ORGANIZING YOUR COMMUNITY

For agency staffs working to manage critical issues, few efforts are more important than that expended to build grass-roots coalitions within the community to support your goals and your message. In addition to helping you provide better services to survivors of trauma, coalitions can form a united front to address or influence legislative activities.

Coalition groups can be organized in any number of ways; in fact it’s likely no two groups will be identical. They may be local or they may link up with similar groups in other communities to form a regional or statewide network.

Some groups, such as statewide domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions, are highly sophisticated organizations with their own offices, board members and staff. Others have no formal structure, but consist of loose networks of individuals or organizations that can be relied on to take part in a telephone or letter-writing campaign when the need arises. On a local level, this may include staff from domestic violence or sexual assault agencies working together with community partners such as law enforcement agencies, public health organizations, groups that serve children, etc.

Developing a coalition will increase your power base with elected officials in several ways:

- Your coalition will give the appearance of a large number of constituents who have an interest in an issue.

- The coalition can form a united front to influence legislative activities.

- Developing working relationships with other agencies or groups as well as elected officials can be valuable in a crisis.

- Members of a coalition can organize candidate forums or debates, publish voting records and provide information for the public on important issues.

When working with coalitions, keep in mind that members won’t always agree on every issue. The best group leaders can do is to present accurate information and let people make up their own minds about whether they support a particular priority, position or activity and whether they think it’s worth working for.