

Ways to Serve Domestic Violence Survivors Remotely



- Train staff at shelters and domestic violence providers in the client's community to assist with the case. Provide mentorship and review the cases before they are processed. The challenges include:
 - Immigration law is a big subject to ask non-legal workers to take on. Therefore, you are faced with either presenting only the essential information (which leads to potential confusion because the context is missing), or finding very few people with that much time to devote. Training is a big time commitment for both legal service trainers and social service providers. It may be best to limit this plan to agencies that have a significant number of potential cases to work on, to make the training investment worthwhile. (However, training materials for social service providers are available through NIFVI.)
 - Similarly, mentoring someone else to do a case is not very efficient, and agencies with limited resources may find it frustrating.
 - Most legal service providers prefer at least one in-person meeting with a client where we can assess eligibility and admissibility.
 - NIFVI has worked with some social service providers that once they've completed a case, feel that they have sufficient expertise to complete others without assistance. NIFVI strongly suggests that an initial one-hour eligibility and admissibility screening meeting take place with each case before agencies go ahead with the declaration or the Supplement B (this prevents any disqualifying element from being overlooked).
- Work on developing an interactive computer program to analyze eligibility, recommend documents, and gather all the necessary information for an application for U Visas and VAWA. Then arrange for a staff member at a shelter or social services agency to interview the client and enter the information into the program.
- Do most of the client work over the phone. The challenges include:
 - It's an impersonal format for a very personal and potentially upsetting or even traumatic process.
 - It's harder to read subtle clues and concepts when we can't see each other.
 - It's hard to get signatures and documents and arrange for client to review documents you've prepared. It can take a long time for documents to get back and forth, delaying the process. Very few of clients have access to a fax machine, scanners or email.
- Conduct clinic days at remote sites. Ask a local organization to host you and to arrange for several clients to meet with you on the day that you are there. It is even possible to assist several clients at once in workshops. Sensitive and private issues like the contents of the police report, facts of the case and the declaration need to be done privately, but forms can be done in a group. Challenges include:
 - Devoting what may be a whole day to just a few clients may not be possible for many organizations.
 - Domestic violence survivors (particularly those with small children) tend to not show up or be very late for appointments. This can be frustrating, especially if you have traveled some distance for the appointment.
- Skype, OoVoo, or other video communication can be effective. Skype has been utilized with clients' relatives in small rural towns, and the same set-up (sometimes at the home of a relative or friend) may be able to be helpful to meet with a legal worker. The law office needs to buy a webcam and make time available for the meeting. Since the client will have access to a computer and internet in order to access Skype, the client can be looking at materials just as she would in the office.

- Installing Skype at a social service agency in a remote community and in the legal service office may be an effective use of offsite and onsite resources. If social service staff can be dedicated to serving as a liaison between the client and legal service agency, s/he can smooth the impersonal aspect of the interaction and support looking through documents and coordinating emails documents. Social service staff are great partners in legal services to domestic violence survivors in other contexts as well - explaining the provisions, taking the declaration, helping gather documents, etc. In many cases, it is difficult to devote two professionals to one case. But in a case where a client is remote from legal services, this option is so much less burdensome than the client or legal worker traveling long distances that it may be worth the extra time.