



# Intro to VOICES

Office of Family Safety

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## **What is the Office of Family Safety?**

The mission of the Metropolitan Nashville-Davidson County Office of Family Safety is to increase victim safety and offender accountability by providing vital crisis intervention services to victims of interpersonal violence while maintaining the emotional wellness of service providers. This Mission is accomplished in our court and community-based Family Safety Centers through client advocacy, training, outreach, and multi-disciplinary teams and Family Safety Center collaboration. The Office of Family Safety exists to provide a compassionate and coordinated response to interpersonal violence. It is a place for survivors to receive a number of services from a variety of agencies, under one roof.

**Vision:** Empowering survivors, expanding safety, and ending violence. The Office of Family Safety (OFS) envisions a city, state, and world without violence where survivors are given hope, healing, and justice.

## **What is a VOICES Committee?**

A group of survivors who...

- Volunteer their time to celebrate their strength and survival.
- Use their voices to help others through advocacy, education, and empowerment.
- Support each other as well as incoming OFS clients.
- Can offer a unique perspective in regards to the center's established programming, and/or identify gaps in services.
- Continually advocate on behalf of the Office of the OFS, not just in the early stages but for long-term sustainability.

### **A VOICES Committee is NOT:**

- A support group
- A mascot for the movement

**Ultimately, the role of VOICES is to hold Centers accountable to the people they serve.**

## **VOICES History**

The first VOICES committee was launched in San Diego in 2002. At that time, members of VOICES served as an advisory committee for the San Diego Family Justice Center, assisted with training and spoke at various public events to bring awareness to the services provided at the Family Justice Center. A national movement was later supported by a Steering Committee. The goal of this effort is to mobilize a network of survivors to advocate for victims currently experiencing violence nationwide.

## **VOICES Nationally**

Through the Alliance for Hope International, VOICES is developing an outreach effort to create a nationwide group of survivors to educate the public about family violence, as well as support new and existing Family Justice Centers. It is the vision of active chapters to connect and

engage with other VOICES chapters nationally to share news and successes as well as collaborate on new ideas. It is the role of the Alliance to support chapters, help them network, and provide Technical Assistance to Centers wishing to establish a VOICES Committee. There is a monthly call between representatives from all VOICES chapters across the country, and VOICES members are encouraged to meet and talk with chapters in other cities as well.

### **Guidelines for Participation:**

- Being a survivor of some type of violence or abuse
- Ensuring the safety of each individual member and the group as a whole.
  - To meet this goal our chapter requires:
    - At least one year removed from the abusive relationship or incident
    - Not currently undergoing trial proceedings related to the abuse or assault.
    - Not in a current/new relationship with a convicted abuser.

Membership should be a diverse representation of the community served by the OFS, including domestic violence, sexual assault, elder abuse and trafficking survivors, adult survivors of child abuse, parents of child abuse survivors, survivors who are men, survivors who identify as LGBTQ+, survivors from marginalized communities, surviving family members of homicide victims, etc.

Group members can either obtain a reference or referral from a service provider (counselor, case manager, advocate, etc.) who they have worked with, or opt for an interview with an assigned therapist/staff member to assess readiness for participation in the group.

### **Structure of Group:**

#### **Participants must decide**

- **Membership application/screening process and recruitment**
- **Membership expectations**
- **Scheduling meetings: frequency and consistent date?**
- **Facilitation of group**
- **Communication**
- **Connection/Affiliation with National VOICES network**

### **Sample Activities for VOICES chapters around the country:**

- **Community Education:**
  - Informing existing training and outreach programs—what do people need to know about interpersonal violence?
  - Tabling at events or fairs to spread information about the OFS.
- **Identifying Gaps in Services:**
  - How might the OFS improve services? Identify agencies or services that are missing.
  - Find out what process is like for a walk-in client and give feedback.

- Inform policy or procedure changes.
- Give feedback and educate OFS staff members on survivor experiences.
- **FSC Client Outreach**
  - Write letters to incoming clients to offer support and encouragement.
  - Volunteer time inside of the OFS to help clients feel comfortable while waiting for services
  - Plan events for clients and other survivors.
- **Media Outreach:**
  - Write an op-ed for a local news outlet or blog.
  - Speak to local news stations (tv, radio) about issues of interpersonal violence/current events
  - Write letters to legislators regarding current bills that impact survivors
  - Inform Office of Family Safety social media pages and website content
- **Public Speaking:**
  - Sharing stories of healing and the impact of interpersonal violence at community events or with media.
- **Advocacy:**
  - Offering support to clients applying to get an order or protection, attending court with OFS staff.
  - Attending city council meetings to advocate for funding during budget decisions
  - Advocating on behalf of or in opposition to bills that may impact the OFS and local victims/survivors.
- **Commemorative Months, Vigils and Memorials:**
  - Planning activities or educational campaigns to bring attention and awareness during national commemorative months
  - i.e. January: Human Trafficking Awareness, April: Sexual Assault Awareness and Child Abuse Awareness, October: Domestic Violence Awareness
- **Display Boards, Visual Aids and Art Pieces:**
  - Introduce the VOICES committee and FSC to the community with visual art in the center or display boards at local events
- **Bonding and Community-Building Activities:**
  - Promoting self-care and healing of VOICES members through fellowship and fun activities.

Ultimately, YOU get to decide what activities are a priority for this group, and what activities you personally are comfortable with participating in!



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