SAFE WAYS FOR SURVIVORS TO WORK FOR CHANGE

Advocates and other providers sometimes get nervous when the people we serve talk about getting involved in social activism efforts. What about safety? Are they ready for this, or should they be taking care of their own issues first? However, there are usually ways even for people in the early stages of recovery and healing to participate safely:

• **Breaking the silence.** Going to a support group meeting and sharing one’s personal story can be a radical act! Our society encourages people to stay quiet about certain issues. When one person says “I have the disease of alcoholism” or “I’ve been abused,” others find it easier to break their silence.

• **Contacting people who make decisions.** This may include complaining to TV stations about violent programs, calling radio stations that play music glorifying drug use or abuse in relationships, or writing to advertisers who promote stereotypes or sponsor objectionable programs.

• **Talking to their children.** Parents can discuss the violence portrayed in TV shows, movies and video games, help their children understand what happens when people do these things in real life, and educate their children about alcohol and drug abuse, dating violence and other dangers.

• **Getting involved politically.** Make sure people you serve know how to get registered to vote. Encourage them to write or call elected officials about issues that affect them.

• **Getting involved in the community.** Where it is safe to do so, encourage survivors to join organizations that work for change. Faces and Voices of Recovery and National Alliance on Mental Illness are examples of organizations that work to get appropriate support from governments and the public for people in recovery.

• **Being a role model.** Hosting a potluck or social gathering where no alcohol is served, refusing to buy violent toys or video games for children, and explaining to others why one refuses to use corporal punishment with one’s children are all actions that make a statement, both to children and other adults. A survivor shares:

  “Today, I want to carry that torch and say, ‘We can overcome. We can survive. We can succeed. We can be brave. We can have the courage.’ I am an example to many, many young women. I’m their role model. Look at myself. I am someone who experienced severe domestic violence, and I am successful today. I thought I would never take a peek at the world ever again – that I would be six feet below on account of someone else’s hands, that my blood would be on the palms of their hands. And before that ever happened, I am very successful today. And it takes a lot of strength.”