***TRAITS (Of an effective advocate)***

***Cangleska, Inc. Advocates Training Manual\****

***Empathy***

Empathy means to understand what a woman is saying and communicating back to her that you do understand. It doesn’t mean that the advocate had to have the same experience. It does mean that the advocate has learned about the dynamics of battering or rape and she can genuinely identify with the woman’s experience.

***Respect***

The advocate knows the woman has worth. The advocate protects the woman’s right to make her own decisions. She knows the woman has the ability to overcome the crisis. Being respectful means that the advocate doesn’t get over- protective or doesn’t act in a negative way toward the woman. Battered women and rape victims come with many different personalities and some are hard to work with. Remembering she has worth and rights will help.

***Genuineness***

The advocate doesn’t need to become someone she isn’t. She doesn’t use “counselor talk” or psycho-babble. She uses her own style and is confident in that. The advocate can be freely herself. When an advocate is genuine, the woman develops trust quickly and doesn’t have to be on guard that she’s being psychoanalyzed or judged by someone who thinks they are superior.

***Concreteness***

The advocate is clear, concise and specific. This helps the woman move out of confusion and powerlessness. It also helps her stay in the present - in what’s going on now. For example, if the woman says, “He hit me.” The advocate asks, “Where did he hit you, with what and how many times?”

***Sensitivity to “others”***

How a woman reacts to being physically or sexually attacked has a lot to do with her specific culture, family, handicap or lifestyle. Advocates have to work hard or rid themselves of stereotypes. For example: a woman may tell you she is in a love relationship with another woman. If she perceives that the advocate disapproves of lesbians, she knows she won’t get help and the advocate hasn’t done her job.

***Self-Disclosure***

Sometimes it’s helpful for the advocate to share personal details about her life - most often if she has been a victim of violence herself. There are benefits and negatives to doing this. They have to be weighed by the advocate and she has to go with her instinct. The benefits are that there can be a bonding and a positive relationship established. The negative is that the focus could shift away from the woman who needs your help. The most common mistake is when the advocate goes on too long about her own experience and the woman feels like she has to become the helper.

***Confidence***

Confidence comes with experience and training. It means the advocate is convincing and dynamic - she is sure of herself. This helps the woman feel like she can trust and she’s in a safe place. Also, it communicates to the woman that there is hope that the advocate will use her skills to help the woman find her way out of crisis. Sometimes, we have to convince ourselves we are confident even when we aren’t. One of the mistakes an advocate can make is to “get into the crisis” with the caller. Remembering that she is asking you for assistance will help to keep calm.

***\*****Cangleska, Inc. was a Native non-profit model advocacy program that included shelter, outreach, batterers re-education and probation programs, etc. As a culturally-based program it modelled itself in the ways of a women’s society. Additionally, understanding that battering is a gender-based issue, the word “woman” is used rather than survivor or victim. Inclusion of males, recognition of the Two Spirit community, children etc. was considered a routine, necessary part of advocacy.*