EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE:
HOW DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMS
PROMOTE SURVIVORS’ SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

In 2015, NRCDV and the Research Consortium on Gender-Based Violence at Michigan State University conducted a systematic review of the empirical evidence for the four most common DV services:

- Emergency Shelters
- Advocacy
- Counseling
- Support Groups

EVIDENCE BEHIND EMERGENCY SHELTER

A review of 17 articles found that, as a result of a shelter stay, survivors across numerous studies reported:

- Feeling safer and having more safety strategies
- Feeling more hopeful
- Knowing more about domestic violence and its effect on themselves and their children
- Higher self-efficacy
- Feeling less isolated
- Fewer trauma-related symptoms

EVIDENCE BEHIND ADVOCACY

A review of 9 articles describing 5 distinct studies found that:

- Broad-based advocacy decreased abuse, increased access to resources, social support, quality of life over two years
- Civil legal advocacy decreases re-abuse, increases wellbeing
- For criminal cases, having an advocate increased prosecution against the perpetrator

“This program saved my life. I had no place to go, no money. I now have a job, apartment, and I am learning how to get over my fears. I don’t have nightmares anymore thanks to counseling.”

Survivor from Washington State
Meeting Survivors Needs Through Non-Residential DV Services (2011)
**EVIDENCE BEHIND COUNSELING**

A review of 6 articles found that counseling:

- Reduces anxiety
- Reduces depression
- Enhances well-being

“Everyone has been very supportive. I never would have come this far emotionally or financially without the assistance I have received from this program. I have grown as a person and I am now strong enough to encourage my old[er] daughters to have healthy relationships.”

Survivor from Massachusetts

*Meeting Survivors Needs Through Non-Residential DV Services (2011)*

**EVIDENCE BEHIND SUPPORT GROUPS**

A review of 6 studies specific to domestic violence, as well as a review of the general support group efficacy literature, found that:

- Extensive evidence that support groups improve psychological well-being across numerous populations
- Similar, positive support for the efficacy of support groups for survivors of IPV:
- Greater sense of belonging and decreased distress; members felt more empowered, more connected, and had coping tools to make the changes in their lives they wanted to make

*In the Meeting Survivors’ Needs Shelter Study (2008), 3,400 survivors from 8 states were asked to describe what they would have done if the shelter had not existed. Ninety-five percent wrote descriptions that were often poignant and extended, which fell into five general categories: being homeless, losing everything (including their children), a desperate action, uncertainty, and continued abuse/risk of death. Combined with the concerns expressed, these responses indicate that survivors do not go to shelters as a first resort.*

**If the Shelter Didn’t Exist…..**

"Be at a homeless shelter or begging friends to stay with them, and putting them at risk of abuse by my ex-boyfriend."

"I’d be sleeping in my car, lose my children and my job."

"Stayed with my abuser and continued to get beat every day."

For additional material, see NRCDV’s DV Evidence Project at [www.dvevidenceproject.org](http://www.dvevidenceproject.org)