

**Battered Women's Resource Center
Voices of Women Organizing Project
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Recommendations for the NYC Domestic Violence Hotline

The domestic violence hotline is a very important resource for battered women and is often their introduction to the service system. It is therefore imperative that callers receive the highest quality of assistance so they are not discouraged from seeking help. Many of us have used the hotline and domestic violence services as well as dealt with the many City systems in our efforts to find safety for ourselves and our children.

Hotline problems:

- callers often get a recorded message and have to wait;
- some callers felt the hotline functions more like a referral agency than a crisis hotline - it is very frustrating to call one number only to be given many more numbers to call, especially if making calls is difficult or unsafe. In particular, disabled callers may not have access to a phone out of their abusers presence;
- lack of immediate shelter space, the need to call back many times or call many shelters looking for space; the real shortage of shelter space for single women;
- workers told more than one woman she could get shelter if she made alternative plans for one of her children - this caused the women great distress;
- callers did not always get told all their options and rights;
- women voiced concern over the lack of advocacy by the hotline worker (for example not helping a woman get a police escort to get her things);
- the need for more services for children;
- some women felt the hotline worker does not spend enough time with a caller to help her feel comfortable disclosing her situation.

Recommendations:

I Staff qualifications & training:

- our goal for the hotline is to have the highest quality assistance provided by skilled, attentive, friendly and supportive counselors ready to meet the needs of callers;
- we feel it would be helpful for survivors of dv to participate in hotline training. Our unique understanding of the needs of callers would add an important dimension to training. We recently participated in Youthline training at their request, which went very well;
- all counselors need to know the options available to battered women and be skilled at helping women sort out what would be most helpful in their situation; they should also be sensitive to the needs of women in crisis.

II Advisory Committee

We are delighted at the suggestion that some of our members join the hotline's advisory committee. Two of our members will begin attending advisory committee meetings in June. We understand that this is the first time that survivors have attended these meetings.

III More shelter space

There is a critical lack of shelter space for d.v. victims, especially space for single women, women with sons over age 10, disabled women and women with large families. While we appreciate that workers try their best to prepare callers for this situation, often their advice is a shock to callers who are told of the lack of space in these situations. Well meaning advice about trying to find alternative space for older boys, etc. only serves to anger and discourage women from seeking shelter. We would like to work with the hotline to push for more shelter and to figure out the best ways to help women cope with the situation as it exists today.

IV Separate line for non-emergency calls/3 way calling book up with services

We understand the need to keep calls short so as not to tie up the line, however, we would like to figure out some way for people who need to talk to be able to do so without having to make numerous calls. One suggestion is to have a separate line for non-emergency calls. These calls could be answered by peer counselors (like the youthline). Another suggestion is to immediately hook the caller to a non-residential program for counseling rather than give them a number to call. 3 way calling should also be done routinely with shelters.

V Counselors get the support and compensation they deserve & need

We would like to support your efforts to hire well qualified people and keep them through adequate pay and benefits and by providing the support and supervision they need. We feel hotline workers need several breaks during the day in order to do their best.

***The members of VOW
April 2001***

The Voices of Women Organizing Project -VOW- is a grass roots organization of survivors of domestic violence working to improve the many systems battered women rely on, such as the criminal justice, welfare, child welfare and service systems.