

# Supporting LGBTQ Survivors of Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**HOW ANTI-VIOLENCE PROGRAMS AROUND  
THE UNITED STATES ARE ADAPTING**





**This report was written by  
Ericka Dixon of the New York City  
Anti-Violence Project.**

#### **NOTE ON DATA COLLECTION**

The information in this report is based on an online survey administered to the member programs of the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs by Ericka Dixon, which accepted responses from April 7, 2020 to April 20, 2020, with further information gathered through follow up interviews with staff from member programs. Seventeen organizations from 14 states responded.

#### **CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS**

**The Montrose Center**  
Houston, TX

**Center on Halstead**  
Chicago, IL

**St. Louis Anti-Violence Project**  
St. Louis, MO

**Rainbow Community Cares**  
Durham, NC

**Diverse & Resilient**  
Milwaukee, WI

**The Network/La Red**  
Boston, MA

**Illinois Accountability Initiative**  
Statewide, Illinois

**Gender Justice Nevada**  
Las Vegas, NV

**Casa Ruby**  
Washington, DC

**The LGBTQ Center Long Beach**  
Long Beach, CA

**Los Angeles LGBT Center**  
Los Angeles, CA

**New York City Anti-Violence Project**  
New York, NY

**Resolve**  
Santa Fe, NM

**Louisiana Department of Health**  
Baton Rouge, LA

**Kansas City Anti-Violence Project**  
Kansas City, KS and MO

**Pride Center of Vermont**  
Burlington, VT

**Fenway Health Violence Recovery Program**  
Boston, MA

The **National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP)** works to prevent, respond to, and end all forms of violence against and within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, (LGBTQ), and HIV-affected communities.

NCAVP is a national coalition of local member programs and affiliate organizations who create systemic and social change. We strive to increase power, safety, and resources through data analysis, policy advocacy, education, and technical assistance.

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# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had unique and devastating impacts on LGBTQ and HIV-affected survivors and anti-violence programs (AVPs) across the United States, since it began in March 2020.

For more than 40 years, AVPs of many different sizes and in many locations across the country have provided comprehensive services, many of them in-person, to LGBTQ and HIV-affected survivors of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and hate violence. These services include individual and group counseling, housing and economic justice advocacy, legal advocacy, HIV and other STI testing, as well as providing a safe and affirming space for LGBTQ and HIV-affected communities to come together and engage in political advocacy, community organizing, and community building.

NCAVP surveyed our member programs to get a more accurate picture of how COVID-19 was affecting advocates, service providers, survivors, and organizations. Seventeen

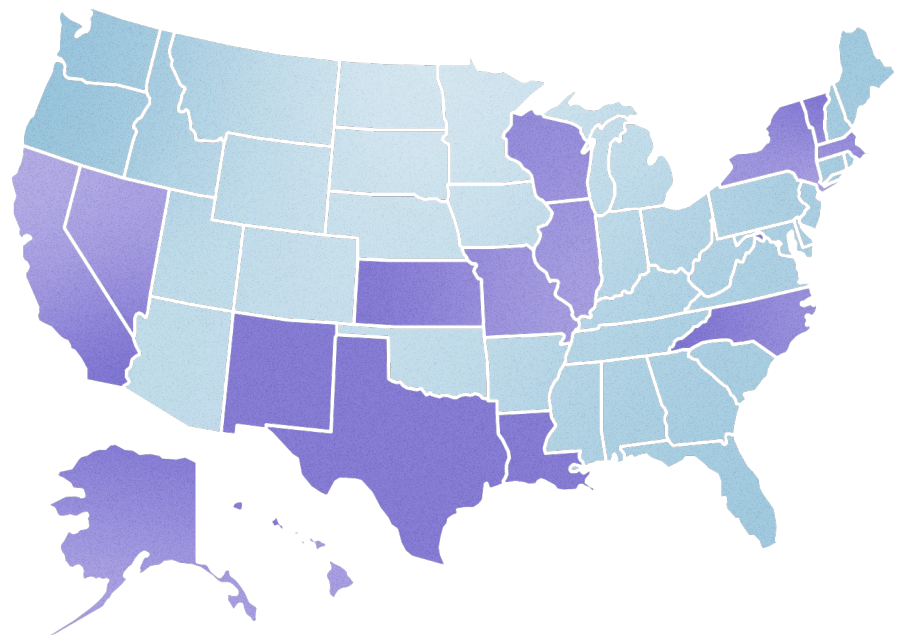
member programs in fourteen states completed the survey, representing urban and suburban areas in the east, south, midwest and west coast. Responses range from organizations that have a large organizational infrastructure of over 100 employees to AVPs with one or two volunteer advocates. This report serves to document the trends in challenges to service provision and the impact of COVID-19 on advocates and survivors, as well as innovative ways that AVPs have responded to the challenges presented by COVID-19. Survey responses were collected in mid-April 2020 and are a snapshot of that moment. We expect that the responses of AVPs have and will continue to shift as different regions of the country see waves of COVID-19 infections and as groups continue to adapt to this new landscape.

## Overview of Survey Respondents

**17** NCAVP member organizations

**13** U.S. states, plus Washington, DC represented

Survey responses range from **organizations with large infrastructure** and over 100 employees to **AVPs with just one or two volunteer advocates**.





## **There are three main findings of our survey, as detailed in this report:**

- COVID-19 has created significant barriers for LGBTQ and HIV-affected survivors to access the services of anti-violence programs.
- Professional advocates employed by AVPs, many of whom are LGBTQ and HIV-affected themselves, are also experiencing barriers to doing their work, including being directly impacted by the pandemic and other associated trauma.
- Organizations that support survivors are experiencing dramatic and sudden budget shortfalls related to the pandemic and resulting economic challenges, and are renegotiating grant contracts and experimenting with online fundraising to replace in-person events.



# COVID-19 Highlights Longstanding Inequity

Prior to COVID-19, LGBTQ and HIV-affected people, particularly Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), queer and transgender people, faced numerous structural barriers and oppression fueled by white supremacy, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and patriarchy, when attempting to access life-saving and life-sustaining services, as well as community.

These impacted people face disproportionately high rates of violence, as well as barriers to safety, support, and services, including discrimination and bias. The pandemic has only exacerbated these conditions in the last few months, with dangerous, even deadly consequences.

Sheltering in place and stay at home orders using the slogan “safe at home” do not take into account the survivors who are now forced to quarantine with a person or people who are causing them harm, including intimate partners, as well as family or roommates engaging in anti-LGBTQ violence. Shelter is often not accessible for LGBTQ people who cannot be “safe at home.” Despite ongoing advocacy, domestic violence shelters often discriminate against LGBTQ people, particularly

survivors who are transgender, non-binary, and men—those who do not fit the heteronormative assumption that intimate partner violence (IPV) survivors are cisgender women being harmed by cisgender men. LGBTQ people face violence, bias, and discrimination from staff and other residents in homeless shelters, and may choose to remain on

the street or in unsafe living situations to avoid shelters and associated violence. In this pandemic, domestic violence and homeless shelters are struggling to meet current and prospective residents’ needs, while also implementing physical distancing. Isolation, increased vulnerability, and lack of access to services, including adequate food and housing, increase violence.

Furthermore, the high rates of criminalization for particularly Black and brown LGBTQ survivors subject them to increased risks of violence and for COVID-19, as they are more likely to be incarcerated, where they face violence and rising COVID-19 infections, isolation, and little to no support.



**LGBTQ and HIV-affected survivors of violence cannot always remain “safe at home” during shelter-in-place orders, but seeking shelter elsewhere poses a serious risk of violence and discrimination as well.**



## SURVEY FINDINGS

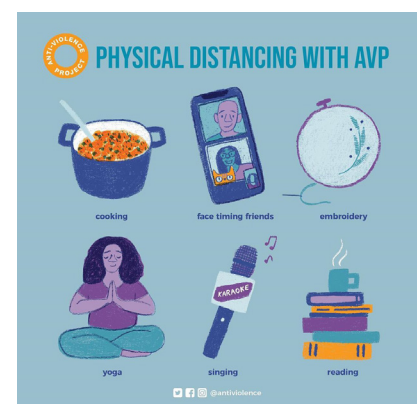
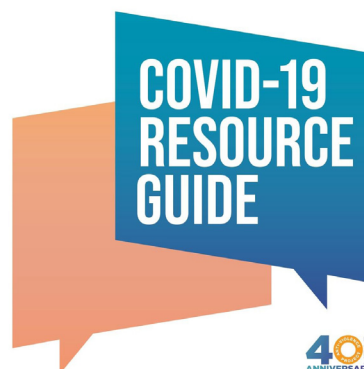
# COVID-19 Creates Significant Barriers for Survivors to Access Services

Every organization surveyed indicated that they have shifted their work to offer many of their services remotely, using online video conferencing and telehealth platforms. The shift to phone and online service provision and support is allowing some survivors to continue to access services, but the mandated shift is also creating barriers for LGBTQ and HIV-affected people who are the most marginalized. Some survivors do not have access to personal WiFi, phones, computers, or tablets. Additionally, survivors who are homeless, those who are forced to quarantine with a person who is causing them harm, or others forced to return to a home of origin where their identities are not affirmed may not have the ability, privacy, or support to safely reach out and engage in services. For survivors with pre-existing conditions and/or disabilities that increase their vulnerability to the virus, leaving home, going for walks, or going to a park for privacy may not be safe or feasible.

Though all groups surveyed said that they have adapted programming, only two of the organizations have been able to continue all of their programs remotely. Some are still figuring out how to adapt some programs, while others indicated that some programs are now on pause because it is not possible to operate remotely:

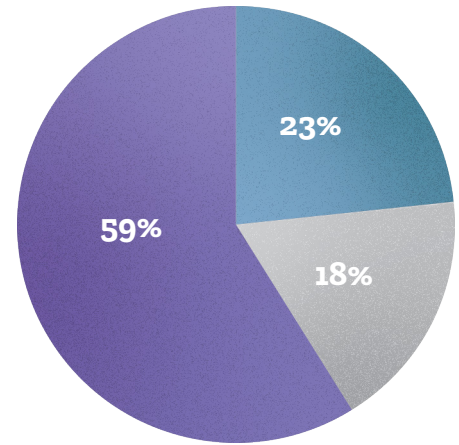
- Four survey respondents indicated they have not been able to shift youth and/or senior programming.
- Four groups are not able to offer support groups, including dialectical behavior therapy groups due to confidentiality and privacy concerns.
- Four groups indicated that they were unable to continue health services including medical accompaniment and HIV testing.

Graphics from the New York City Anti-Violence Project provide one example of how member organizations are providing information to their communities to specifically address the challenges posed by COVID-19.



## Overall Change in Hotline and Warmline Call Volume Since the Beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Ten respondents reported that call volume “increased a little” or “increased significantly”
- Four respondents reported that call volume “decreased a little” or “decreased significantly”
- Three respondents reported that call volume “stayed the same”



Of the 17 organizations who responded and run hotlines or warmlines:

- A majority (58.8%) experienced a decrease in calls from the start of the pandemic in March through April.
- Seven organizations indicated that many of the calls they received were related to escalating intimate partner violence, often requiring rapid responses.
- Many of the groups have seen an increase in youth reaching out for emotional support because they are at home with abusive, anti-LGBTQ parents or guardians.
- In one instance, an organization has seen an increase in hook-up violence, particularly with older gay men, who were targeted for theft or robbery. The same organization also indicated that incidents of hook-up violence may be underreported due to shame and stigma surrounding breaking quarantine and isolation to seek intimacy.

Conducting outreach to survivors who aren't actively reaching out has also been a challenge for advocates during this time. When asked about challenges to meeting clients needs, 10 respondents mentioned an inability to access survivors and assess their needs as a major barrier.

Lastly, many advocates report that helping survivors who are the most impacted by COVID-19 access direct monetary support is critical right now. Gift cards, transportation vouchers or cash can be life-saving for survivors who depended on the gig and informal economies for income, like sex workers who may no longer be able to work outside of the home, and survivors who may be financially dependent on an abusive partner. Some advocates are having limited success working with funders to provide this support to survivors.



# Advocates Need More Organizational Support

Staff working at AVPs are often from the very communities that they serve, providing both an opportunity for uniquely creative service provision, as well as presenting challenges when violence is experienced within the community. Acts of intimate partner homicide or hate violence impact not just clients who may have been involved but entire communities, including advocates. Advocates, especially those who are also survivors, may experience more severe or prevalent vicarious trauma when working with clients, and advocates, particularly those who are people of color, trans, non-binary, disabled, may continue to experience the same structural violence that their clients experience and against which they are organizing and fighting. The impact of having shared identity with clients and community, as well as the need for organizational support to respond to these impacts, have always been a reality for advocates and AVPs.

All of this is compounded by COVID-19, which is a collective trauma we are all experiencing. Both clients and staff are being forced into isolation. Staff may have to isolate in homophobic, biphobic, transphobic, or otherwise unsafe homes. Staff, like clients, are navigating the

mental and physical health impacts of being constantly inundated by news of COVID-19, navigating where and how to get groceries, and preparing in case of illness and subsequent care. Staff who were previously managing being both an advocate and survivor, navigating shared identities with other groups at the margins and structural violence, are now also managing surviving a global pandemic, and need support in order to continue showing up for community in a sustainable way.

Of those surveyed, 22% of organizations indicated that self care and sustainability tips for staff were needed, and 22% of respondents indicated that staff stress and anxiety were top challenges in providing services to clients and community. Smaller teams of two or three volunteer advocates are facing the added stress of not being able to provide services if one or more of their team is unable to work. Several respondents also indicated that working from home is creating technological overload and a lack of a work/life balance. As indicated above, loss of funding is also a major source of stress and anxiety for advocates, some of whom are no longer getting paid or facing lay-offs due to funding cuts.

## **Organizations Are Facing Funding Restrictions and Cuts**

When asked about unique funding needs that agencies are facing as a result of working from home, nine out of the seventeen organizations responded to the question indicating a general concern about funding being restricted, cut altogether or potentially not renewed. Organizations that generally work in schools and other group settings, offering training to children and youth are having to shift their programming online and are reaching fewer students. Other organizations are facing challenges meeting grant deliverables. Additionally, general capacity of staff is significantly lower due to stress, illness, remote operations, outlined above. All of these factors are impacting the ability of organizations to meet previously set deliverables and many

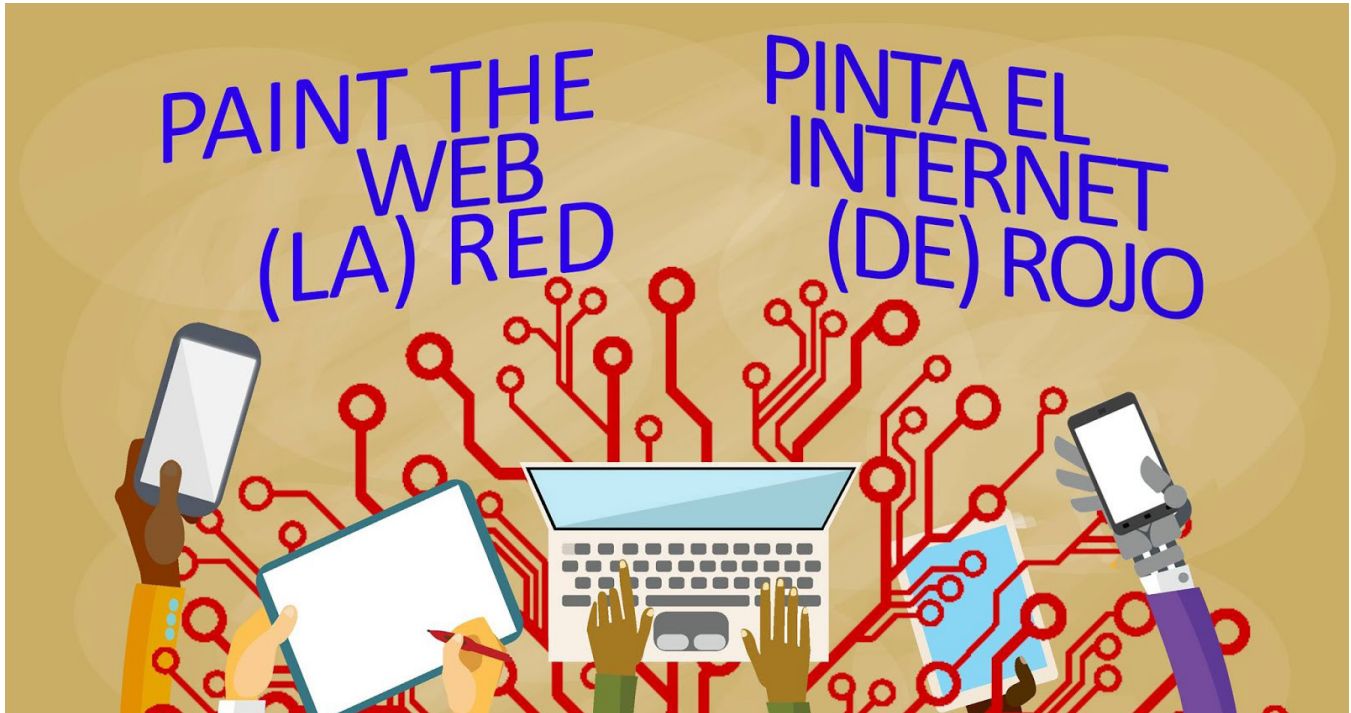
are concerned that this will impact their future funding and overall fiscal health.

Additionally, organizations have been trying to shift funding so that it can better fit their immediate needs. One strategy is to ask funders, particularly foundations, to change program-specific grants to general operations support in order to maintain staff salaries and benefits. One organization mentioned applying for funds from the Federal Paycheck Protection Program, mentioning that that is a potentially helpful intervention that would allow them to keep staff longer. Some organizations have also needed to shift funding to better equip staff with the technology and equipment necessary to work from home.



## Innovative Solutions

Despite the myriad challenges that COVID-19 is presenting, several organizations are also finding creative ways to support survivors and community as a whole.



### ONLINE FUNDRAISERS

The Network/La Red, based in Boston, MA, traditionally hosts an in-person annual fundraiser “Paint the Town (La) Red,” at the end of April, with a silent auction, local performances and celebration with community partners and survivors. Due to COVID-19 they moved it to an online platform. “Paint the Web (la) Red” was a success, both at fundraising for the organization and in bringing the community together online through a celebratory video, online auction, singing and spoken word performances. The video was successful in

highlighting the creativity and adaptability of the staff and highlighted the myriad ways that survivors could reach out and receive services. The video garnered 92 views and eight likes on Youtube, as well as 224 people reached and 61 engagements on Facebook. The event usually brings in \$30,000 for the Network, and while the online fundraiser brought in \$24,000 this year, the Network increased its net from around \$18,000 to \$23,000 due to the low cost of hosting an online event (\$1,000 compared to \$11-\$12,000 in costs).

## BUILDING ONLINE COMMUNITY

Diverse and Resilient's Room to be Safe program, based in Milwaukee, WI, has started hosting online "Queerantine" gatherings weekly online, reaching LGBTQ community across the state. Queerantine themes include pod mapping 101, building resilience, and general community space to gather, as well as specific Queerantines for LGBTQ youth in the area. In order to promote online safety for participants, three staff are always present in the forums with one dedicated to be on the look out for "Zoom bombing" - incidences of people entering Zoom rooms and disrupting meetings, often with sexually explicit, racist or otherwise violent content or

comments. Thankfully to date, the Queerantine space has not been zoom bombed. Additionally, participants discuss how to promote online confidentiality using the chat feature to discuss sensitive information, and using headphones to prevent others in a physical space from hearing participants' conversations. While no online space can be completely accessible to everyone, the Queerantine space does offer ASL interpretation during all of their gatherings.

Center on Halsted, based in Chicago, IL, has also begun hosting an online LGBTQ Teen Hang space through Zoom.

Queerantine presents:

# RESILIENCY: LIVING IN THE MOMENT WHEN THE MOMENT SUCKS

May 14th  
6:00 PM - 7:00 PM  
CST



with Kathy Flores, Program Director  
Room to Be Safe

\*\*Zoom link in description







# CURBSIDE LUNCHES

## FREE SACK LUNCHES

**IN RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES  
THAT SOME FAMILIES ARE FACING  
IN RELATION TO THE COVID19 PANDEMIC  
WE'VE PARTNERED WITH**

**WOODY'S KC**  
**3740 BROADWAY ST KCMO 64111**

**TO PROVIDE FREE CURBSIDE  
SACK LUNCH PICK-UP TO  
LGBTQIA INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES**

### CREATIVE OUTREACH

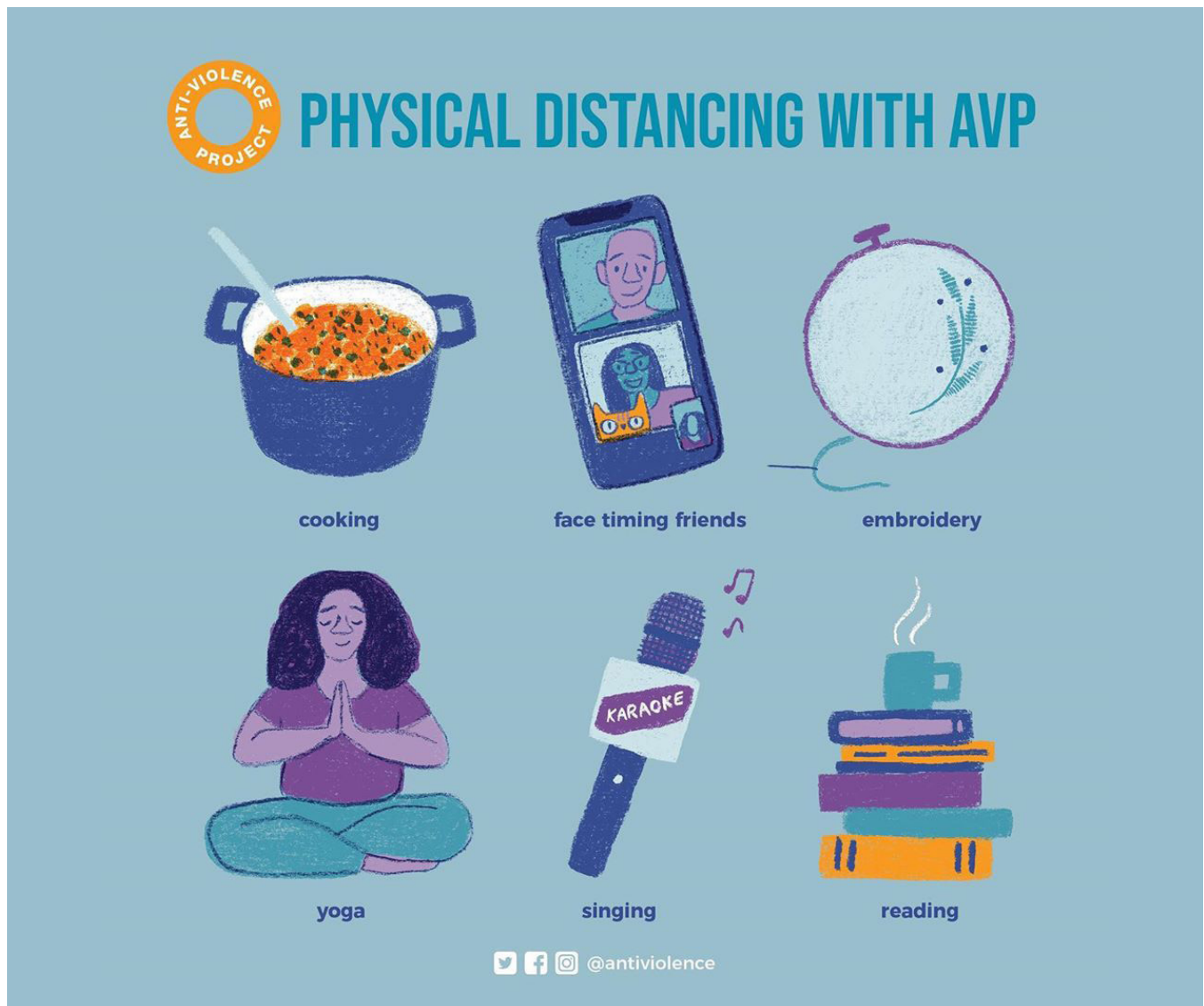
Kansas City Anti-Violence Project (KCAVP), based in Kansas City, MO, is providing outreach to the community through a Free Sack Lunch food and clothing pantry program on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The Free Sack Lunch program is hosted at the community LGBTQ+ dance bar, Woody's KC. In order to maintain compliance with the mandated rule of no gatherings of more than 10 people, KCAVP utilizes five staff members, one bar employee and up to three volunteers to help run the program. All exchanges are conducted in the bar's outdoor patio space which can be accessed

directly, instead of going through the main restaurant/bar area, which increases safety of both community members and KCAVP and bar staff. In addition to providing meals and clothes, KCAVP also uses this opportunity to work with survivors who do not have personal access to the internet, wifi, phones or computers/tablets, to fill out online forms for benefits, unemployment and other services, as needed. As Kansas City begins to reopen, KCAVP is re-evaluating the needs of the community and making shifts as necessary to respond to emergent safety and material concerns.

## SUPPORTIVE HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES

The New York City Anti-Violence Project has successfully implemented new human resources policies, as well as expanded existing policies in response to COVID-19. In addition to regularly accrued sick days, full time staff are now eligible for 70 additional hours of paid sick leave specifically related to COVID-19 (part time staff is eligible for additional sick leave on a pro-rated basis). This leave can be taken if a staff member or family member of staff contracts COVID and/or time off is needed

for self or family care. To support the mental health of staff, five additional paid COVID-19 Sustainability Days were given and could be used anytime prior to July 31. Sustainability days can be taken instead of sick, personal, or vacation days in order to support staff with time needed to rest. NYCAVP additionally has permanently expanded its bereavement policy to include the ability of staff to take time related to the loss of community members due to COVID-19 or for any other reason.





# Recommendations

## To support community members, organizations should consider:

- Shifting funding budgeted for food and supplies at in person events to directly support community members' basic needs, like access to food and clothing.
- Raising funds to provide stipends to community members and volunteers with low threshold requirements for participation in projects.
- Allowing flexible scheduling of counseling sessions so survivors can connect with advocates when they are able to get a break or step away from their home situation.
- Connecting community members to local mutual aid groups.

## To support staff, organizations should consider:

- Sharing resources and tips for ergonomic work-from-home setups and purchasing items that support working from home. These can range from accessories like a laptop stand, mouse, or keyboard to larger items like office chairs and laptops.
- Assessing tech access for staff and providing material support would greatly assist staff in working from home in a sustainable way long term.
- Establishing informal, intentional opportunities for staff to connect about what they are experiencing, which could help increase staff sustainability during this time.
- Amending paid time off or sick time policies to add COVID-19 related sick leave for the employee and for caretaking work.
- Amending paid time off to add "sustainability" days for staff to rest and recover during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Creating flexible work time policies in order to accommodate staff needs, particularly for caretakers, allowing for staggered work schedules to cover different shifts and accommodate their mental health needs or familial obligations.

## To support organizations, funders should consider:

- Converting project grants into general operating support.
- Making multi-year renewal grants of two- to three-year terms to give organizations some increased stability.
- Streamlining application processes, especially for regrants.
- Being flexible on deliverables and listening to grantees about how they are adapting their programming.
- Extending timelines for contract deliverables and reports and simplifying the reporting requirements.