



National Campus
Safety Awareness Month



NCSAM 2020 PODCAST SERIES

TRANSCRIPT:

I SEE YOU: HOW INTERSECTIONALITY CAN INFORM DIRECT SERVICES

Introduction

The subject matter of this podcast series will address challenging topics related to personal and campus safety. We acknowledge this content may be difficult and have included specific content warnings in each episode to help create an inclusive, positive, and safe experience for all listeners.

Music

[Playing]

Introduction

In the wake of COVID-19 and an advancing civil rights movement institutions around the nation are reaffirming their commitments to campus safety as they navigate the great reopening. And even as communities wrestle with a new normal, the Clery Act remains the same. A call to action, our paths may be different, but the purpose of the journey is still the same.

Sarah Barrett

Hi, I'm Sarah Barrett, and today I'll be sitting down with Ruth Perrin, Senior Counsel for the Campus Violence Project and Naida Henao, Managing Counsel for Strategic Advocacy and Communications from Network for Victim Recovery of DC (NVRDC) to discuss how intersectionality plays a role in their ability to deliver culturally safe and equity-informed services.

Hi Ruth. Hi Naida. Welcome.

Ruth Perrin

Thank you for having us.

Sarah Barrett

Thanks for joining me today as part of our National Campus Safety Awareness Month or NCSAM series. We really appreciate you offering your time to discuss such an important topic today. In addition to navigating a global pandemic, we are also part of an unfolding social justice movement that is prompting more conversations related to equity, inclusion, and justice really than ever before. And throughout these conversations, the word intersectionality often comes up and we know that intersectionality is more than a buzzword intersectionality highlights, the various identities, backgrounds, and experiences that make us all unique.

And when it comes to unique, your organization is pretty distinctive in the work that you all do, can you share a little bit about your organization and what it is you do?

Naida Henao

Yes, of course. So we work for the Network for Victim Recovery of DC, and we are a nonprofit based in the District of Columbia. And we have a holistic team made up of our legal and advocacy programs who work



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together to provide free and holistic services to survivors of all crimes. So that ranges from providing an advocacy response to sexual assault survivors in DC, to serving as advisors in Title IX cases for student survivors and also helping homicide victim's, family through criminal prosecution to also our elder abuse prevention program. So, we really, again, help victims on a wide spectrum of victimization.

Sarah Barrett

Thank you for sharing that. As you speak to the folks that you're serving, you touched on a wide spectrum, and that kind of gets me back to what I was alluding to earlier related to the word intersectionality and the spectrum that is really composed of all the identities that we as individuals might hold. The word intersectionality was first offered as a theoretical metaphor in Kimberlé Crenshaw's, 1989 essay as a way to understand how multiple forms of inequity or disadvantage can converge in a way that impedes access to structures and systems, or gets played out as marginalization or oppression and daily life and social relations. So from your perspective, how does intersectionality informed your work when providing services to clients?

Ruth Perrin

Yeah, that's a great question. So I think using an intersectional lens when we work, um, as legal services, providers is really crucial. All of our clients are individuals with different life experiences and different needs and different populations and different individuals are affected differently when they experience a crime. And I think that means how we respond to the crime has to be based on what that individual survivor needs and, um, survivors of crime are by no means a monolith and every person that we work with is going to have needs that are somehow different than a different person that we work with. And they might experience different barriers to accessing services for those needs. So I think it's really important that we recognize when we work with a survivor, um, that we need to avoid making any assumptions about what they might want or what, um, options are right for them. And then also I have to note that, um, to have honest conversations about intersectionality as legal services providers, we need to not just ask ourselves what identities our client holds, but also start by looking inward and asking ourselves what our identities are and what biases we might have.

Um, we can't pretend that we ourselves, aren't individuals with identities and biases, none of us come to the table with a blank slate, but as providers, we need to be working to check that our own experiences and identities. Aren't something that we're projecting onto a client and something that's affecting the services that we're giving them.

Sarah Barrett

Ruth, you brought up a great point related to looking inward and reflecting on our own identities. What type of work do you all engage in on a personal level to address biases or to gain understanding of identities that you may not be familiar with? And how does this work foster a culturally safe environment for those that you serve?

Ruth Perrin

So, I think that, of course the work on a personal level starts with, um, taking opportunities to attend racial justice and equity trainings, cultural competency trainings, and fostering relationships with community organizations that offer culturally specific services. But in general, I think the work needs to go beyond that and be more of a practice than, than something we engage in by going to workshops. Um, especially when you hold an identity that's different than that of your client, which is going to be a lot of the time. It's important to be constantly checking in with yourself about the way that your biases might be coming into play. I think, um, too often we tend to look at things like a binary. Like I'm either I'm racist, sexist, or homophobic, or I'm none of those



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things, but none of us can grow up in a society and culture like we have without, um, experiencing biases and assumptions about people. And so it's really important that we recognize that we have those biases that we name them and then ensure that we're going to do whatever we need to question and address those biases. So that survivors get the services they need and deserve. Um, implicit biases. Aren't a 9-5 thing. We can't just be employing these things to check our own biases in our work lives, but it's actually something we need to be doing all day every day to address, um, whatever biases we might hold.

Sarah Barrett

As you think about addressing those biases, are there specific considerations you take into account when first working with a client to address the various identities that they might hold?

Ruth Perrin

Yeah, Absolutely. Like I mentioned before, I think that one of the most important things we can do when we start working with a new client is to never make any assumptions and then really listen to what a client says that they want. I've had clients who on paper might seem to have similar demographic backgrounds, but it would be wrong. And counterproductive of me to assume that because of that, um, those clients have the same wants and needs. So whenever we conduct an intake on that call, they always ask, what are your goals? And I think that question is what really informs and drives our representation of that client because we can't begin to help a client, um, get the services they need or engage with the processes they want to engage with. If we don't understand what it is that they want out of those things,

Sarah Barrett

That's such an important aspect of working with survivors and taking the time to assess the goals that they've set and to actually ask what are their goals. Uh, can you share a little bit more, as far as your organizational practices or the systems that you've instituted to really foster that survivor defined justice for marginalized or underserved survivors of crime?

Naida Henao

Yes, of course. So, you know, we keep going back to the theme of survivor defined justice and really getting down to the individual level because I think that's something that happens. That's, well-intentioned by many organizations that we all want to say, okay, you know, what practices are we going to have for marginalized communities or underserved crime victims and those demographics. But the reality is we can't treat marginalized communities again, as if they're all wanting the same thing as if they all have the same identities, right? Because even individuals within marginalized communities might have intersecting identities that may give them more or less privilege than other individuals in that group. So, you know, again, we, we start back on the individual basis and kind of see, um, what individual clients are facing and what their goals are. And for example, in the context of, um, Black Lives Matter, I think a lot of people are, are generalizing and saying, Oh, okay, well now all Black people, um, would, would not want to report to the police after a crime, but that doesn't acknowledge that some Black people may still want to report to the police and some may not feel safe doing so in the same way that not all White people, for example, will feel safe with the police.

And so for us as an organization, I think that has been really important for us to, to step back and say, in addition to the services that we're providing crime victims, are we also making sure that when we say that we are supporting survivor defined justice, that that's not only within our organization, but that we're trying



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to advocate for our clients to have multiple options to respond to their victimizations within bigger systems. At NVRDC, for example, we started a restorative justice project, we're also one of the few organizations that serve sexual assault survivors that are supportive of informal resolution processes in the Title IX context. And so for, from our perspective, as long as those processes are well-regulated, they are safe, they're overseen by trained professionals. We're going to defer to our client and empower them to make the choice, but ultimately deferring to you. And you being able to decide what path towards justice is going to be right for you. I will not tell you, and I'm going to advocate for systems to also not make that decision for you.

Sarah Barrett

Naida, you brought up the concept of safety in your answer. Can you expand a little bit on what type of additional techniques you might employ to help individuals feel safe enough to share their identities and how those identities might impact the services they need or, or wish to receive?

Ruth Perrin

Yeah, so, um, a major principle of our work in addition to being survivor centered is being trauma-informed service providers. And I think that that's something that really informs how we make sure a client feels safe talking to us. We know that as crime victims, rights advocates and attorneys, that when a person experiences a crime, it often is an experience that makes people feel powerless. So the response to that crime needs to be one that seeks to give the survivor their power back. And one way we do that is by letting survivors lead the conversations we have by giving them choice about what they do or don't want to share with us. And by explaining why we're asking certain things. So for example, when we first speak to someone, we have to get various demographic information. So we always explain that we're asking because we have to collect certain information to see who we're serving, but that the information will not affect their eligibility for our services.

And that it won't be shared unless in anonymized data. Another example is when we have to get narrative information about the crime that the survivor has experienced. We explain why we're asking certain questions. We never want the survivor to feel judged by what we ask them. And we find that a lot of times, if we're not explaining why we ask certain questions, they might feel judged. So a common example of that is when we're trying to understand what happened to a client, we might ask, you know, if they had been drinking and that's because we need to figure out what evidence there might be about the crime, but, um, not because we are judging them or think it's any, um, we think it's their fault because they were drinking. So we'll always explain why we ask that sort of question. Um, and in terms of, um, how identity identities might affect the services that they need. I think, like Naida said, um, we don't tell survivors what they need. We try to listen to what they say they need. And then our organization also has amazing advocates that do a lot of work with clients to connect them to social services that they need. And so they'll do everything from providing, um, or finding organizations that will provide safe housing for the client or finding funding to get different things replaced that might've been damaged as a result of the crime they experienced and a whole lot of other things.

Sarah Barrett

In the previous question you brought up the concept of choice and, um, feeling as though you have a voice at the table, um, a lot of conversation has come up related to the racial justice movement and, you know, the group Black Lives Matter was previously brought up. In what ways do you think the advancing racial justice movement can support efforts to cultivate empowerment and self-determination for survivors?



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Naida Henao

So, I think that the advancing racial justice movement is directly, um, directly gonna impact this, this increasing empowerment and self-determination. Especially for survivors, um, that whose racial identity has made them have different experiences with a lot of the systems that we have and the more of racial equity there, there is, the more those survivors are going to be empowered because we can't pretend that we all have the same experiences moving through different spaces, such as like going to a police station or being in a courtroom. And so with this racial justice movement, I think, you know, it's not that there's anything new, many people have known this for a very long time that everyone in this country is not equal, but with these refreshed conversations, and I think some deeper reflection that is happening with many individuals now, we're really looking at what are those, um, those differing experiences that are happening and what are ways that we can address those differences and make sure that people feel comfortable in different spaces.

But also as we've been alluding to throughout this interview, to make sure that there's also not just limited options that are kind of catered to people with certain identities. So if we're making requirements that, for example, if you want to get crime victims compensation and get that kind of assistance with, for example, any, any of your property that has been damaged as a result of a crime or assistance with paying medical bills as a result of a crime or funeral costs and burial costs as a result of a crime, you can't get those without reporting to the police. So what are we saying to those survivors that don't feel comfortable going to the police, that if you don't go and to enter the space where you feel unsafe, if you don't go into this space where perhaps there might be very negative consequences for you and your family members, then you don't get the same type of financial assistance and support that other survivors are gonna get, you know, I think again, just feel great about all these racial justice movements is that we're looking at things from a different perspective. We're looking at what other options there are then just continuing the status quo from centuries ago.

Sarah Barrett

You brought up so many great points related to the interaction for survivors and how some of the policies and systems that are in place, um, may impact their ability or their perception of their ability to access some of those resources. And so from your perspective, or NVRDC's perspective, what is the call to action for listeners today?

Ruth Perrin

I think a big topic right now with respect to campus safety is the new Title IX regulations. And I think regulations are confusing and they impose some requirements like cross examinations that are frankly scary to a lot of survivors. And I do think it's unfortunate that we're seeing these really prescriptive Title IX regulations, that mirror carceral systems at a time that we're seeing more and more support to move away from that system as a society. And I do worry that these new processes would discourage survivors from reporting, especially survivors from marginalized communities. And of course, reporting isn't the right choice for everyone. But in general, does tend to get people connected to the services that they need, whether or not they choose to pursue a formal complaint with their school. Um, but on the other hand, they also worry that a lot of the discourse surrounding the new rules makes the process seem even scarier, um, than they actually are.

And that, that will also discourage survivors from reporting. So my hope is that our response will be to continue advocating for schools, to provide more options for their students, to make them feel safe and to foster an on campus culture that encourages student survivors to access the resources that they need. Um, as students advocates and community members, we should be asking that our schools of course be safe from violence, but also that if violence does happen, that all members of the community feel safe reporting. And that's part of



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what Naida was talking about, about ensuring that there are multiple options available to students, including things like informal resolution processes on which may look like restorative justice or something else. Um, we need to be advocating for as many options as are needed for survivors, and then we need to be making those options safe for all survivors to access. I think it's, it's on us as a community to make the system safer for people to interact with. And I think that that's something we really need to remember and keep in mind, rather than focusing on, um, on concerns that we might have about, about rules that have been released.

Sarah Barrett

That's a great point as we think about centering the conversation and where our focus lies, you both brought up so many great points today for our listeners to consider how intersectionality might play a role in the work that they do and sharing about the ways that NVRDC considers intersectionality and promotes survivor defined justice. Um, I just really want to thank you both for taking the time today. And I actually wanted to shift gears a little bit, uh, before we end our time, I wanted to ask you a few quick questions, not necessarily related to intersectionality, uh, but to acknowledge the place that we're in right now and the historic events that we've been experiencing. And so I'm wondering if one or both of you could share a life hack for coping with quarantine.

Ruth Perrin

Yeah, absolutely. I think, um, for me, one thing that has been really important is setting boundaries. Um, that's definitely something that's always important, um, as a legal service provider, but, um, I think it's especially important right now when, um, myself and my colleagues are working from home. So I think it's really important to make sure, um, that when you're working from home, you're making very specific hours that you're not treating, um, your home, like it is your office and that, you know, you're kind of setting aside a space and a time for when and where you're working.

Naida Henao

Yeah. Mine's really similar to Ruth. I would say boundaries, but more in life generally. I think we all have a lot of pressure right now just because the news cycle has been, it feels like even heavier than usual with a lot of the violence that's happening in communities. We have the elections coming up, we have COVID considerations and the myriad of other things that are going on and it feels like a lot. And I think a lot of us feel pressures that we have to be on top of all the things and be involved in everything that is going on. But I think an important boundary to set is that it's okay to say, you know what, today it's one of those days that I feel like my cup is empty and it's okay to take the day for myself to do what I need to do to fill that cup again. Just because as, as well, intention as we all may be, we really can't help others or contribute to a movement or do well at work or show up for our partners if we're feeling like our cup is empty. And that's something that definitely, you know, there's a privilege component to that to be able to take a day and step back and take a pause for yourself. Um, but that, you know, that it's still important to be able to check in with yourself and make sure that you're feeling good as well, because it can, it can enable you and empower you to be able to contribute more positively to everything that's going on. But if you're feeling burnt out at the end of the day, I don't think anyone wants everyone to be, um, be spread too thin. Um, we're all gonna be stronger together if everyone is making sure to take care of themselves in whatever way feels right for them.



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Sarah Barrett

Those are both really great life hacks. And I hope our listeners can, uh, utilize some of that advice and the thoughts that you shared there. And as we think about being in this together and moving forward, I'm wondering if you can share what you hope will be the same after 2020 and what you hope will be different.

Ruth Perrin

One thing that I'd definitely like to see going forward is continued interest in social justice issues. I think a lot of times we see that that sort of interest ebbs and flows and as an advocate for survivors, that can be really tough to see because it's not like just because something isn't a hot topic, it isn't a problem. You know, police violence against Black communities is a problem when it's in the news and when it isn't and sexual assault on campuses and the school's responses to those assaults are an issue, whether or not it's in the news. And I think we tend to see more action around those issues when there's more news coverage. And I think even though that's historically been true, my hope is that people remain engaged in these topics and continue to work to make our communities safer for everyone going forward.

Ruth Perrin

Yeah. I'm going to steal Ruth's answer and say similarly, um, I want this continuation of social justice movements and like she alluded to, I think next year, I just hope that people will take it to the next level, right. And to not only have the sense of performative allyship of like, you know, putting things on your social media accounts and just talking about it, because in the news there it's a new cycle, but really taking the next step and saying like, what am I really doing to, to help and to give back even when this isn't in the news cycle and am I still, you know, assisting the racial justice movement, even when there's not a protest in my city, or am I advocating for change on my campus, or am I advocating for sexual assault law reform? Even though someone in my, I don't necessarily know someone in my life that's been a survivor. Um, I think all those things are so important and we need to take it to the next level. I think we're really well situated to take things to the next level, but I just hope that as Ruth said, that momentum continues to grow and doesn't dissipate as we get, um, perhaps distracted with other things that are going on. Because there are a lot of things on people's plates, like I said earlier, but, um, I hope that the importance of this issue doesn't get lost in the chaos of, of anything that may happen in the future.

Sarah Barrett

Such great considerations for, uh, what we hope will be the same and some things that we hope will be different. Um, that is the theme for our National Campus Safety Awareness Month this year, because we know that professionals are working to do the same type of work, in a very different world. So, uh, once again, I just want to thank you both Ruth and Naida for taking the time with us today to share your thoughts on intersectionality and the historic events of 2020. And we wish you all the best in the work that you do. Thank you.

Naida Henao

Thank you so much for having us.

Ruth Perrin

Thanks so much Sarah.



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