

The Legacy of the Strong Field Project Executive Summary



May 19th, 2015

Project No. 4208

Prepared for:

Lucia Corral Peña
Senior Program Officer
Blue Shield Against Violence
Blue Shield of California
Foundation

50 Beale Street
San Francisco, CA 94105
Tel: (415) 229-5462
www.strongfieldproject.org
www.blueshieldcafoundation.org

Prepared by:

Hanh Cao Yu, Ph.D.
Jennifer Henderson-Frakes
Miloney Thakrar
Castle Sinicrope
Lydia Nash
Allie Bollella

With contributions from:

Mika Clark
Eduardo Ortiz
1333 Broadway, Suite 310
Oakland, CA 94612
www.spra.com

Executive Summary



Since its early years, the Blue Shield of California Foundation (BSCF) has been strongly committed to ending domestic violence (DV) in California. This commitment to large-scale social change has led the Foundation to adopt a field-level lens for creating the conditions necessary for DV leaders and organizations to become more effective in addressing domestic violence.

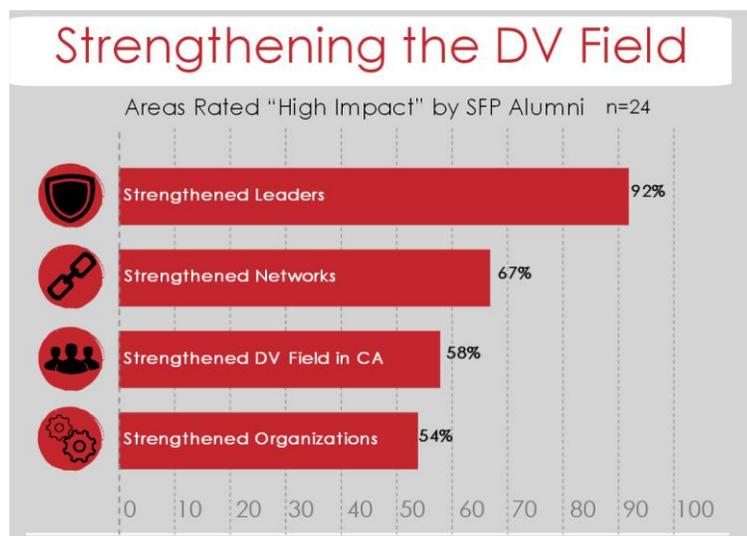
In response to a comprehensive scan of the strengths and needs of the DV field in California, the Foundation launched a bold, multi-million, five-year initiative called the Strong Field Project (SFP) in 2010. The SFP's ultimate goal was to strengthen a DV field that is "equipped with a critical mass of diverse leaders and organizations with sufficient capacity and the right support, tools, skills and knowledge to lead a stronger movement forward to prevent and end DV." The SFP has a three-pronged approach: (1) leadership development program (LDP), (2) organizational strengthening grants (OSG), and (3) networking building and knowledge sharing (NBKS).

BSCF engaged Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) to assess the SFP's impact and contributions to strengthening the DV field. In this final initiative report, we look at the legacy of the SFP at the individual, organizational, and field levels and implications for the field as leaders move beyond the SFP to make their own legacy.

SPR used various methods to assess progress towards the major SFP outcomes. These included (1) interviews with 66 SFP participants, alumni, Advisory Group members, Coordinating Committee members, and DV field leaders; (2) an SFP Alumni Follow-up Survey, (3) LDP organizational case studies; and (4) information gathered from training evaluations, pre and post assessments, observations, and document review.

Overview of The Legacy of the Strong Field Project

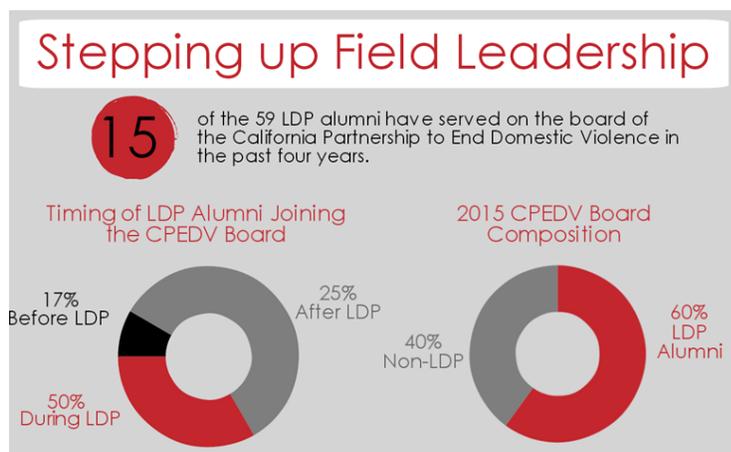
In the final year of the SFP, SPR conducted The SFP Alumni Follow-Up Survey with LDP and OSG alumni. Our goal for this survey was to understand the longer-term impact of the SFP on individuals, organizations, and the field—especially now that leaders and organizations have had some amount of distance from the program and time to apply their learnings and experience. The results, shown above, were fairly consistent with previous survey findings. Nine-two percent (92%) of alumni rated



“strengthened leaders” as the highest area of SFP impact. This was followed by about two-thirds (67%) rating “stronger networks” across the state as the highest area of impact, and more than half (58%) rating a “stronger DV field in California” as the highest area of impact. We take a deeper dive into each of these areas in the remainder of the report.

Strengthened Leaders

One of the most powerful legacies of the Strong Field Project is the cadre of strengthened leaders that this initiative has fostered. LDP alumni, as well as those who have worked with these individuals, report profound impacts from participation in the LDP. Our analysis of pre- and post-leadership assessments and interviews with leaders showed that the LDP has had significant impacts on DV leaders’ leadership and management skills overall, and in the following specific areas: increased self-awareness as a leader, increased self-confidence, increased multicultural leadership, increased financial leadership, improved succession planning and management of change and conflict, and increased field leadership. Furthermore, at the end of their LDP participation, **67% of LDP alumni reported holding leadership positions in local, regional, and statewide DV networks and the Partnership Board consists of 60% LDP alumni leaders.** Indicative of the persistence of difficult working conditions, self-care and work-life balance continue to be areas of challenge for leaders in the DV field, and showed the least LDP effect. In general, LDP has fostered leaders who are not only empowered and re-energized, but also well positioned to become more effective field and movement leaders.



Strengthened Organizations

The Strong Field Project has strengthened domestic violence organizations through multiple channels, including the two cohorts of 27 OSG grantees funded to build capacity in various priority areas. Key outcomes for OSG I grantees included the implementation of transformative organizational models such as shared leadership models, and models that integrated community organizing and child abuse services. **In discussing their progress and most valuable outcomes, OSG II grantees stressed the importance of infrastructure, systems, and groundwork laid, as well as larger culture shifts** that occurred as a result of their OSG projects.

To what extent are grantees stronger organizations as a result of their work? While the assessment of OSG I grantees was challenged by inconsistent data here, for OSG II grantees, organizational strengthening can be described both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively, OSG II grantees took a short survey to assess the status of key capacity areas for their organizations prior and after their OSG grant periods. **OSG II grantees reported increases in all capacity areas. Increases were particularly pronounced in two of the weakest areas at baseline: systems to manage and coordinate goals and activities; and the use of monitoring and evaluation data.** This reflects much of the infrastructure and process-oriented outcomes highlighted by OSG II grantees.

In a *qualitative* sense, OSG II grantees continued to reflect on how their organizations have been strengthened in the areas of operations/administration, programming, and/or finances. **OSGII grantees’ administration was strengthened in a number of ways, ranging from facilities**

and operations, to increased knowledge and heightened inter-departmental collaboration. Infrastructure strengthening was also a theme in this area, particularly around capacity to do fund development work. **Overall, effects on programming included: larger shifts in philosophy or framework for service provision; expansion of services or capacity to serve; and co-location of services and partnerships.** A broad group of OSG II grantees reported fund development-related strengthening as a result of their OSG II work. OSG II grantees **made changes to their approach to fundraising, and increased their organizational capacity to engage with potential funders. Capacity was heightened not always by hitting original revenue targets, but by putting critical infrastructure in place with strong promise for the future.**

In addition to the OSG II grants, LDP also provided a unique opportunity for organizational strengthening through the strengths-based leadership organizational retreats. This extra organizational support was a direct response to the challenges that some LDP leaders reported facing in bringing innovative learnings back to their organizations. Four selected LDP III organizations took advantage of this retreat opportunity to deepen individual and collective understanding of how to utilize strengths-based leadership principles.

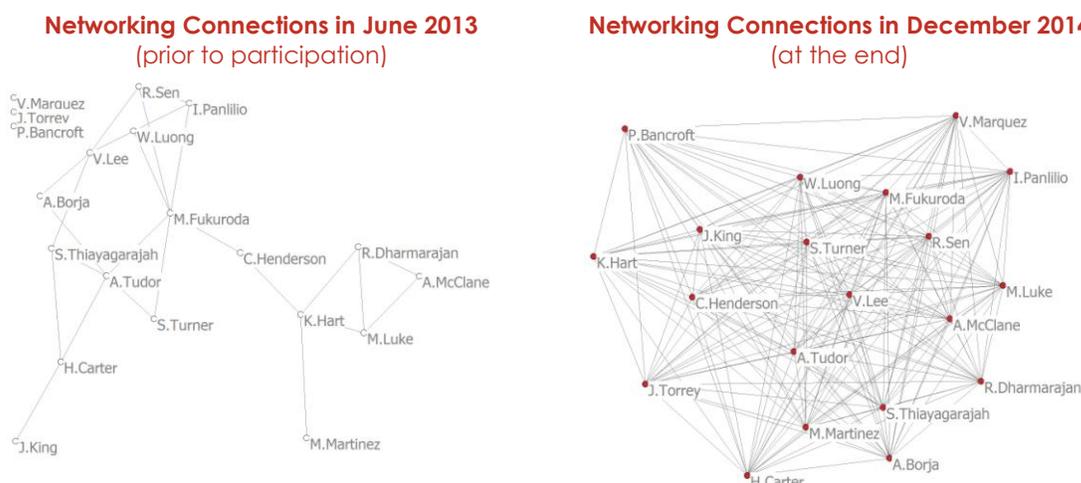
Although the long-term effects of these recent strengths-based organizations are yet to be seen, the survey results and interviews conducted showed that the **organizational retreats were most effective in the short term at helping participants understand and become aware of their personal strengths.** Moreover, all four organizations reported some noticeable organizational changes that can be attributed to the strengths-based leadership retreat.

Key factors that contributed to the success and effectiveness of the LDP organizational retreats included the following: **(1) a critical mass among senior leadership and peers to champion strengths-based practices; (2) multiple mechanisms to facilitate reflection and integration of strength-based leadership practices and tools; and (3) concerted efforts to integrate strengths-based content into organizational policies, systems, and culture.**

Strengthened Field and Network

The SFP has been strongly guided by the value of collaboration as well as by long-term objectives to strengthen statewide and local coalitions to network, support, and sustain the DV field in California. The final report reflects on connections among LDP and SFP participants in fall-winter 2013-2014, complemented by a case study of how the SFP has contributed to increased connections and collaboration among Cohort III with the potential to strengthen the DV network in California.

Over the course of their participation, LDP Cohort III transformed from disparate groups and



individuals with few or no connections to each other, to a dense and highly interconnected network. Prior to joining LDP Cohort III, several cohort members had no previous connections with other cohort members, even at the networking level. Within the first six months of the program, connections among cohort members exploded and by the end of the program, all members reported interactions and connections with each other.

At the end of the program, there is evidence that strong relationships and supports are in place among LDP Cohort III participants. Participants frequently check in with one another via phone calls, text, and e-mail to discuss personal and professional challenges and accomplishments. Cohort III has also put in place a resilient support system to sustain their current relationships and facilitate further growth beyond the conclusion of the LDP program. Finally, Cohort III has also begun taking action and self-organizing around specific projects, such as collaborating on BSAV Cultural Competency grants and serving on the Partnership Board.

In terms of connections to the broader field, as of fall and winter of 2013-2014, LDP participants filled important places in the SFP network. Representatives from all cohorts occupied central roles in the network, reflecting a high level of interconnectivity with other central leaders in the field. Examples of cross-cohort LDP connections include: improved collaboration on a regional level, co-facilitating capacity-building trainings, developing the Domestic Violence Information Resource Center (DVIRC) (an online collaborative community for domestic violence agencies to share resources and network), joining the Partnership's Board, and partnering to apply for grant funding from Blue Shield and other sources.

While many SFP participants acknowledged the field has room for continued growth and development, they also noted several areas of change and transformation since 2010, including:

- **The field has stronger networks, and there is less feeling of isolation.** Many SFP participants recognized the important role SFP has played in bringing together leaders, providing the space for connecting, and building the capacity of leaders to network
- **The SFP has provided space for critical conversations and infused the field with new life and momentum.** Numerous field leaders and LDP alumni highlighted how SFP has provided the space to have critical conversations that have been historically too risky or scary.
- **The field has become more diverse and made progress towards bringing in innovation, new leaders, and non-traditional partners.** Participants reflected on a host of ways the field has become more diverse since 2010, from a new openness to approaches (e.g., trauma-informed care, cultural competence) to regional diversity and including individuals from rural organizations.
- **The field has made progress towards shared language and a shared vision.** While SFP participants did not feel the field has been fully united around a shared vision, many agreed that there is evidence of an emerging shared language and vision and that many leaders in the field are reaching agreement on the topics that need to be addressed for a common vision and agenda to be fully fleshed out.

Strengthened Knowledge Base

From the Leadership Development Program, the Regional Institutes, and SFP Institutes, **the DV field in California has already begun to learn about the LDP “gems” and has practiced applying the strength-based leadership tools, multicultural leadership, and adaptive leadership models in organizational processes and systems.** These powerful ideas and concepts are gaining critical

mass with in many organizations as multiple participants from the same DV organization are taking part in LDP and as LDP alumni are being trained to effectively share valuable knowledge with those who have not been part of the SFP.

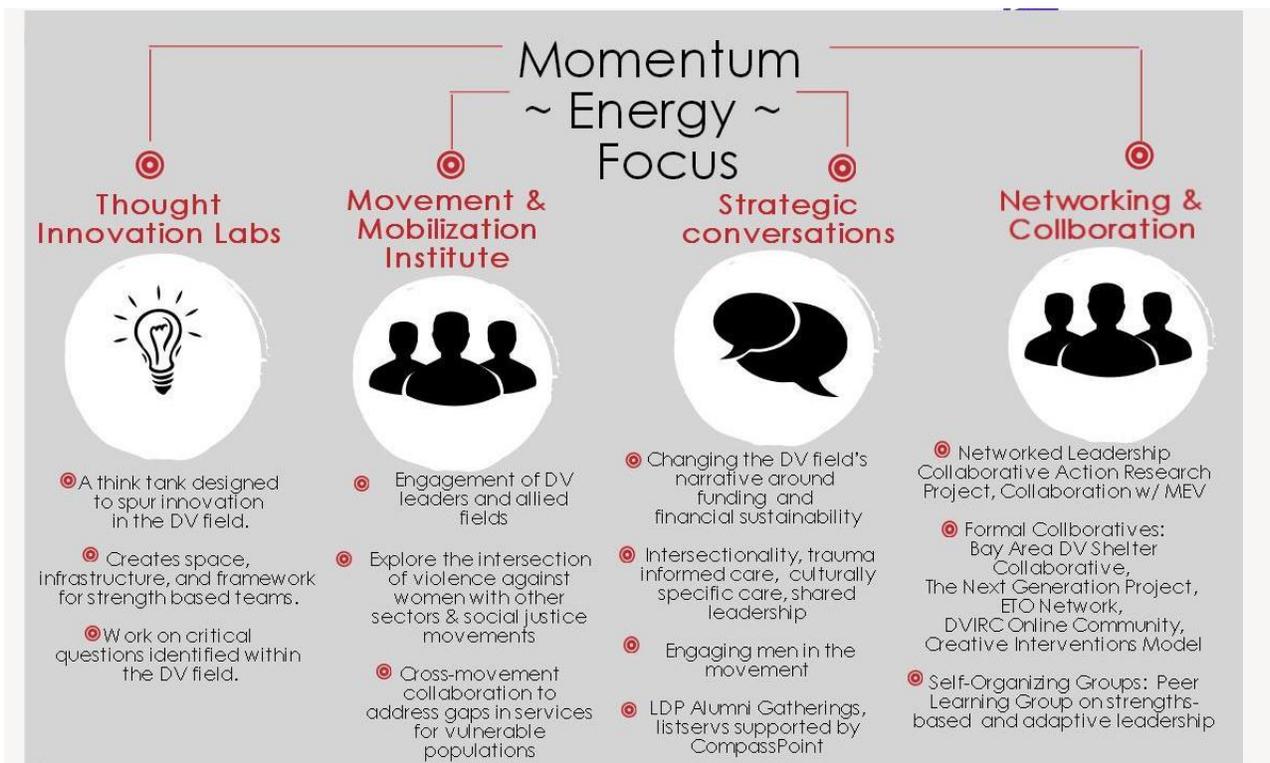
From the OSG, critical groundwork and infrastructure has been laid, and invaluable lessons learned, from the organizational development work of the OSG II grantees. **Particularly rich knowledge resides in the areas of fund development, theories of change, mergers and holistic service delivery, shared leadership models, and leadership development/policy advocacy.**

While in some cases the full impact of these efforts and models have yet to be felt, the implementation lessons, outputs, and initial outcomes have rich implications for the field.

Beyond the SFP

As the SFP ended, the momentum continued to build as leaders, organizations, and networks began to mobilize across California to continue the field-changing conversations that occurred at the 2014 SFP Institute and the LDP Alumni convenings.

Efforts Underway Leading to Action. SFP alumni were asked where there has been momentum and what has been seen as promising. The graphic below presents major areas of focus that were most frequently mentioned. With hope and excitement, leaders pointed to efforts that are field generated and supported by the Foundation, including the Thought Innovation Labs and the Movement & Mobilization Institute. LDP leaders unanimously expressed interest in continuing to have strategic conversations and taking action on topics such as intersectionality, culturally specific and trauma-informed care models, changing the narrative of what the movement needs to end DV, funding for sustainability, and engaging men in the movement. In addition to involvement in the Legacy Projects, a number of efforts were cited by both DV leaders and BSCF as already underway to foster informal and formal networking and collaboration in California's DV field (e.g., Networked Leadership Collaborative Action Research Project, Efforts to Outcomes Database Collaboration, The Bay Area DV Shelter Collaborative, etc.)



Challenges to Moving to Action. While the level of energy and sense of optimism are high, LDP alumni and others highlight some potential barriers in order to transition to an “action network.” Identified barriers include: **cohort silos and cliques** between SFP participants and others. Looking forward, key questions that remain are whether the network should move forward with cohort-based workgroups leading the charge in specific areas, or should the network take a broader, more movement-minded approach. Although there is evidence of growing cross-cohort collaboration among LDP participants, it is critical alumni not fall into siloed groups and cliques without the benefits and perspective that the increasingly diverse DV field can bring.

Some divisions exist within key issues, despite broadly agreeing on what key areas need to be addressed. Movement to an “action network” will require **infrastructure and continued support from foundations and intermediaries**. Many LDP alumni and others feel there will need to be field, organizational and state level support for the Legacy Projects. Another challenge will be to **find additional resources to support the action network and the in-person convenings**.

Next Steps by Field Leaders. In response to the question of what is needed to ensure success in moving to action, DV leaders had many ideas and suggestions to share especially around the need to engage new stakeholders and ensure that adequate infrastructure is in place to support the work.

- **Engage new stakeholders.** To move the field to become an action network, LDP alumni pointed to the need for engaging new stakeholders outside the SFP to lift up new and diverse voices.
- **Ensure networking infrastructure is effective.** Leaders also identified the need to ensure there are continued in-person meetings and convenings. In order to continue the momentum of SFP, leaders strongly believed that there needs to be space for continued face-to-face collaboration and that it has to be as inclusive as possible. Also, cognizant of the fact that most of these leaders have full-time jobs, many leaders expressed the need to figure out what “backbone” support mechanisms will look like for the Legacy Projects.
- **Communicate the goals and structure of the Legacy Projects.** Most importantly, leaders are unsure what the future of the Legacy Projects will be. Their focus, structure, and impact are not clear yet and many leaders feel the legacy projects will need extensive support after the sunsetting of SFP.
- **Define the Partnership’s role.** DV leaders agree that the responsibility of the Partnership is to continue providing many of the types of trainings and gatherings started by SFP. Leaders also see the role of the Partnership as taking the lead on finding resources and funding to sustain convenings and trainings. Finally, leaders see the Partnership as also being the holder of knowledge, and sharing information to build inclusivity for the movement.

Conclusion

Through careful planning, implementation, and sunsetting of the Strong Field Project, The Blue Shield of California Foundation has made a lasting and far-reaching impact on the entire DV field. The success of this initiative has largely been the result of Coordinating Committee partners and the Advisory Group members’ deep insights into the field’s strengths and needs, and the unwavering commitments of leaders to be vulnerable and authentic in re-building themselves, their organizations, and the movement to end domestic violence. Moreover, individuals involved in the SFP strongly recognize the value and significance of this initiative as a rare opportunity for the entire DV field to be resourced and challenged on “habits” and approaches

that were not working; to fail and learn from mistakes; to have courageous conversations; and to experiment with innovations. While the SFP is at an end, leaders are boldly charting a new course for the DV field to become more effective in advancing a stronger movement to prevent and end domestic violence in California.