

Excerpted* from
**Collaborative Response to
Crime Victims in Urban Areas:**
Final Evaluation Report

Submitted to Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center by Dana D. DeHart, Ph.D.

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*full report on multi-site evaluation available on request from esther.giller@sidran.org.

INTRODUCTION

Although a significant number of crime victims seek post-crime support from members of the faith community, faith leaders and congregants may feel unsure of their abilities or uneducated regarding resources to assist crime victims. Funded through the United States Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), the *Collaborative Response to Crime Victims in Urban Areas* project was intended to enhance support for victims of crime by linking faith-based organizations and victim assistance programs in five high-crime, urban neighborhoods.

The Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc. (MCVRC) is a private, nonprofit organization whose mission is to ensure that victims of violent crime receive justice and are treated with dignity and compassion through comprehensive victims' rights and services. Founded a quarter century ago, MCVRC was selected as a pass-through agency to direct the project based on expertise in grassroots organizing, knowledge of crime victimization, and credibility with both victim-service and faith-based organizations. In this role, MCVRC would oversee administrative and programmatic functions of project sites via a cooperative agreement with OVC. MCVRC selected five existing agencies from a field of 55 applicants to serve as lead agencies for the project:

- STAND! Against Domestic Violence (STAND!) in Richmond, CA, is a community-based nonprofit agency dedicated to serving victims of domestic violence in Contra Costa County, a large county north of San Francisco.
- Based in Baltimore, MD, the Sidran Institute, Inc. (Sidran) is a nationally focused nonprofit organization devoted to helping people who have experienced traumatic life events.
- The St. Paul Area Council of Churches (SPACC) is an ecumenical and interfaith organization in St. Paul, MN, representing 168 congregations from 23 different denominations, dedicated to justice and anti-racism for betterment of St. Paul communities.
- The Anti-Violence Partnership (AVP) of Philadelphia, PA, began in 1980 as a victim assistance program serving family members of homicide victims and evolved to address the entire cycle of violence and violence prevention.
- The Interdenominational Ministers Fellowship (IMF) includes more than 40 predominantly African American Christian congregations and 10 community-based organizations joined to fight social injustices in Nashville, TN.

Thus, lead agencies included two victim-service organizations, two faith-based organizations, and one organization specializing in mental health issues. With guidance from MCVRC, these lead agencies were charged with linking victim assistance programs and faith communities in five neighborhoods. This report summarizes evaluation methods as well as national and site-specific findings.

EVALUATION METHODS

The *Collaborative Response* project involved five sites, each with some commonalities as well as unique community demographics, politics, resources, and service needs. The evaluation blended site-specific and cross-site measurement to allow both broad general inferences and more specific conclusions about each of the five communities.

Basic components of evaluation included review of project timelines and progress reports, examination of evaluations from project trainings and advisory committee meetings, documentation of number and nature of collaborative partnerships, and on-site interviews with over 50 staff members and participants from across the five sites.¹ Staff interviews covered a range of basic issues including strategic plans, implementation processes, technical assistance issues, perceived outcomes, and sustainability at each site. The remainder of prospective interviewees were selected by site staff with input from the evaluator in order to achieve a range of demographic and disciplinary perspectives at each site. These interviews (prompts in Appendix A) addressed issues such as perceived impact of the project, nature and strength of interagency relationships, lessons and barriers, and ongoing potential of project activities. Interview transcripts were coded and analyzed using qualitative software and a grounded-theory approach for identification of major themes within and across the five project sites.

FINDINGS

Site-Specific Activities



Sidran Institute, Inc.—Baltimore, MD

The Sidran Institute, Inc., a nationally focused nonprofit agency specializing in trauma issues, utilized a community-driven approach to bring faith-based and secular service providers and the community at-large together for the well-being of crime victims. The initiative emphasized that because physical, emotional, social, and spiritual effects of trauma are complex, healing must occur in a connected community. Individual meetings were held with a diverse group of stakeholders in order to nurture one-on-one relationships, build trust, and cultivate interest in the initiative’s vision. Each meeting opened doors to new contacts via a “snowball” approach to networking. Sidran then convened small homogenous groups of stakeholders to participate in focus groups or discussions on issues of common interest. Sidran intentionally kept groups for faith-based versus secular providers separate to provide for open discussion of concerns and allow opportunity to establish common goals. Principles derived from Sidran’s Risking Connection® curriculum were a cornerstone of the initiative, teaching faith-based and secular service providers to work in collaboration with survivors and with each other to provide trauma-sensitive services. By utilizing representatives from the participating organizations as presenters in these and related cross-trainings on topics of common interest, the statement was made that much expertise lies within both faith and secular communities. Finally, a diverse group of clergy, faith-based service providers, government agencies, nonprofits of all sizes, and grassroots organizations reached a consensus on shared values and evolved into a 42-person Leadership Council. The Leadership Council is responsible for the functioning of the initiative beyond the federal funding period.

Highlights

Sidran’s Risking Connection® trainings, along with other project trainings, were used to help faith-based and secular providers gain understanding of the effects of crime on victims, the role that spirituality can play in their healing, and how providers can make more successful cross-referrals to address victims’ needs holistically. An important component of the training is the philosophy that all persons working in the community are providers, and that faith leaders

provide a spiritual service that complements the more traditional human services of secular providers. The trainings helped providers from diverse backgrounds establish a common language, shared vision, and mutual trust to further future work together.

It was evident in the trainings that people started with separate languages and then began to rely on their overlapping languages. People made an effort to be inclusive in listening and speaking. They were engaging each other in their differences (Community organizer).

This series of trainings included those specifically for faith-based providers, for secular providers, combined faith-secular trainings, and even trainings co-sponsored by the Baltimore Departments of Health and Social Services for selected social-service staff.

In addition to Risking Connection[®], the initiative made use of activities such as community tours of the target area, focus groups, site visits, presentations at staff meetings, dialogue sessions on common issues, and panel discussions. Several networking sessions were held for both faith-based and secular collaborators; these sessions included an educational component as well as opportunity for attendees to “profile” themselves and distribute business cards or organizational literature.

After the neighborhood tours, people would sit down and talk amongst themselves. It seemed like each meeting that we had, people would network with one another after the meeting. You know that you have a good meeting when the meeting is over and people don't leave. There was a lot of that (Community organizer).

The networking forums became a key in developing an effective referral network that would be more personalized for the victim, in that the referring agent would have greater trust that the person being referred would be treated well. Further, faith-based and secular roundtables met regularly to examine how providers could address the needs of victims, to reach consensus on core values, and to develop a strategic framework on how to function with other service providers as “equally valid partners in the process of healing.” Sidran also secured additional funding and conducted groundwork to encourage houses of worship, hospitals, clinics, and counseling centers to hire parish nurses and pastoral counselors, as these professionals were viewed as a critical link between the faith-based and secular providers in better serving victims.

Finally, through the initiative, Sidran provided technical assistance to collaborating organizations on resource and partnership development, program planning, organizational development, sustainability, and collaborative service delivery. This resulted in substantial partnerships that addressed service gaps in East Baltimore, including encouragement for the development of a new faith-based service and shelter for abused women and children.

Beyond key project activities, Sidran also engaged in presentations and representation at community meetings and events. Presentations were made at the state victim assistance academy, at a local community college, and to the domestic violence coordinating council. Project products included a memorandum of understanding with the state attorney's office and a hard-copy and CD-ROM resource directory for providers, as well as project-related brochures and information packets.

Sustainability

Sidran's plans for sustainability involve a project that is community-owned and community-driven, working largely through existing community institutions. An important part of their plan evolved as the project progressed. It involved bringing a self-selected group of collaborators into leadership positions by cultivating an inner core via the Leadership Council. Sidran hired a consultant to serve as a liaison and help the council build an ongoing infrastructure as the federal funding period comes to an end. The consultant will help ensure that the collaborative has a well-defined mission and standards, help develop a new strategy for recruiting and preparing partners, and help develop and sustain skills and processes to achieve goals.

One primary objective was to plan that the project would be ceded to the community. The role of Sidran was to provide support, training, and technical assistance to the people in the community so that those people could then be driving the bus. It has been clear throughout the project that the community would take over. It's like a parent teaching a child to be independent. The collaborative will be a legacy left by Sidran for the community (Community organizer).

Sustainability of the collaborative also may derive from existing funding ties of those in the Leadership Council. A group of the collaborating partners, both clergy and secular leaders, have come together to identify, cultivate, and approach potential funding sources to sustain and build on the accomplishments of the initiative. Partners have also submitted a concept paper for additional federal funding, and five of the collaborating organizations banded together and secured a federal grant. There is also possibility of staffing the collaborative with an internship through one of the partner organizations in conjunction with local institutions of higher education.

The collaborative has also developed a core of strong champions for the project throughout Baltimore, and they are working to develop a documentable model for broader dissemination. Sustainability plans also include a website and listserv to facilitate referrals, as well as periodic events to bring partners together each year. There are hopes for peer victim support groups to be housed in faith and community institutions, and possibly a "one-stop" community-based support center for triage, assessment, and coordinated network service and referral. Currently, three partners involved in the collaborative (one government agency and two churches) are working together to identify funds and locations to bring the support-center idea to fruition.

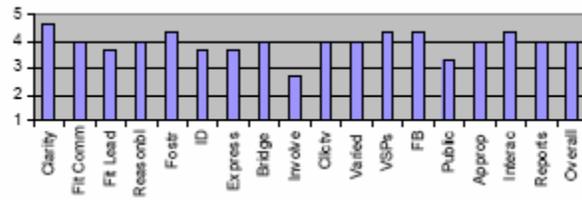
Strengths & Struggles

In-depth evaluations for the Risking Connection[®] trainings were overwhelmingly positive for multiple sessions, and evaluations for other trainings were mostly positive.

As can be seen in Table 3, advisory committee members gave Sidran very high marks for clarity of communication, ability to foster partnerships, building support among secular and faith-based providers, and quality of interaction at advisory meetings (see Appendix B for rating forms). Areas for improvement include involving front-line staff, congregants, and the lay public in project activities. Most remaining rating dimensions received moderate to high scores, with a high overall satisfaction in the project. Many project comments addressed the tenacity of project coordinators in keeping participants involved, and one wonders whether involvement will wane without the dogged efforts of paid Sidran staff members.

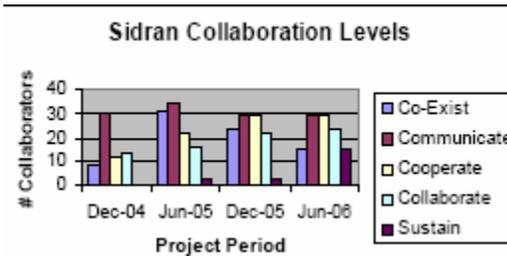
TABLE 3: ADVISORY MEMBER EVALUATIONS

Sidran



Examination of staff ratings of collaborative partners over time (Table 4) indicates that Sidran steadily recruited new partners into the initiative while slowly building a substantial core of sustainable partners (see Appendix C for collaborative levels).

TABLE 4: COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS OVER TIME



These findings are supported by reports from interviewees, who indicate that the project made significant progress toward relationship building, establishing mutual recognition of one another’s contributions to community services, and a strong commitment to continue the initiative beyond the federal funding period. Interviewees felt confident that their investment in the project would be met with a rewarding return over time, and that the collaborative has true potential to improve visibility and access to services for victims of crime and increase consultation and coordination among providers.

Right now, because it’s still in its formation stages, there is more going into than is coming out...The final product that you were initially working to put together—you can’t see that yet. It’s sort of like with children—you start when they are young, and it’s a high investment, but then as they get older, it’s more of a give and take relationship, and you get a lot of your investment back (Faith leader).

Another component of perceived success was the broadened conceptualization of “victim service provider,” through which all partners were given equal footing as providers of important services for victims—including not only traditional victim service agencies but also spiritual leaders and allied professionals.

We redefined “secular” to include not only victim service providers, but also mental health, substance abuse, food stamps, social services, healthcare, and so on. Our motto was “wherever the victims surface” (Community organizer).

An undeniable aspect of project success involved relentless grassroots organizing by two project coordinators with solid ties to the community. Although functioning in the absence of these coordinators will present a true challenge to the initiative, there exist a number of factors that bode well for sustainability of the initiative. First, with encouragement from Sidran staff, partners have already begun meeting in the absence of coordinators. Further, there is the consultant liaison, several partners have already secured additional funding for related activity, and partners demonstrate an exceptional confidence in the collaborative's potential.

I think this is really one of the stronger projects that I have been involved with. I have done a ton of collaborations that feel like they got totally bogged down. This group did seem to set a direction and kind of stay on it. That's pretty critical (Secular provider).