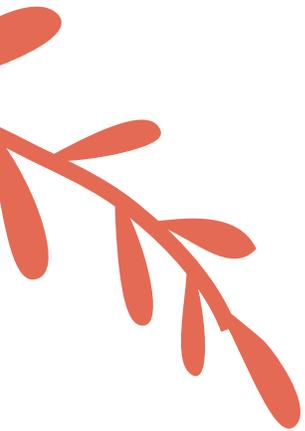


*TELLING STORIES OF
SURVIVAL:
THE VALUE OF DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE ADVOCACY IN
MINNESOTA*

**WRITING TO WHOLENESS &
VIOLENCE FREE MINNESOTA**





VIOLENCE FREE **MINNESOTA**

THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

ABOUT

Founded in 1978, Violence Free Minnesota is a statewide coalition of over 90 member programs working to end relationship abuse. Violence Free Minnesota strives to end relationship abuse by taking strategic action in partnership with the power of survivors and member programs across the state. As Minnesota's state domestic violence coalition, we shape public policy, raise public awareness, and build the capacity of community-based programs to address the needs of survivors of relationship violence and advocate on their behalf.

OUR MISSION

- Represent relationship abuse victim/survivors and member programs;
- Challenge systems and institutions;
- Promote social change;
- And support, educate, and connect member programs.

OUR VISION

To end relationship abuse, create safety, and achieve social justice for all.



ABOUT

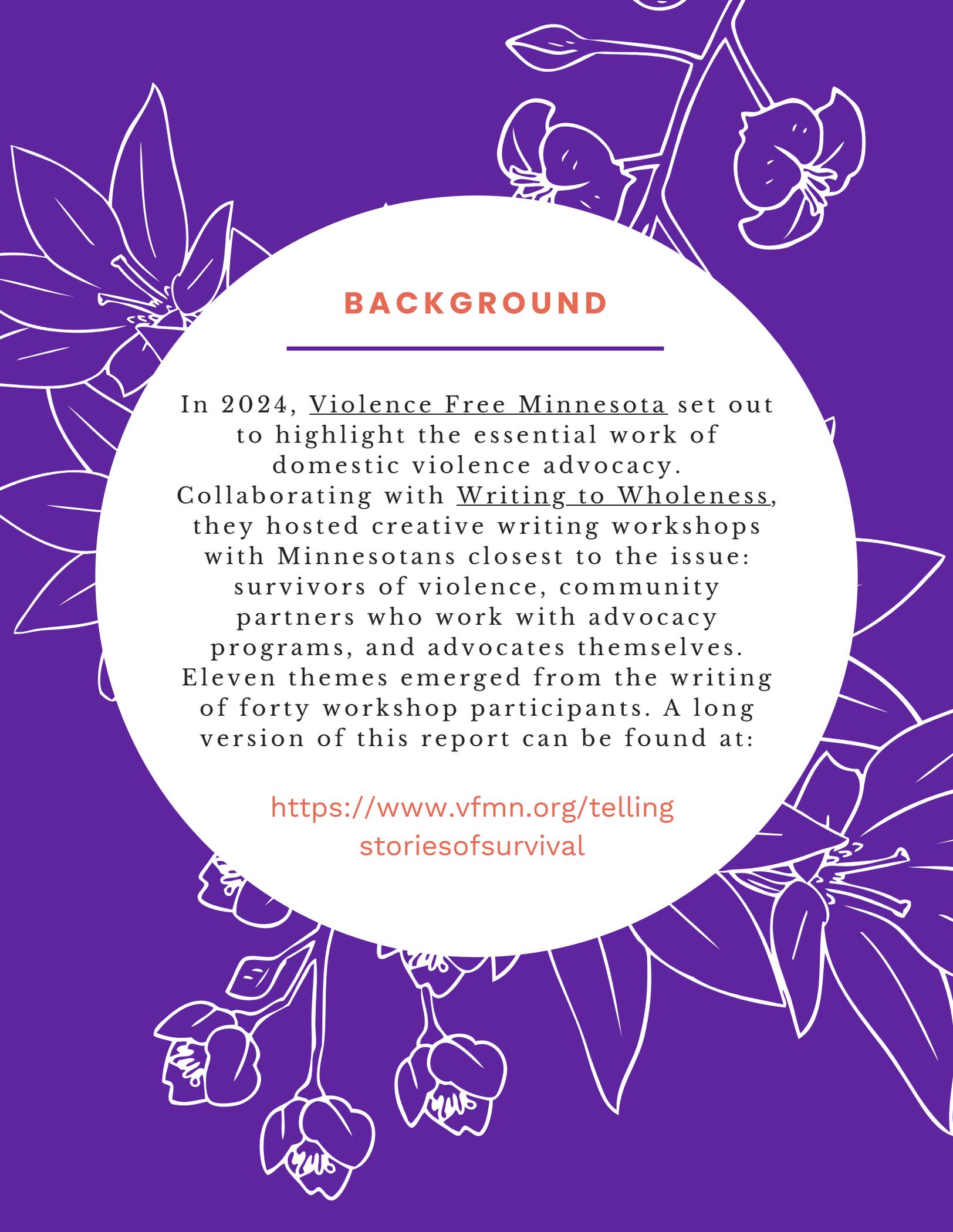
The mission of the Writing to Wholeness Collective is to improve individual and community well-being by promoting writing as a strategy for personal and social change. We formed in 2019 to spread the power of creative writing to those who have experienced domestic and sexual violence. We are an intergenerational and interdisciplinary team of artists, diverse in culture, expertise, and age. Our skills, our sensitivity (due to how trauma had impacted us personally), and our love of writing coalesced into an idea to share the writing exercises and mindfulness practices we witnessed as practical, successful tools to improve the well-being and wholeness of survivors.

<https://writingtowholeness.com/>

THE ARTISTS

The artists leading the Writing to Wholeness Collective are Elena Anderson Eggert and Wendy Brown-Baez. Both Wendy and Elena are authors with active writing careers. Elena brings ten years of advocacy experience serving victims of domestic and sexual violence in settings such as crisis lines, hospitals, and college campuses. Wendy has facilitated writing workshops for thirty years in settings such as Cornerstone, The Aliveness Project, El Colegio High School, SafeZone, Face to Face Academy, and state prisons.

All illustrations in this report were created by Vicky Eidelsztein, Argentinian visual artist. More of her work here: <https://www.holavicksz.com/>.



BACKGROUND

In 2024, Violence Free Minnesota set out to highlight the essential work of domestic violence advocacy. Collaborating with Writing to Wholeness, they hosted creative writing workshops with Minnesotans closest to the issue: survivors of violence, community partners who work with advocacy programs, and advocates themselves. Eleven themes emerged from the writing of forty workshop participants. A long version of this report can be found at:

[https://www.vfmn.org/telling
storiesofsurvival](https://www.vfmn.org/telling-storiesofsurvival)

1. Advocates meet survivors where they are, providing hope, empowerment, and resources to make their own decisions.

“We offer compassion, empathy, greater understanding, a wealth of knowledge, shelter and stability.” -Advocate

2. Working with an advocacy program helps survivors re/connect with themselves and learn more about their needs, identity, and goals. The approach of advocacy is unique, and crucial to a survivor's journey.

“I learned that I had a right to feel as I did, that I could stop turning myself inside out to be okay for others, that I can continue to grow and be more empowered.” - Survivor





3. Working with advocacy programs offers survivors community-building and validation through connection with others with similar experiences.

“Abuse stole a part of me I had to fight to get back. And I did it by listening to others’ stories.” -Survivor

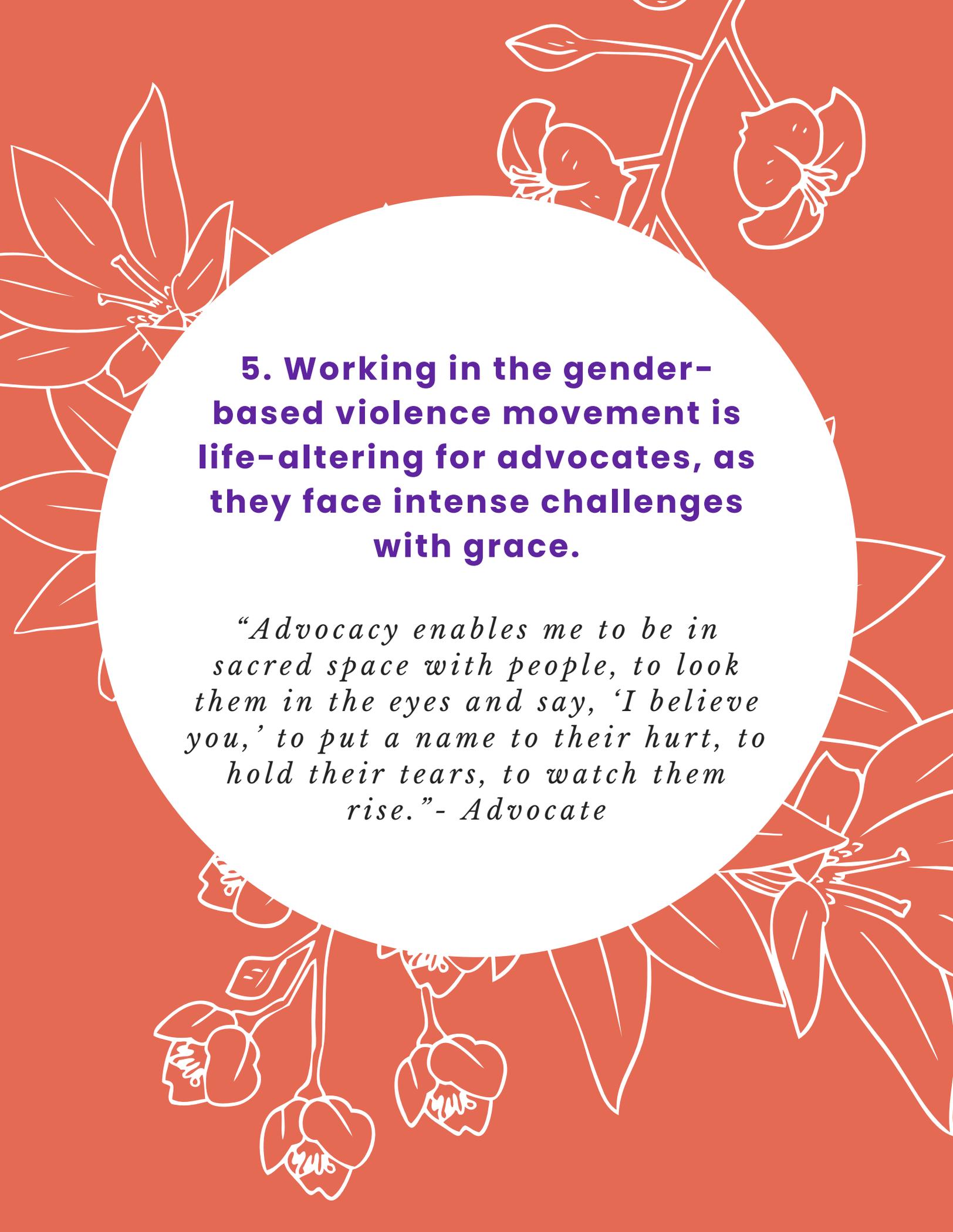
- *“We need to speak out and let our stories be known so we can show the world that we are stronger together.” -Survivor*

4. Many advocates get into this work because they are survivors.

- *“Being an advocate has shown me how much we are all suffering, how much we all look for love, connection, and acceptance. It’s shown me that healing is possible.” -Advocate*
 - *“I’m passionate about doing something to give back for everything given to me and my kids.” -Survivor*
- 

I feel like I'm
finally starting
to know myself





5. Working in the gender-based violence movement is life-altering for advocates, as they face intense challenges with grace.

“Advocacy enables me to be in sacred space with people, to look them in the eyes and say, ‘I believe you,’ to put a name to their hurt, to hold their tears, to watch them rise.”- Advocate

6. Culturally-specific approaches to intervention and prevention are a critical and under-resourced component of ending domestic violence.

- *“We offer healing that reflects the community we serve.”- Advocate*
- *“Culturally specific lenses are so important to ending domestic violence, especially the insights into cultural assets and strengths.” -Partner*

7. Domestic violence work intersects with other social justice issues, such as racial justice and transgender justice. Advocates are experts in navigating and honoring those intersections.

“I advocate for every victim, for every voice, I make sure everyone feels safe.” -Advocate





8. Ending domestic violence is a community responsibility. Advocates are positioned to lead the way.

“I envision a world where we recognize our interconnectedness. I believe the skills and tools from advocacy can get us there.”-

Partner

9. Advocates belong in collaborative spaces examining systems' responses to domestic violence. Their on-the-ground expertise improves responses for survivors.

- *“We recognize that survivors know what they need and there's no benefit to forcing them to jump through hoops to get their basic needs met.” -Advocate*
- *“We have advocates and systems workers and leaders and survivors, all side by side. There's a value in sharing and co-learning together.” -Partner*





10. Cuts to funding for advocacy are detrimental to the entire community. The informed, creative, and necessary work of preventing and intervening in domestic violence must be funded.

- *“Advocacy programs do so much for our state. These organizations received less funding in the past few years and that’s a loss for everyone in Minnesota, no matter what issue you care about.” -Partner*
- *“The issue of domestic violence is not isolated, it is connected to all systems and other health areas. It is a collective issue.”-Partner*

11. To continue supporting survivors, advocacy programs need opportunities for reflection, community-building, expression, and appreciation to increase staff’s well-being.



“We need to have advocacy honored and respected. We need grace, outlets, and resources.” -Advocate

Patchwork: An Advocacy Cento

The cento (or collage poem) is a poetic form composed entirely of lines from other writers. Here, each line comes from a workshop participant: survivors, advocates, and community members.

I was stuck and I needed to get out

You are in the right place
We all need each other

People come to us with their past carried along
I came to see how their stories were my stories

I am breaking the generational cycle
It is passion, it is commitment. It is a part of who I am

I have overcome a lot, and I have something to give
It's shown me that healing is possible

Let our stories be known
so we can show the world
that we are stronger together.

I'm still
here,

I'm still
standing





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**If you are experiencing abuse,
contact Day One at **866.223.1111** to connect with services.**

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