Knowledge Center

Concept Paper Presented by

Safe Futures Collaborative Overview

The Maryland Safe Futures Collaborative is a collective impact project focused on improving service coordination among state and local agencies and regional service providers and filling critical service gaps in support of those impacted by intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and/or sex trafficking (relational violence).

This is a cross-sector collaborative effort has been guided by nonprofit, public and private leaders including funders, advocates, service providers and people with lived experience as survivors.

Safe Futures Collaborative model for victim-centered collective impact brings together five agencies making up each knowledge center:

o **Backbone –** **YWCA of Annapolis & Anne Arundel County.** State Futures Collaborative design team and guiding coalition.
o **Empowerment Center –** **Mid-shore Council on Family Violence.** Support and empower survivors on their journey to improve self-sufficiency and break the cycle of violence in families.
o **Prevention Center –** **Family Crisis Center of Baltimore City.** Stopping violence before it starts.
o **Response Center –** **Turn Around.** Crisis response once violence has occurred.
o **Knowledge Center –** **House of Ruth Maryland.** An easily accessible clearinghouse for curated content, tools and training.

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Knowledge Center Overview

House of Ruth Maryland leads the fight to end violence against women and their children by confronting the attitudes, behaviors and systems that perpetuate it, and by providing victims with the services necessary to rebuild their lives safely and free of fear.

In July of 1977, House of Ruth Maryland was founded as Baltimore's first crisis center and emergency hotline for victims of what was then referred to as domestic violence, but is now known as intimate partner violence. Today, House of Ruth Maryland exists as the largest comprehensive intimate partner violence service provider in the State of Maryland. House of Ruth Maryland's service offering is a direct reflection of the agency's mission:

> *"House of Ruth Maryland leads the fight to end violence against women and their children by confronting the attitudes, behaviors, and systems that perpetuate it, and by providing victims with the services necessary to rebuilt their lives safely and free of fear."*

To achieve its mission, House of Ruth Maryland provides services to those impacted by intimate partner violence such as emergency shelter, licensed, developmental childcare program, clinical therapy for survivors and their children, service coordination, rapid rehousing assistance, civil legal representation, educational programming to promote awareness and safe responses to intimate partner violence, and intervention services for those who have used abusive behaviors toward their partners.

House of Ruth Maryland began offering training to other professionals serving survivors of intimate partner violence in the early 2000s when it began opening its internal training programs to partnering agencies. As the demand for this content grew, House of Ruth Maryland launched its "Comprehensive Intimate Partner Violence Training" as an external training for any professionals in the field. Over the years, the variety of training products has grown and House of Ruth Maryland allocated staff and a budget to its newly developed Training Institute in 2007. This new department began exploring ways to improve products and increase accessibility of content. Today the Training Institute offers a full calendar of regular products, as well as, customized technical assistance packages to service providers all over the country.

The Safe Futures Maryland initiative recognizes the benefit of the history, infrastructure and reach of House of Ruth Maryland's Training Institute and has elected for it to serve as the project's Knowledge Center, which aims to *help end relational and sexual violence by amplifying the voice of practitioners in creating and curating content on best practices and sharing information through accessible channels.*

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Aligning with Safe Futures Maryland

The growth of House of Ruth Maryland's Training Institute included the expansion of technology for delivering training content such as webinar software, learning management and course design software, and lecture-capture technology. All of these tools supplemented the state-of-the-art training facility House of Ruth Maryland opened in the heart of Baltimore through the support of its 40th anniversary capital campaign ion 2017. It is not feasible or practical for every service provider in Maryland to acquire the same amount of training technology and tools, which is why House of Ruth Maryland's commitment to the Safe Futures Maryland project includes creating ways to make the technology in which it has invested available to other organizations throughout the state. This will enable all programs in Maryland to have a platform to raise awareness and educate communities to further their mission.

In addition to creating platforms for Maryland service providers to share products they have developed, House of Ruth Maryland has also created a virtual Community of Practice, a web-based message board that allows for practice and academic discussion in real time on a global level. The intention of this forum is to increase access for all providers to cutting edge research, strategies that support best practice, and essential resources, and to generate a discourse that promotes collaboration and innovation. The design and development of this tool prioritized the following features: registration security, confidentiality and rules of engagement notices and agreements, document library, news feature to announce both changes in the platform, product, and offerings, as well as growth of the community of advocates and agencies, and video posting capability.

Serving as the Knowledge Center for the Safe Futures Maryland initiative, House of Ruth Maryland committed to the following goals:

1. Engaging and contracting with a researcher/research team to identify and connect with Maryland service providers to identify overlap, gaps and matches for training and technical assistance needs, training and technical assistance strengths, products that may be ready for dissemination and available training delivery and distribution technology.
2. Developing and implementing a framework for submitting and prioritizing new product for promotion and distribution through the Center of Knowledge that includes standards of quality and research.
3. Developing appropriate agreement templates for a variety of product formats (webinars, whitepapers, etc.) that:
   a. Protects the intellectual property of content developers.

    b. Fairly compensates content developers and House of Ruth Maryland for development and dissemination costs that are above and beyond standard hosting expenses.

4. Maintaining white-labeled webinar technology.
5. Promoting participation in Center of Knowledge's communication platforms, including webinars, monthly email distribution and an online Community of Practice, to increase product reach.
6. Create and host a clearinghouse of Centers' and partnering organizations products (Salus).

The Creation of Salus

Key Learnings and Challenges

Upon initial discussions with Design Team partners, it quickly became apparent that branding concerns had to be addressed early in the project. The Design Team expressed concern about House of Ruth Maryland's brand, if used to promote the Knowledge Center, overshadowing the intellectual ownership of materials created by partnering agencies who submitted content. On the other hand, the Safe Futures Maryland brand did not sufficiently represent the broader vision for the platforms House of Ruth Maryland had been building. Therefore, House of Ruth Maryland invest in the development of a secondary brand for the network of training tools it was offering.

This new network was named Salus, [sey-luhs], Latin for safety, salvation, or welfare, gets its name from the Roman goddess of safety and wellbeing – of both the individual *and* the state.[1] The name represents both parts of the work to end relational violence: providing services to increase the safety of survivors (the individual) and challenging the community attitudes and systems that perpetuate violence (the state).

After presentation and feedback from the Design Team, House of Ruth Maryland developed the logo and secured website domains and social media handles for the newly developed brand. The webinar technology was moved to a new vendor and the learning management system account was expanded to meet the commitment of providing white-labeled technology to other organizations interested in using the platforms to share content.

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[1] De Vaan, M. (2008) *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the Other Italic Languages*, Leiden and Boston, Brill

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Throughout this process, House of Ruth Maryland has engaged a technology advisory committee, made up of financial, training, and technology professionals from Maryland companies such as Mindgrub Technologies, IBM, Confidio, Howard Bank, The Bozzuto Group, and Verdence Capital Advisors. This group meets every two weeks to get project updates and inform strategies to address challenges such as network design, competitive market pricing, contracting, and online course blueprinting.

Presentations made to potential partners about the Salus network have been well received. Representatives from the Governor's Office on Crime Prevention, Youth & Victim Services, the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, the University of Michigan, Johns Hopkins University, and the Family Peace Initiative, have all expressed interest in the platforms and see the potential benefits Salus brings to service providers.

The entire process of developing the Salus network to support the Safe Futures Maryland project has been a journey in learning new skills. House of Ruth Maryland is first and foremost a survivor-centered service agency, and the expansion of its training tools and initiatives requires creating the staff capacity for learning new skills and the budget required to contract those skills that aren't available in-house. This has required coordination across a number of companies, which can be a big task on its own, but doing so in the midst of a global pandemic that requires safe distancing, has been uniquely challenging. Staff and contractors have been impacted personally by the COVID-19 virus, which has required flexibility in scheduling and deliverable timelines.

Moving forward, it is going to be critical that as the participation in the Salus network increases, the customer service scale at the same rate. Staff need to be responsive to forum moderation requests and monitoring, resource upload requests, and technical assistance needs. Additionally, House of Ruth Maryland will be looking to its Safe Futures Maryland partners to assist in the development of standards for resources that will be uploaded to the Salus network.

> *"Training is critical to providing effective and efficient services. This high level of concern among survey participants seems to suggest that standardized statewide training would be critical to success and should be available in a variety of mediums. The limiting factors to meeting such needs are, but not limited to, the cost of training, staff to support operational requirements while conducting training, and creating the time to receive evidence-based training from national-level subject matter experts."*
>
> - Maryland Governor's Office

Knowledge & Resource Sharing

The entire Salus network (www.saluscommunity.org) is a shared resource for service providers across Maryland beyond. The site is being launched with a resource library that provides a number of downloadable resources included fact sheets, toolkits, videos and other learning tools. The website design also allows for providers to upload their own resources to share with each other.

Moving forward, resources will be developed and shared to assist service organizations to create the highest quality learning tools possible. Demonstrated best practice and research like the following will be used to guide product development and prioritization:

o Contrary to popular belief, synchronous webinar teaching is at least as effective, if not more effective, than live, in-person training and asynchronous (self-paced), online learning.[2]

o Effective webinars have common characteristics that should be replicated by those using the Salus network. These include presenters being familiar with the webinar logistics, products being based on needs assessments, having quality learning objectives, engaging slides, the use of interactive learning tools, soliciting and being responsive to feedback, and having an enthusiastic presenter.[3]

o Partners who wish to host online learning products such as webinars and self-paced courses will be encouraged to host accompanying message board content to expand the learning opportunity beyond the teaching time of the course. Message boards are a critical way to support retention of material and to assist learners in navigating challenges when trying to implement what they have learned.[4]

Looking Ahead

House of Ruth Maryland will continue building the Salus network to serve as Safe Futures Collaborative of Maryland's Knowledge Center and will adapt it based on user feedback in the coming months.

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[2] Gegenfurtner, A. & Ebner, C. (2019). Webinars in higher education and professional training: A meta-analysis and systematic review of randomized controlled trials. *Educational Research Review, 28,* doi: 10.1016/j.edurev.2019.100293.
[3] Topor, D. R. & Budson, A. E. (2020). Twelve tips to present an effective webinar. *Medical Teacher*, 42, 11, 142-159. doi: 10.1080/0142159X.2020.1775185
[4] Berry, S. (2017). Building community in online doctoral classrooms: Instructor practices that support community. *Online Learning, 21 (2).*

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In order to offer the best possible user experience and to ensure a variety of cutting edge resources are offered through the Salus network, the following will be accomplished in the coming months:

- o The website frame is complete and now the content must be added and capabilities built out, which will include an area to register for webinars and online course, access to the virtual Community of Practice, a resource library that users can upload to or download from, and directly to connect to the Safe Future Maryland partner sites.
- o In partnership with Johns Hopkins University, a survey of Maryland's human trafficking, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault service agencies will be completed to identify what resources exist or could easily be developed to be shared and promoted through the Salus network.
- o Interviews will be conducted with representatives from each of the Learning Centers to identify what resources have been or can be created as a result of the Safe Futures Maryland investment.
- o Contracts will be drafted and negotiated with providers who want to distribute for-profit products through the Salus network.
- o Completion of the Salus website will include an area to upload resources for anyone that wants to promote a product through the Salus network.

Once the network infrastructure is complete, House of Ruth Maryland will work with the Safe Futures Maryland partners to coordinate a social media launch of the Salus network. The first self-paced, online course, "Recognizing and Responding to Intimate Partner Violence" will be ready to host in February of 2021.

House of Ruth Maryland is eager to offer the Salus network as an opportunity to promote the great work being implemented by service agencies working with survivors of human trafficking, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault. The Salus network will increase access to expertise, professional development tools, and service resources for providers throughout Maryland and beyond.

About House of Ruth Maryland

House of Ruth Maryland leads the fight to end violence against women and their children by

 confronting the attitudes, behaviors and systems that perpetuate it, and by providing victims with the services necessary to rebuild their lives safely and free of fear.

House of Ruth Maryland was founded in May of 1977 by a coalition of women's organizations, religious groups, service providers, and elected officials to provide a safe haven for victims of domestic violence and their children. In November of 1977 we opened Baltimore's first crisis shelter for these victims in a row house on North Calvert Street. The shelter was staffed by one paid staffed person and a voluntary Board of Directors.

In November 1998 a new 84-bed shelter and 6 apartment transitional housing, featuring expanded services and programs, opened. The new shelter has a holistic health and wellness program, including an on-site health clinic staffed by the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing.

Today, House of Ruth Maryland is recognized as one of the nation's most comprehensive domestic violence centers and has a staff of more than ninety. Our voluntary leadership consists of a thirty-member Board of Directors and an Advisory Committee.

For more information visit www.hurth.org.

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