

SECTION: Community Connections

TOPIC TITLE: DSS Connections



Importance of Topic:

The local department of social services (LDSS) is an important resource for those serving survivors of domestic violence. Services provided by LDSS include SNAP, TANF, assistance with utilities, and child care ([Assistance](#)). Local DSS programs also work with Child Support applications and enforcement ([Applying for Child Support Services](#)). They also provide services through Adult Protective Services and Child Protective Services.

Statutes/Professional Standards:

- Code of Virginia References:
 - [Virginia Administrative Code - Title 22. Social Services - Agency 40. Department Of Social Services Agency Summary](#)
<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title22/agency40/preface/>: The Department of Social Services supervises the administration of public assistance and service programs by local social services agencies, including various federally reimbursed programs and programs not federally reimbursed.
 - [§ 63.2-1612. Responsibilities of Department; domestic violence prevention and services \(virginia.gov\)](#)
 - [§ 63.2-1509. \(Effective July 1, 2021\) Requirement that certain injuries to children be reported by physicians, nurses, teachers, etc.; penalty for failure to report](#): Virginia Code related to mandatory reporting requirements for suspected child abuse and neglect.
 - [§ 63.2-1605. Protective services for adults by local departments](#): Virginia code related to the protective services for adults by local departments.
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- [Professional Standards Reference](#): STANDARD #13: Sexual and Domestic Violence Agencies will coordinate services within the agency and the community to promote high quality integrated services and support to survivors. · Develop and maintain signed agreements (e.g. memorandum of understanding, cooperative agreements, partnership agreements) as needed to provide and coordinate services to survivors. Examples include: Cross-training and/or co-location with agencies such as: - Victim Witness - Social Services to include Adult and Child Protective Services - Colleges and universities - Mental health - Law enforcement - Hospitals - Schools - Immigration services - Legal aid.

Terms Used or Needed to Understand this Topic:

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Formerly known as food stamps, SNAP can be used like cash to buy eligible food items from authorized retailers. A SNAP account is established for eligible households and automatic deposits are made into the account each month. Participants will receive an EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) card which will debit the account each time eligible food items are purchased ([Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) - Virginia Department of Social Services](#)).

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): The TANF program provides eligible families with a monthly cash payment to meet their basic needs. Virginia's TANF program emphasizes personal responsibility. Participants may be provided with services such as job skills training, work experience, job readiness training, child care assistance, transportation and other work related expenses ([Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\) - Virginia Department of Social Services](#)).

Adult Protective Services (APS): Adult Protective Services (APS) receives and investigates reports of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of adults 60 years of age or older and incapacitated adults age 18 or older. If protective services are needed and accepted by the individual, local APS workers may arrange for a wide variety of health, housing, social and legal services to stop the mistreatment or prevent further mistreatment. Services offered may include home-based care, transportation, adult day services, adult foster care, nutrition services and legal intervention in order to protect the adult ([Adult Protective Services \(APS\) hotline](#)).

Child Protective Services (CPS): Child Protective Services (CPS) in Virginia is a continuum of specialized services designed to assist families care safely for their children. It encompasses the identification, assessment, investigation, and treatment of abused or neglected children. CPS provides services to children and their families in an effort to protect children, preserve families, and prevent further maltreatment. Local departments of social services are responsible for receiving reports of child maltreatment; responding to reports of child maltreatment; facilitating services to children and families; and supporting and strengthening families. CPS also assists with the development of statewide public awareness and education programs and provides programmatic support for the administration of state and federal grants aimed to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS): In addition to administering funds for domestic violence services, VDSS operates a statewide Child Protective Services (CPS) and Adult Protective Services (APS) hotline 24/7 to support local departments of social services by receiving reports of child and adult abuse and neglect and referring them to the appropriate LDSS. The CPS/APS Hotline is staffed by trained Protective Hotline Specialists.

Mandatory Reporters: Mandatory reporters are required to report suspected child abuse or child neglect to their LDSS or to the LDSS where the child resides or to the VDSS CPS hotline. Mandatory reporters are also required to report suspected elder abuse or abuse of incapacitated adults. See related Virginia Code listed above.

Did You Know?

Your local DSS staff can be an invaluable connection to other resources in your community. For instance, they may know about resources for clothing, furniture, and seasonal items such as food and gifts for holidays. If your program is well-connected with DSS staff, they will think of you when opportunities become available.

Racial/Social Justice Focus:

Survivors may have had no prior experience or knowledge of Social Services and may be ashamed to have to rely on public assistance. They may have had previous experiences or known of other people who experienced bias with Social Services. Survivors with children may be concerned about losing their kids.

Scenario 1: A Black woman comes to the shelter with her two children. After multiple attempts to leave her husband, she feels ready to go out on her own with her kids. She has no job and needs help. The advocate talks with her about applying for SNAP and TANF. The survivor is terrified to go to Social Services because she fears she will lose her children. She has known several women in her community who had their children taken away from them by Social Services. The advocate talks her through the process and tells her that she will go with her when she applies for DSS help.

- Is this a good role for the advocate to take?
- If the advocate is white, will that make a difference to the survivor? Will the survivor possibly feel like the advocate doesn't understand her fear?
- If the advocate is unable to go with the survivor to the LDSS, how might she help prepare the survivor to have a successful experience?

Scenario 2: An advocate walks by the open door of one of the bedrooms at a shelter. She witnesses one of the residents, an immigrant woman, hit her 10-year-old daughter when the child is being slow about getting dressed.

- What should the advocate do?
- The scenario describes it as the child being hit. Is this different if it's a smack on the child's bottom or a smack on the hand?
- If the advocate decides to contact CPS, what steps should she take with the client?
- Should a program have procedures in place to respond to something like this?

Trauma-informed Focus:

Informing survivors about the resources at their LDSS and helping them to navigate those services can be incredibly beneficial, especially for low-income clients. A strong connection with LDSS partners will help advocates know how to best access these services to support survivors.

Promising Practices:

Overview of General Characteristics:

- The program has strong connections with LDSS staff, covering all jurisdictions of the service area.
- Staff are aware of the resources available through Social Services and the procedures for accessing them, so that they can inform clients.
- Agency staff are involved in multi-disciplinary meetings or other gatherings as this can be a way to develop connections.
- The agency engages in training from LDSS to be well-informed of LDSS services for staff and volunteers.
- The agency has procedures for responding to concerns about child abuse, elder abuse, and abuse of incapacitated adults.
- The agency is clear with LDSS staff about confidentiality restrictions and the efforts taken to support survivor autonomy.

Examples:

- **Doorways** is a joint DV/SV program located in urban Arlington County. They have built a long standing and strong collaboration with Child Protective Services with their local DSS. Around 5 years ago, they started the Safe and Together program. From the beginning, Doorways has been a partner in creating more accountability for the offending parent and to protect and empower the non-offending parent (DV survivor). They have made many positive strides not only in collaboration and support to the family, but with early identification of information and services for children and their parents. To build this relationship, Doorways staff had to listen and understand their roles. They created a MOU with CPS with clear delineations. They held monthly meetings to discuss challenges, successes and new ways of doing things. They have been open to receive and provide honest feedback, learn from each other, and learn together. Although COVID impacted their services, they have continued to hold these monthly meetings. This helped them to adapt and serve their families better. Through this connection, Doorways and their local CPS have developed deep respect for each other and each other's services.

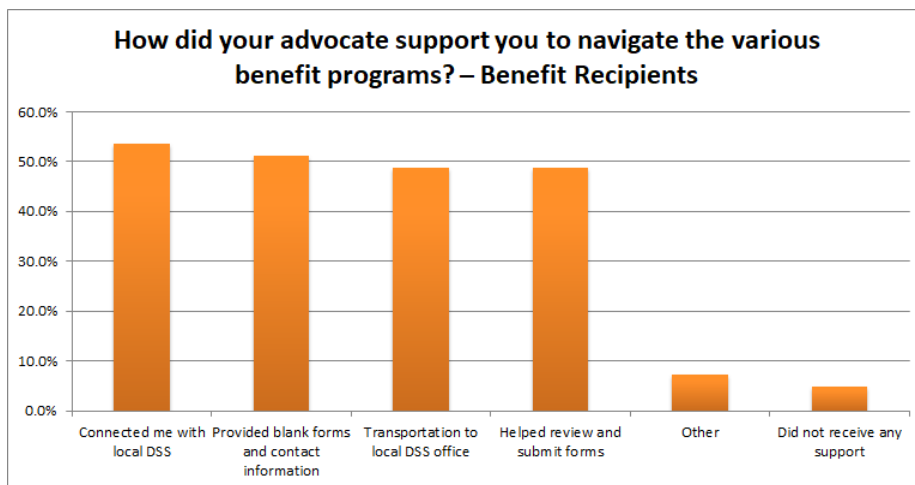
Program Focus:

- Are you aware of the local statistics with social services, especially with the removal of children from their home? Do these stats show higher numbers with children of color and/or low-income families?
- If there is a challenging situation that happens with staff of the LDSS, is the agency prepared to repair working relationships if needed?

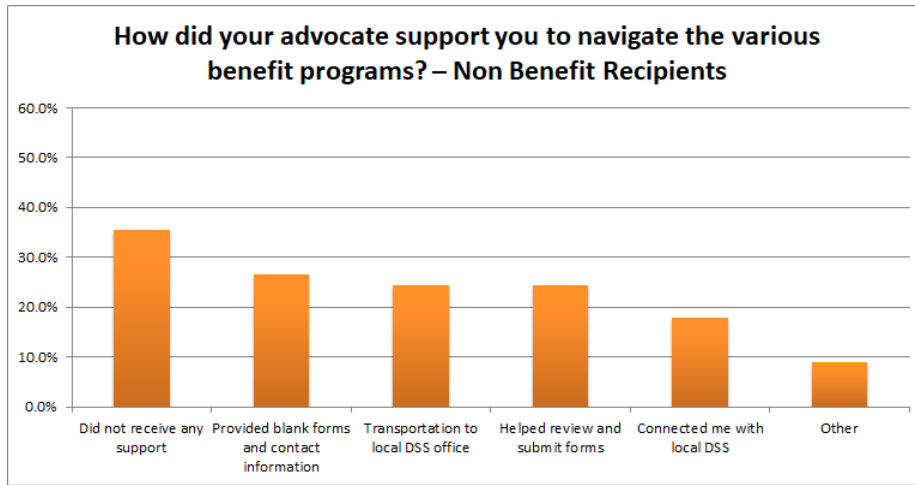
Client voice:

Documenting Our Work Evidence:

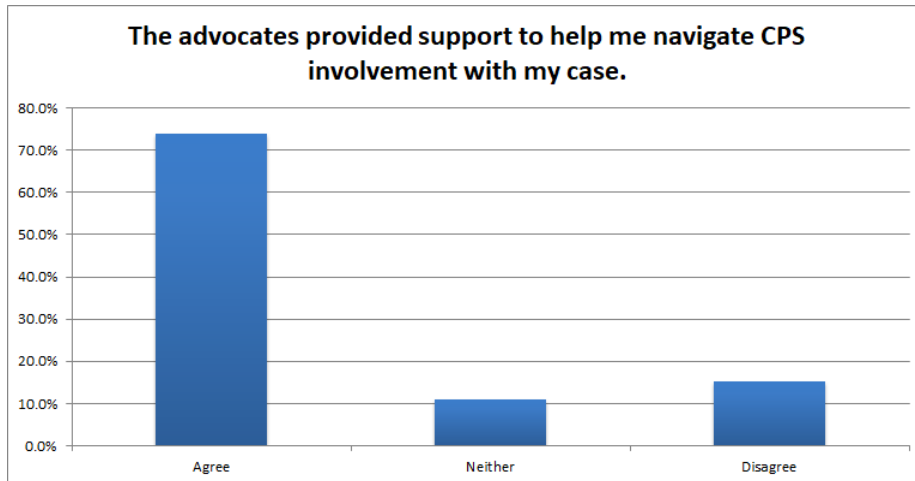
- “Taught a lot of positive thinking-- taught me I was not selfish for thinking of me. and that I needed to be positive when dealing with DSS”



Data from Survivor Voice Survey, 2021



Data from Survivor Voice Survey, 2021



Data from Survivor Voice Survey, 2021

COVID-19 Focus:

Your local DSS can be an invaluable resource during an unexpected crisis like COVID-19. There may be an increased need for survivors to access resources like food assistance or unemployment benefits and there may be an increase in services available through the local DSS. Advocates should continue to focus on being a resource for survivors wishing to seek benefits without taking away from a survivor’s agency. Interactions with DSS should always be decided by survivors with advocates lending support as necessary. Updates on the VDSS response to COVID-19 are found here: [VDSS COVID-19 RESPONSE - Virginia Department of Social Services.](#)

During COVID-19:

- Has your local DSS changed its hours of operation or its accessibility?
- How will support with DSS connections look different due to changes with COVID-19, for instance, if staff can't accompany survivors to social services or if they are only able to access services virtually?
- What DSS benefits may be more complicated for survivors to access during COVID-19? What resources (wifi, computer access) can your agency provide to help them apply for them?

Additional Resources + Links:

Videos:

- [Mandated Reporters](#): Powerpoint presentation for Mandated Reporters for Adult Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykLj-Hc28o4>: A Ted Talk by Jessica Pryce, To Transform Child Welfare, Take Race Out of the Equation.

Publications/Collections:

- <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/localagency/index.cgi>: Find your local department of social services.
- [Child Support in Virginia How YOU can better support Virginia's children](#): Brochure outlining support for children.
- [A Guide For Mandated Reporters In Recognizing And Reporting Child Abuse And Neglect](#): A Guide for Mandated Reporters in Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect.
- [Child Welfare League of America: CWLA](#): CWLA is a coalition of hundreds of private and public agencies that work to serve children and families who are vulnerable. The website includes e-learning, webinars, and publications.
- <https://info.mstservices.com/blog/racial-bias-problem-child-welfare>: Is Racial Bias Still a Problem in Child Welfare?