

**An Interview with Kittie Smith, Wisconsin SASP Administrator**

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Kittie Smith, the Wisconsin SASP Administrator has been quite successful in helping develop culturally-specific sexual assault services by supporting culturally-specific programs to develop a sexual assault component to their work. Among several other initiatives, she has funded HAWA (see separate article), an organization that works with the Hmong community in Milwaukee, to develop sexual assault programming.

She credits her trailblazing efforts to the analysis of women of color groups about the limitations of dominant culture programs to fully meet the needs of diverse groups of survivors and a background in grassroots program development spanning the past 42 years. She says her basic philosophy is that, “you should support communities’ to come up with and develop the responses and programs that they think will work best in their communities and stay focused on survivor empowerment.”

Kittie explained that, in Wisconsin, they have had several programs make the shift from being a solely domestic violence program into being a meaningful dual agency and noted, “The only way they’ve been able to do that is to proactively reach out to sexual assault survivors. “

Asked specifically how she has supported these programs, she commented, “You have to do a lot of listening. Go let them show you what they are doing. Advocate. Help them get doors open. Talk about the things that they do that are really working. Don’t answer questions on their behalf but let them speak for themselves.”

Kittie, an administrator for a number of additional federal funding sources that address violence against women, has also operationalized her commitment by holding pre-award grant writing training and specifically inviting culturally-specific organizations. She says, “They came and had a long conversation about to develop the work. We laid out a generic path and then discussed how it would be different in various communities. We also talked specifics like how much do things cost? What is an appropriate timeline?”

Of the approach of funding a short-term planning grant, Kittie explains, “Planning grants really allow for organizations that don’t currently have the capacity to provide sexual assault services to develop it, to work out kinks with the dominant culture organization, and work out their partnerships. Funding gives them the space to do that.” She asks them, “What basic information are you lacking now to do this? Do you have staff that need to go to training?” Kittie points out that the whole organization, not just one staff person, has to embrace the commitment to providing sexual assault services and fully integrate that commitment, “If there’s only one committed person, when that person leaves, the program will be

done.” She’s found that, with the commitment in place and the planning grant funding, outreach efforts can fairly quickly lead to actual direct services because survivors start to come forward.

In terms of a message to her colleagues, Kittie says, “It’s very inspiring to work with culturally-specific organizations. Don’t be afraid and get out there because it gives you the energy to do what you do, puts you back in touch with why you do this work and keeps you humble.”