs originate from urban program models.
- ▶ Main office locations may be located far from the rural service area(s) making accessibility to the rural community challenging.
- ▶ Outreach office locations may be located in remote, isolated areas within the rural community making service provider and survivor safety difficult to maintain.
- ▶ The effects of persistent poverty and unemployment increase provider case loads. Survivors may have limited access to their own resources and rely heavily on provider assistance to meet their needs.
- ▶ Service providers often travel long distances to attend meetings, trainings, meet with survivors, and/or to participate in community events.
- ▶ Faith-based organizations often provide programs and services in rural communities. However, in order to access these needed resources, survivors often have to participate in religious activities that may not align with their own beliefs.
- ▶ Cell phone reception and internet access may be unreliable and/or unavailable in rural communities.
- ▶ Reliance on the help of volunteers is crucial. However, it can prove to be challenging because volunteers may have limited training opportunities available to them locally.
- ▶ Dual relationships, as both service providers and community members, mean that service providers are easily recognized in the community. This can create challenges for safety and confidentiality.

What can rural service providers do?

- ▶ Serve as change agents in breaking down barriers, stigmas, and oppressive attitudes experienced by survivors of domestic violence.
- ▶ Ensure that programs are accessible to all members of the community regardless of language, age, status, physical ability, culture, and sexual orientation.

- ▶ Ensure that law makers are aware of gaps in services and what can be done to fill these gaps.
- ▶ Educate system partners that will reach large populations such as schools, churches, hospitals, and non-profit organizations about the dynamics of domestic violence and the need to break down barriers that prevent survivors from seeking help.
- ▶ Coordinate training opportunities located within the rural communities.
- ▶ Organize, recruit, and train volunteers from local organizations that represent populations living within local communities.
- ▶ Utilize public service announcements, letters to the editor, and radio talk shows to promote awareness of services, meetings, and events.
- ▶ Establish a Coordinated Community Response (CCR) to enhance community outreach, advocacy, program planning, and policy change. The CCR model builds on community strengths in order to address challenges to preventing violence against women. For more information on CCRs see *A Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence* located at <http://files.praxisinternational.org/ccrdv.pdf>

In order to ensure the delivery of competent and accessible services to all members of the community, rural service providers must be keenly aware of community specific trends, strengths, and barriers for survivors seeking safety. Understanding these aspects of rural communities will assist service providers in addressing barriers for survivors of domestic violence and increasing program success in rural communities.

Resources:

Factors that Impact Service Delivery to Individuals Living with HIV/AIDS in Rural Northeastern Texas, Wilma Cordova, H. Stephen Cooper, and Freddie L. Avant. *Contemporary Rural Social Work*, Vol. 3, 2011.

Social Work In A Very Rural Place: A Study of Practitioners in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Paul Force and Emery Mackie. *Contemporary Rural Social Work*, Vol. 4, 2012.

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