

The Power of Partnership

Strategic Restructuring Among Domestic Violence Organizations



Executive Summary

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Dear Colleague,

In 2009, as the domestic violence field in California was confronted by the very real possibility of permanent state budget cuts, Blue Shield Against Violence (BSAV) started on a learning journey to explore how we could continue to support strong partnerships across the field. In an environment and at a time when our grantees were being asked to do more with fewer resources, we asked our current partners how they could work together in different ways and bring new stakeholders into the field.

Guided by the deep knowledge, passion and commitment of our domestic violence grantees, we are pleased to share these four case studies with lessons from recent mergers and restructuring occurring within the domestic violence field. La Piana Consulting has been at the forefront of providing important research and tools on restructuring and collaboration to a range of nonprofit organizations. Based on the actual experiences of domestic violence organizations across the state and beyond, this report shares several important lessons for organizations considering future collaborative options.

We still have much to learn about the long-term sustainability of the domestic violence field. In this ongoing time of scarce resources and immense need, we are all striving to increase the impact of our efforts. We hope that you will find these stories useful and encourage you to share them and add your own stories and lessons.

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Long", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Peter Long

President and CEO

Blue Shield of California Foundation

Introduction

California's domestic violence organizations have long engaged in cooperative relationships to improve and coordinate services. At the same time, more integrative forms of collaboration, or *strategic restructuring*—such as joint programs, shared administrative services, or merger—are still rare in the domestic violence field.¹

This is not for lack of interest. There appears to be growing awareness among domestic violence organizations about the power of integrative partnerships. However, one of the barriers they face in exploring such opportunities is the dearth of information from the field on how strategic restructuring has enhanced the effectiveness of organizations like their own.

The Power of Partnership addresses this need by featuring four case studies showing how integrative forms of collaboration have enabled domestic violence organizations—and their partners—to capitalize on their strengths, develop new solutions, and more effectively serve the community.

Profiled Partnerships

This document includes two case studies featuring Blue Shield of California Foundation (BSCF) grantees and two drawn from outside California:

- **The Community Advocacy Program**, a program of Boston's Center for Community Health Education Research and Service, Inc., supports on-site Family Advocates at five partner community health centers throughout the Dorchester area
- **The East Los Angeles Women's Center** and the Los Angeles County and University of Southern California (LAC+USC) Medical Center's Violence Intervention Program work together to provide access to domestic violence advocacy and services to survivors coming into the Medical Center hospital ER
- **The Domestic Violence and Child Advocacy Center**, a merger of the Domestic Violence Center of Greater Cleveland and the Bellflower Center for Prevention of Child Abuse, offers family violence prevention, treatment, and advocacy services
- **STAND! for Families Free of Violence**, a merger of STAND! Against Domestic Violence and the Family Stress Center in Contra Costa County, provides a single point of entry to a range of services that had once been accessed and provided separately

Two of these cases bring together domestic violence advocates with community health centers, and two share a focus on strategic restructuring between domestic violence and child welfare organizations. This grouping offers an opportunity to lift up the success these organizations have created in two service areas by using integrative partnerships while reflecting on the lessons and key takeaways that are applicable to partnerships in various other areas of work.

¹ See Blue Shield of California Foundation website at www.blueshieldcafoundation.org for the report [Partnerships in the Domestic Violence Field](#)

Key Characteristics

Case Study	Motivation for Partnership	Elements of Success	Challenges	Future Plans
Community Advocacy Program	Expand access to advocacy services for more domestic violence survivors	Building on the common interests of an established group of cross-sector partners Leveraging proven advocacy capacity	Balancing different cultures of service delivery Maintaining momentum and keeping partners engaged, even as staff/leadership turnover occurs	Use best practices in screening and assessment to create a standard for all partner health centers Expand to more health centers
East Los Angeles Women's Center and LAC+USC Medical Center Violence Intervention Program	Ensure access to advocacy services for more domestic violence survivors	Capitalizing on existing 24-hour response capacity and cultural competency Deepening an existing referral relationship into new partnership opportunities	Building out domestic violence capacity on top of existing sexual abuse hotline infrastructure Educating medical staff about referring patients to advocates	Develop the relationship with the Medical Center to provide training of medical staff in effective screening and assessment
The Domestic Violence and Child Advocacy Center	Achieve synergies between domestic violence and child welfare advocacy	Co-creating a compelling vision of integrated services Receiving support from a funder-led initiative providing education and consulting	Adopting a broader social justice lens and systems thinking Working through the discomfort and uncertainty of a merger process	Take a lead role in advancing the agenda to build cross-discipline relationships for a more integrated approach to family violence
STAND! For Families Free of Violence	Create a more holistic approach to serving those affected by domestic violence and child abuse	Being open to a broader view of service Maintaining a high level of trust, as modeled by leadership from both organizations	Integrating two different organizational cultures Integrating human resources, technology, and other operational systems	Reinvent the organization's service delivery model and structure to support an integrated approach to care

Positive Results

Clients get improved access to resources

Partnerships bring together the best of both worlds to better meet clients' needs.

Leveraging the accessibility of the health center and the expertise and cultural competency of domestic violence advocates opens up a new channel through which domestic violence survivors can obtain both immediate medical care and other supportive services and resources.

Integrating services for survivors of domestic violence and child abuse means that families in crisis no longer have to shop for help among multiple agencies, but can go to one place equipped to provide a seamless response.

Partnering can be pioneering

Innovation takes risk, but can position you as a leader in serving the community.

As health care reform efforts begin to pave the way for a more integrated approach to physical and mental health and wellbeing, partnerships among domestic violence advocates and primary care providers offer opportunities to strengthen the work of both on behalf of survivors. Those organizations already building these bridges are creating models that others will follow.

Despite the growing recognition of family violence dynamics and the efforts of domestic violence organizations and child welfare agencies to seek common ground, few have ventured as far as developing integrated partnerships. Adopting a more inclusive mission has enabled these few to be more effective voices for ending violence in their communities.

Closing

As the challenges facing California's domestic violence organizations continue to intensify, the ability to respond with proactive strategies becomes ever more imperative. These four cases demonstrate how the range of options available through strategic restructuring offers unique opportunities to improve services, to gain a stronger advocacy voice, to enhance efficient and effective operations and sustainability, and to ultimately achieve greater impact.

As organizations move beyond informal collaboration to embrace more integrated partnerships, this may mean trying and failing, requiring adjustments to achieve desired results—but it can also mean being a pioneer and leading the field in a new and promising direction. This ability to create new solutions is at the heart of the *why* of collaboration.

Resources

Successful partnerships are motivated by a clear *purpose*; developed through a thoughtful *process*; and put into effect with well-supported *implementation*. The list of resources below will provide more information about developing collaborative strategies for your organization.

[Partnerships in the Domestic Violence Field](#), research and observations on collaboration among domestic violence organizations. (Blue Shield of California Foundation, Blue Shield Against Violence, 2011) Available online at www.blueshieldcafoundation.org.

[Beyond Collaboration: Strategic Restructuring of Nonprofit Organizations](#), a review of the trend toward increasing partnering among nonprofit organizations. By David La Piana. (The James Irvine Foundation and the National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 2000) Available online at www.lapiana.org.

Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining and Enjoying the Journey, a practical, step-by-step handbook to help keep collaborative efforts on track. By Karen Ray and Michael Winer. (Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 2000).

The Nonprofit Mergers Workbook Part I: The Leader's Guide to Considering, Negotiating, and Executing a Merger, offering clear, usable information for nonprofit management and boards as they consider merger. By David La Piana, with Robert Harrington. (Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 2000).

The Nonprofit Mergers Workbook Part II: Unifying the Organization after a Merger, a workbook addressing how to effectively integrate organizations that have merged. By La Piana Associates. (Fieldstone Alliance, 2004).

[The Collaboration Prize Database](#), a searchable database of nonprofit organizations that were nominated for the Collaboration Prize. It includes examples of formal collaboration, partnership, alliance, joint programming, administrative consolidation, and merger. Available online at www.thecollaborationprize.org.