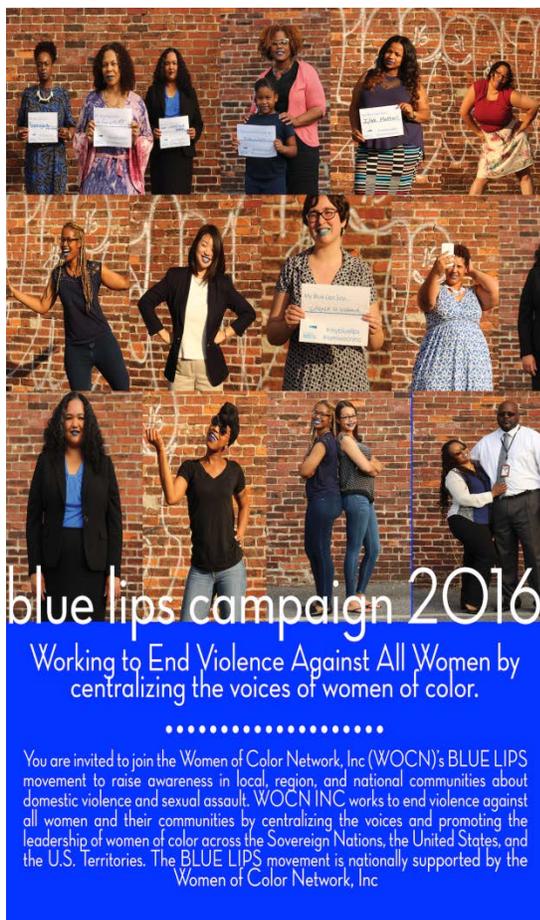


How Women of Color Network, Inc. Practices Survivor-Led Technical Assistance to Respond to Black Women and Girls in Crisis

Studies show that domestic violence is most likely to take place between 6pm and 6am and that every nine seconds, a woman in the U.S. is assaulted or beaten.¹

Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence are often relegated to the shadows, which allow its perpetrators to hide in plain sight. In 85 percent of domestic violence cases, the victims are women.²



The statistics for battered women in the general population are deeply concerning. For women of color, the violence goes beyond the pale. Among African American and other women of African descent in the United States, the numbers paint a picture of disproportionate violence that is as complex and shocking as it is outrageous and frightening.

African American women make up 13 percent of the female population in the United States.³ Yet, it is estimated that 41.2 percent of Black women have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner during their lifetimes.⁴ Just under half of African American women (47.6%) reported sexual violence other than rape.⁵

No woman or child, regardless of her race, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, ability, economic, educational or social status deserves to be abused or killed. These statistics are not meant to ascertain “who has it worse?”

However, they are meant to shed light on a disturbing reality when it comes to Black women’s

¹Do Something.org|11 Facts About Domestic And Dating Violence<https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-domestic-and-dating-violence>

²Do Something.org| 11 Facts About Domestic And Dating Violence <https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-domestic-and-dating-violence>

³Center for American Progress | Fact Sheet: The State of African American Women in the United States

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2013/11/07/79165/fact-sheet-the-state-of-african-american-women-in-the-united-states/>

⁴: National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, United States, 2011. TABLE 7. Lifetime prevalence of intimate partner violence, by race/ethnicity* and sex of victim.

⁵The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Summary Report, https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_report2010-a.pdf

representation across the spectrum of violence against *all* women who suffer from physical gender-based violence.

To help untangle the complicated question of how we interrupt the cycle of gender-based violence against Black women and girls, NBWJI conducted an interview with Women Of Color Network, Inc. (WOCN) team members, **Tonya Lovelace-Davis, WOCN, Inc. CEO; Zoe Flowers, WOCN, Inc. Program Manager; Aleese Moore-Orbih, WOCN, Inc. Systems Training Director;** and **Sumayya Coleman, WOCN, Inc. Leadership Program Director.**

A Survivor-Led Movement

NBWJI: “When did WOCN, Inc. first begin to address violence against women of color?”

Tonya Lovelace-Davis (TLD): WOCN, Inc. spun off about on September 30, 2014 from the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, and has been committed to ending violence against women of color (women of Asian/Pacific Islander, Arab/Middle-Eastern, Black/African American/Caribbean/West Indies, Native/Indigenous, and Hispanic/Latin descent) since 1997. Approximately 60% of those we work with are from African American/African/Black/Afro-Caribbean communities. At the end of the day, the core of what we do is centralized within the context of being providers, and wanting to address a population that is extremely overlooked.

NBWJI: “How did WOCN, Inc. come to partner with the Office of Violence Against Women to help bring attention to an overlooked population?”

TLD: We, at WOCN, Inc. are all survivors. As such, we see broad disparity in services and the manner in which they are provided to African American/African/Black/Afro-Caribbean communities and all communities of color. We wanted to be a part of building a table of services, a consortium of services and of TA provision that would help to reach and wrap around African American/African/Black/Afro-Caribbean communities. We saw the opportunity to partner with Office of Violence Against Women as a way to help build and strengthen that table of TA providers and service provision. We can do that by making diverse approaches more accessible to them and communities that specifically need culturally specific resources.

Aleese Moore-Orbih (AMO): As the WOCN, Inc. Systems Training Director, I will be the lead liaison for a cooperative agreement between WOCN and the Office of Violence Against Women. We have an opportunity to do some specific work with the Black community, and specifically to provide TA. I think it is a chance to bring some of the work that we’ve been doing around systems change and grass roots work to the issues. The Office of Violence Against Women cooperative agreement is an important vehicle for bringing together our leadership and policy work and our coalition-building knowledge.

This is an opportunity to bring all the work that we’ve been doing together to create a broader TA offering. As well we can share our work with other African American/African/Black/Afro-Caribbean grantees [also receiving funding from Office of Violence Against Women] who could

utilize us as a supportive resource. We are also excited to convene an African American/African/Black/Afro-Caribbean Consortium made up of other TA Providers and Partners such as, In Our Own Voices, which serves LGBT people of color and Peaceful Families, which serves African American/African/Black/Afro-Caribbean Muslim communities. Bold Rebirth, another member of the consortium, serves Afro-Caribbean communities. The Jenesse Center provides local culturally specific Domestic Violence services. The Sasha Center provides local culturally specific sexual assault services. Ujima, Inc., a new national African American/African/Black/Afro-Caribbean technical assistance provider housed in the DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence is also a part of that group.

Sumayya Coleman (SC): The specific work that WOCN, Inc. does within the African American/African Diaspora is very special for me. WOCN, Inc. has always been, for our African American/African/Black/Afro-Caribbean women constituents, an organization and project that offer space, language, voice and access. It has been a lifeline for access to resources for this movement for a long time.

From my perspective and hearing from other advocates in this movement, often African American/African Diaspora women's issues get left out. So with this Office of Violence Against Women cooperative agreement, we get to hear our voices in our own language. Now we will have more. With this opportunity, we can ensure and strengthen relevant services specifically for the African American/African/Black/Afro-Caribbean women and survivors. "Culturally, this is a very beautiful and special opportunity for the community of survivors at-large to serve our sisters."

A "Wicked Web"

NBWI: "Will you speak a little bit more about what "systems change" and "grassroots" means in the context of this work?"

AMO: We've been doing work over two years that we refer to as Jagged Justice (JJ).⁶ It's about connecting the dots when it comes to interpersonal violence, state violence, community violence and the violence *within* the life of women of color. It's not just violence *against* women, but violence *within* the lives of Black women. That violence can create or perpetuate individual or interpersonal violence *against them*.

It's a wicked web. We, as Black women, have done an incredible job of mastering survival in and of doing incredible work within that web. Nevertheless, it can be smothering work. I felt that it was our responsibility to figure out how to untangle the web. To figure out how we equip

⁶ **WOCN, Inc. #JaggedJustice Initiative:** The Women of Color Network, Inc. (WOCN, Inc.) posits that women, men and queer people of color, gender non-conforming, gender fluid, cisgender, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, heterosexual people of Asian, African, Latin, Native, and those of Middle-Eastern descent do not get access to pure justice. The purpose of #JaggedJustice is to connect the dots across all forms of violence, to provide a platform for marginalized voices and aspiring allies to be heard, and to seek collective action steps and solutions.

ourselves to do this work in a healthier way. Which, if you take a step back you see as women of color advocates that we are experiencing the same issues the women we advocate for are. We want to support and advocate for those same women who are also experiencing interpersonal violence.

Zoe Flowers (ZF): It was our desire to connect our work from our Jagged Justice initiative to the work of this African American/African/Black/Afro-Caribbean and Office of Violence Against Women cooperative agreement. One of the things you often see when it comes to service provision in Black communities is that the constituents are: 1) unserved, 2) underserved or 3) inadequately served. Sometimes, even organizations that are culturally specific still lack, for various reasons, a holistic approach or a broad-view approach to working within Black communities. It's my hope that we can spend more dedicated time with culturally specific providers and give them the tools to increase their capacity for service provision in those areas.

NBWJI: "You mention the 'holistic approach' which brings to mind that bodily injury is not the only result when it comes to physical battery. Will you speak to how WOCN, Inc. addresses other serious ramifications on a Black woman's health as a result of physical abuse?"

AMO: One of my particular passions is the specific work around understanding the juxtaposition between there being a constant barrage of incidents against Black women, while at the same time they remain invisible. The violence creates and often perpetuates what some say is "a pipeline to prison." However, long before prison there are many stops along the way. Black girls are particularly vulnerable to violence. They can experience risky health behaviors, school drop-out, a criminal record that prevents fair wage employment and, affordable housing, chronic health conditions, lower life potential, and early death.

Black women experience elevated rates of high blood pressure, heart attacks and strokes. Even more disturbing, they experience these illnesses at earlier ages. I believe it is a direct correlation with life stressors. The stress is related to living with the pressure, of carrying historical racial and gender violence. These are all afrocentric issues and we wanted to weave that into our TA approach for our grantees. It is at the core of our philosophy of "connecting the dots" of all the violence and oppression in and against the lives of Black women.

The Silencing Cycle

NBWJI: "As it relates to local and national policy discussions on sexual assault and intimate partner violence, how does WOCN, Inc. help ensure that concerns of Black women and girls are represented?"

AMO: WOCN, Inc. continues to be a part of the leadership table on policy change/reform. For women of color, we can impact the overall policy which impacts the way in which we can do the work better for all survivors. Specifically, our voices and our minds at the policy table make an incredible difference.

TLD: What we know is that survivors of color and other marginalized communities are at greater risk of escalated violence and extreme forms of self-defense. The National Crime Victimization Survey shows that, between 2003 and 2012 at the rate of 4.7 per 1,000 African-Americans had the highest rates of intimate partner violence compared to Whites (3.9 per 1,000) and Hispanics (2.3 per 1,000).⁷ Unfortunately, they are less likely to access, report, and be aware of the services.⁸ Survivors of color often cite the following reasons for not seeking services:

- Distrust of law enforcement, criminal justice system, and social services
- Lack of service providers that look like the survivor or share common experiences
- Lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate services
- Lack of trust based on history of racism and classism in the United States
- Fear that their experience will reflect on or confirm the stereotypes placed on their ethnicity
- Assumptions of providers based on ethnicity.⁹

Despite the fact that Black women are killed at a rate more than twice as high as white women,¹⁰ Black women are also routinely arrested at higher rates for domestic violence, even when they use violence in self-defense and call the police for assistance.¹¹ They are also at risk of violence from police officers when they call for help.¹² These factors create a cycle where women of color seek services much later than other communities.

Our mission is to end violence against all women by centralizing the voices, leadership and healing of women of color. We raise these issues at every table we're invited to. We work with organizations to better address the factors that endanger communities of color.

ZF: I think too, that the way we are shaping the conversation is also by the process of which we do the work- the way we gather information on women of color. We're guided by what we're told. A lot of times, when it comes to communities of color, people come in, they ask us questions, and glean our information. That information may be used in a way that's helpful or it may not be used at all. WOCN, Inc. always goes back to what we're told by survivors.

“We can't work with strangers”

⁷Truman, J. L. & Morgan, R. E. (2014). Nonfatal domestic violence, 2003-2012. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved on September 23, 2015 from <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ndv0312.pdf>

⁸Nnawulezi, N. & Sullivan, C. (2013). Racial Microaggressions within Domestic Violence Shelters. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 40(4), 350-372.

⁹Barriers faced by survivors of color. Oregon Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence (OCADSV). Retrieved on Sept. 23, 2015, from <http://ocadsv.org/resources/topic/communities-color>

¹⁰Violence Policy Center (2016). When men murder women: An analysis of the 2014 homicide data. Pg 6. Washington, D.C. <http://www.vpc.org/studies/wmmw2016.pdf>

¹¹Gross, K. N. (2015). African American women, mass incarceration, and the politics of protection. *Journal of American History*, 102(1), 25-33. Retrieved on September 24, 2015 from <http://jah.oxfordjournals.org/content/102/1/25.full.pdf+html>

¹²Crenshaw, K. & Ritchie, A. J. (2015). African American Policy Forum, Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies. Retrieved on September 23, 2015 from <http://www.aapf.org/sayhernameareport/>

NBWJI: “What are some of the obstacles in doing the work of WOCN, Inc.?”

AMO: Limitations to access and resources for advocacy causes us to lose advocates every day. Whether it’s through burnout, mistreatment in mainline programs or they decide they can’t do the work anymore. It’s our desire to bring them relevant and innovative resources to advocate. We want to provide them with culturally relevant resources and work for equitable services in their communities, as well as, to keep them inspired and help them practice good self-care for sustainability in this work.

TLD: We would like to have more foundations and corporations supporting our work and helping to get the word out beyond the “field.” We hope to have more community-based outreach. There continues to be resistance from mainstream leaders in examining their leadership and in following anti-oppression principles in their work. There is often a disconnect between what is occurring within communities and how these actions impact survivors, recruiting, hiring and retaining diverse leadership within their programs.

NBWJI: “How can organizations more effectively partner to achieve success with African American/African-Diaspora-serving organizations?”

AMO: One of the things that we encourage is for them to do is to recognize their power and the power within our communities. Often, people don’t recognize their power and how it may bring influence to the decision-making table. WOCN, Inc. incorporates training with Aspiring Allies where we talk about the importance of having a practice of inward and outward reflection integrated into their decision-making processes.

When you sit in a place of power, it is important that you have a process by which to evaluate or reflect on who you are and what you bring to the table. That’s not just for popular culture; it’s for anybody in a power seat. Even for advocates of color as they sit across from survivors of color, there is a need for reflection. There needs to be reflection any time in which someone in power is making a decision.

Inward and Outward Reflection is a process utilizing self-reflection to first listen and learn the outward context/environment you are collaborating with and/or serving.

Then, there must be a return to new self-reflection using the newly acquired knowledge. Decision-making that mainly relies on a single individual’s experience is an insufficient method for reaching and resourcing African American/African/Black/Afro-Caribbean communities.

Effective reflection of the environment/context requires having strong relationships with representatives of the communities.

“Building relationships is so key. So many times decisions are made, then communities of color are called in afterward to be briefed on the decisions that were made.” –Zoe Flowers

This is in order to hear and understand their specific and unique knowledge and experiences. We can't work with strangers. So before we can talk about how we can work with people, we need to talk about how we can build relationships with them.

ZF: We also recommend that when people want to work with communities of color that they connect with culturally specific providers--that they don't go into that work alone. They should consult first with the people who already do that work.

It's so important to do the relationship building *at the beginning* of projects. The underserved are not one thing. The African American/African/Black/Afro-Caribbean are diverse communities. We have different ideas about how the work is done, so we want to have diverse tables. We want to have diverse pockets of expertise represented at the table if possible.

NBWJI: "What advice can you give organizations to ensure that all voices are equally powered and equally represented in this work?"

ZF: I would add the importance of using a social justice framework. Many of us at WOCN, Inc. have had the benefit of being exposed to different frameworks. We have the benefit of being rooted in history and using a social justice framework, so it broadens our view of things. One of the things that we find when we are doing training and have conversations across the country, is that many advocates who do this work currently don't have that framework. So WOCN, Inc. thinks it is important to put this social justice framework into the public. This is important to do so that folks will know that the work they're doing has a history behind it.

I would recommend looking into the history not only of this movement but the civil-rights movement, labor party movements, etc.

Via the STOP Toolkit (funded by Office of Violence Against Women and on the WOCN, Inc. website): Since violence does not occur in isolation, we must respond with services and advocacy that reflect integrated and intersectional approaches in order to address diverse, complex circumstances. Too often, organizations work in silos and miss opportunities for connecting issues, resources, and best practices for supporting survivors and mobilizing responses in a holistic fashion.

Survivors' experiences are textured by intersections or overlapping identities – whether it is immigration status, economic need, limited English proficiency, or racism. As a result, services responses that utilize a broad social justice framework can more effectively grasp and address the complex challenges facing survivors from 3-Tier (unserved, underserved and inadequately served) populations.¹³

¹³ STOP Toolkit: Essential Tool 1: source: <http://www.wocninc.org/toolkit/section-ii-7-essential-tools-promising-practices-in-approaches-to-and-frameworks-to-identify-reach-and-resource-underserved-populations/essential-tool-1/>

TLD: It's also important not to view people of African descent (e.g., African American, Black, African, etc.) as domestic communities in which to do missionary work. Organizations should recognize that they have expertise, that they have agency, that they have culture, and that they have *leadership practices* and *leaders*.

We recommend that people working within systems take the time and make the effort to truly embrace the information that has been provided both through evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence. They demonstrate methods that work to truly make change within these systems and thus, increasing access for marginalized communities.

“Everything is better together”

NBWJI: “Speaking to men in particular, what special considerations need to be addressed in order for male advocates of color to be successful in partnering to reduce violence against women in Black communities?”

TLD: Our survival is inextricably tied to men and the survival of Black men. At the same time there are also some accountability factors that we want men to recognize within the field and within our communities. We would like to see men challenge men on men's violence against women and within families and communities. We want them to challenge themselves on their interactions and connections with Black women. We want them to push themselves on sexism and other forms of “isms” that really do shape the way in which they deal with women- both across the gender spectrum and sexuality spectrum.

We want to see men *and women* actually push themselves in the Black community to challenge themselves on biases and “isms.” We very much see our work with men and our work broadly with women as well. There is the very specific work we do with women. Yet, there has to be some accountability and pushing that we seek to do with men on these issues.

“We are not going to do the work that we need to do unless we learn how to do it together.” – Aleese Moore-Orbih

ZF: It would also be great if the men that are already doing the work would lift us up [as women doing the work]. I would like to see the same outreach to us, to ensure that they have our voices at the table.

SC: This is a complex issue. Black women and girls are assaulted, raped and molested by Black men too. We must talk about that. How do we reconcile this fact within the reality of wanting to have our men as husbands and intimate life partners? Still, they must be held accountable for their violence against us. This goes further to supporting us politically, economically, supporting us socially, spiritually, and all of that.

We need to make sure we talk about the complexities when we talk about partnerships. We are looking to one another for some of the same things, but we definitely need to be safe in our relationships with them.

AMO: Everything is better together. We help show Aspiring Allies how to make room for us at the table, how to respect our voices and how to value our strategies and approaches. As we do that for them, we need to do that with men. Often, there is some pre-engagement preparatory work that needs to be done which also needs to be factored in.

We do work with men. We want to work with men. WOCN, Inc. doesn't want to become that which has been an obstacle for us. Namely, we don't want to be the only ones at the table. We don't want to give the perception that *we* are the only ones that know the answers. We don't want to give the impression that nobody *but us* or *women* deserve to be at the table.

To build an inclusive table though, there needs to be accountability. There needs to be some transformative education for those types of results to come about.

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The mission of the Women of Color Network, Inc. (WOCN, Inc.) is to eliminate violence against ALL women and their communities by centralizing the voices and promoting the leadership of women of color across the Sovereign Nations, the United States and U.S. Territories. They were selected by the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) to be the lead African/African American/Black/Afro-Caribbean technical assistance providers to organizations that receive Culturally Specific Services Programming grant funds, and across all OVW grantees.

*WOCN, Inc. can be reached via contact information located at their website:
<http://www.wocninc.org/contact-wocn/>*

The introduction and interview was written and conducted by Ava Montgomery for NBWJI.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2015-TA-AX- K073 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication/ program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.