
For Immediate Release

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KCSDV ends OARS Program in continuing effort to save lives

Topeka, KS, 5/4/2012 – After extensive consideration and consultation with our member programs that provide domestic violence and sexual assault advocacy services in local communities, KCSDV will no longer seek to renew its longstanding collaborative project with Kansas SRS. The project was to provide services to domestic violence and sexual assault victims receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Additional and new requirements put forth by the state would render the nationally recognized project, known as OARS, more dangerous for survivors and fundamentally impossible to administer in accordance with our core principles of safety and justice.

Originally added to welfare reform in 1998, the Family Violence Option was designed to reduce barriers for victims of domestic violence applying for cash assistance. By adding this provision, Congress intended that victims of domestic violence could move toward self-sufficiency with the assistance of advocacy programs. The Kansas OARS program was born out of this federal legislation.

This has been a successful program in Kansas for 13 years. During the past two years, however, SRS has repeatedly changed the OARS program, ratcheting up requirements for both survivors and advocates. Throughout this period, KCSDV and community based advocates have complied with every SRS request and change, often aiming at a moving target.

Despite the increased difficulties in administering OARS during the past two years, KCSDV has remained committed to the program because of its proven record of increasing survivor safety and self-sufficiency.

Basic Information about OARS

Today, the OARS program places advocates in local SRS offices. These advocates work with survivors to reduce barriers and increase safety and self-sufficiency. OARS is a voluntary program for families needing assistance from SRS and it has been a way to ensure that survivors on cash assistance have access to the specialized services that will best help them achieve their goals of safety and self-sufficiency. These services are tailored to the individual needs of the survivors.

Unfortunately, SRS has introduced new requirements that dismantle the features that have made OARS so successful in Kansas and as a national model. Referrals into the program by SRS workers are down as SRS goes through repeated internal transformations.

Why the New Provisions are problematic

The new requirements included in the RFP violate the best interests of survivors of sexual and domestic violence. Our commitment is to provide voluntary and confidential services. These additions to the OARS program created through the RFP process also illustrate a fundamental lack of understanding of complex obstacles survivors face.

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Here are some examples of changes to SRS policies and to the OARS program, again, inserted without discussion about the impact they would have on survivors of domestic and sexual violence:

- Requiring mandatory psychological evaluations of certain TANF recipients, which are often used against survivors in other proceedings.
- Requiring advocates to report on information that is typically provided confidentially, thus violating federal confidentiality requirements and putting victims in danger.
- Requiring mandatory therapy without regard to specialized training on the impact of trauma on survivors.
- Requiring mandatory development of a “corrective action plan”, showing a disregard for the myriad of difficulties facing survivors, and insinuating that survivors need to be “corrected” or “fixed.”
- Requiring that 90% of survivors receiving services will be employed at the end of 18 months, ignoring current economic realities and the many barriers faced by survivors. Contrast this requirement with the fact that in 2009, job entry rates for Kansas TANF recipients overall was a mere 16.99 percent.
- Imposing a lifetime limit of 18 months of services, ignoring the reality of survivors’ lives and the fact that domestic violence perpetrators often pursue and sabotage survivors’ lives for years after the relationship has ended and sexual assault can have lifetime impact.

Despite the difficult decision not to renew OARS, KCSDV and programs providing services in local communities remain committed to survivor safety and economic justice. KCSDV and the network of community-based advocacy programs located across the state will continue to provide free, voluntary, confidential and survivor-centered services to all survivors in Kansas, including those previously served through OARS.

OARS has been successful. As one survivor said, “this program saved my life.”

KCSDV and the programs standing with us are saddened about this end to the program on June 30. But, we believe safety requires it.

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Founded in 1982, the purpose of KCSDV is the prevention and elimination of sexual and domestic violence through a statewide network of programs providing support and safety for all victims of sexual and domestic violence and stalking, with primary focus on women and their children; direct services; public awareness and education; advocacy for victims; comprehensive prevention; and, social change efforts. Learn more at www.kcsdv.org.