

Advancing Equity Action Plan

Sexual Assault Support Services | Updated Spring 2023

Since 1991, our mission has been to provide outreach, advocacy, and support to survivors of past and present sexual violence and to change the societal conditions that cause oppression, especially sexual violence. Addressing the root causes of sexual violence *is* addressing oppression, and thus at the heart of SASS's mission. We envision a world without sexual violence and indeed without oppression. On the road towards that future, we work to build a community of care where survivors are supported, trauma is mitigated, and violence is prevented. Our work in hospitals, courts, schools, and the community represents SASS's collective commitment to dismantling the systems of oppression that create the conditions in which sexual violence can occur.

At SASS, we want to move beyond inclusivity, acceptance, and tolerance. We are actively co-conspirators in the work towards anti-racism, anti-oppression, and collective liberation. We acknowledge the legacy of white supremacy, settler colonialism, and extractive capitalism and seek to deconstruct the ways that those legacies are enacted within and through us.

SASS's commitment to liberation is evident from even its early years: a Latina Advocate position was one of the first funded, full-time staff positions, and this program has grown throughout the years into the robust Latinx Community Connections program of today. Over the past 30+ years, we've invested in projects and programs that have focused on issues specific to BIPOC survivors, queer and trans survivors, rural survivors, unhoused survivors, disabled survivors, survivors who are or have been incarcerated, impoverished survivors, and more. But SASS is also a part of the anti-violence movement, which has been both transformative and regressive, has challenged and reinforced inequality, and has been resistant to and complicit in oppression. In order to move forward as co-conspirators in the work of liberation, SASS has to account for the legacy of these stories and systems as they exist within our movement and organization. While we strive to use our position for liberation, we are also beneficiaries of those oppressive systems and inherently complicit in them.

In particular, we acknowledge that to discuss sexual violence in the United States requires us to acknowledge the white-supremacy and anti-Blackness inherent in US cultural notions about sexual violence. From the earliest days of the US colonial project, whiteness was constructed in opposition to racist narratives about Black people, and specifically to racist narratives about Black people's sexuality. White masculinity was in part defined by its role in protecting white femininity and sexual purity from the specter of Black male sexual aggression — literally one of the central plot points in the seminal turn of the century work of racist ideology *Birth of a Nation* (which was the first film ever screened in the White House). Narratives about Black women's sexual promiscuity and the treatment of Black women as chattel bred to reproduce (literally) enslavement were similarly used to contrast with white feminine sexual purity and domesticity. This is just one small piece of the large and complex mosaic of intersecting narratives, systems,

and identities that, as a whole, tells the story of whiteness in what is now the US and that also, therefore, tells the story of systemic oppression in the US.

Because of our place within this long, complicated history, it is our responsibility to engage in deep self-reflection, as individuals and as an agency, and ensure that we resist the pull to say, “this is how it has always been done” or “this is just the way it is.” Systemic oppression is a machine that churns out harm, including sexual violence, but if it is a machine that was built, then it is a machine that can be taken apart. And though we will not take down the master’s house using the master’s tools, though we may be built upon the master’s foundation, we nevertheless have the power to fashion and wield our own tools of collective liberation.

Policies we rely on to advance equity

Recruiting, hiring, supporting, and sustaining a diverse team (staff, volunteers, interns, and board members)

In order to recruit and retain staff from all backgrounds, we start by establishing thriving wages. Staff deserve more than fairness or subsistence in their salaries; they deserve the financial stability to thrive. This means that we fight for the funding needed to pay people what they deserve. Indeed, we strive to pay all people for their labor; we value and appreciate those who want to and are able to donate the gift of their time, but we know that volunteering is not possible for all people. We strive to move people into paid positions whenever and pay interns whenever possible.

We reduce artificial barriers to success. SASS expects our staff to be compassionate, collaborative, and ready to learn. We don’t expect that a person needs a particular degree in order to meet those expectations. Our jobs value lived experience just as much as education, so we don’t require degrees except where necessary. We invest in the infrastructure needed to succeed in this work so that our staff don’t have to be able to supply that infrastructure themselves. For this reason, we retain an agency car, have cell phones and laptops for each position, and pay a technology stipend during times when staff are required to work remotely.

We invest holistically in our staff. This starts with robust benefits and a commitment to work-life balance. It also includes policies that make room for differing cultural practices. Our comprehensive Paid Time Off (PTO) policy allows staff to observe holidays that hold personal, cultural, religious, or identity-specific significance. Rather than having all-staff holidays, all staff have a significant pool of PTO that they can apply to any time off, without question. Staff can choose to mark Indigenous Peoples Day, Jewish holidays, and other significant dates that may not be recognized on a federal or state level. Likewise, our bereavement policy includes a broad definition of family members to allow for cultural differences in the notion of a close family member.

We work to reduce vicarious trauma, institutional betrayal, and moral injury. Each week, we dedicate at least an hour to an all-staff debrief to offload trauma. We also encourage recovery practices like naps, decompression time, and frequent breaks. We support staff to take mental health time off and encourage rest. We invest in our community through staff retreats and team building, and also with agency fun days, staff appreciation celebrations, and other times dedicated wholly to community building. Finally, we don't accept that enduring harassment, abuse, or cruelty is a prerequisite for this work. We ask that our program participants respect our boundaries and treat us with respect. We give space for growth and model acceptable behavior, and when people are unable to engage with us in ways that are not harmful, we ask that they step back from our services until they are able to participate without causing harm.

We invest in staff development, mentorship, and growth. We want staff to be able to build strong careers and we want them to be able to do that here for as long as possible. Our management team works to identify each staffer's goal and find ways to support them in meeting those goals. We provide mentorship and support staff to seek continuing education.

We strive towards diverse leadership. We work to have a leadership team that mirrors the diversity of our staff and represents many different types of expertise and experience. We work to reduce barriers to serving on our governing Board of Directors, including having no specific giving requirement and valuing more than just fundraising ability. However, we know that the ability to volunteer time on a Board is itself a privilege that inherently excludes some people from participation. In an area as predominantly white as Lane County, those BIPOC people who can volunteer their time are disproportionately burdened by requests for board service. We will not demand exploited labor. In order to incorporate as much insight as possible, we are exploring advisory councils and other methods for compensating volunteerism.

We know that investing in people means investing in the high quality services that survivors deserve. We routinely audit agency policy for oppressive norms and opportunities for growth. We experiment with alternative models of labor, such as remote workdays and four-day work weeks. All of these tactics improve our staff's quality of life, which in turn makes them better advocates for their clients. We reject the false binary that contrasts direct services with overhead; building a stronger team and a stronger agency makes us all better at providing services and improves the experiences of our clients. Building a stronger community

Building a stronger community

We work to mitigate the potential for causing institutional betrayal trauma while increasing opportunities for healing. We see a program as a promise and recognize that taking away a resource can be harmful. For this reason, we prize sustainable, long-term programs over short-term ones. At the same time, we strive to create programs and practices that respond to the needs of the community and meet each survivor where they're at. This means exploring accessibility in our program offerings, trying new things and experimenting with new modes of offering support, and investing in resilient resources.

We pull the levers that we can to encourage broader policy changes. Though we are not a lobbying organization, we use our platform to voice our support for transformative practices and policies. We lend our expertise whenever possible and uplift the voices and stories of survivors and advocates, creating space for speaking truth to power.

We engage in mutual aid where it's happening in our community. We know that nonprofit organizations are not the only ones doing liberatory work. So we go where the people are and work to find ways to partner broadly. We use the privilege of our position to benefit others. We leverage our access to funding streams that are not accessible to all programs to financially support those agencies that we are relying on for collaboration. When others are doing work that is outside of our expertise, we engage them as partners rather than trying to develop a rival program or competing with them for funding. Whenever possible, we develop subgrantee relationships to ensure that smaller organizations are compensated for the services we rely on and able to sustain and grow.

Sharing resources freely and accepting opportunities to learn. All of our staff actively engage in continuing education, partnership building, and community working groups. In these spaces, we freely share our insight, experiences, and resources while also gratefully accepting opportunities to learn from others whose expertise is different from our own.

How we are accountable

We use regular data collection and reporting to measure outcomes and identify areas of improvement. SASS has taken a comprehensive approach to establishing a well-structured and organized data collection process across all its programs. Our commitment to advancing equity extends beyond just delivering services, we actively encourage feedback from all individuals accessing our programs. Our ability to receive adequate feedback is always constrained by the impact that soliciting feedback has on our clients. We cannot allow the desire for quantifiable feedback to cause harm to trauma survivors. Therefore, our trauma-informed data collection methodology includes the following practices:

1. We do not solicit feedback from clients who are in acute mental health crises. SASS Advocates are trained to assess the appropriateness of requesting formal feedback when working with clients. If the advocate determines that soliciting formal feedback (i.e. via a survey form or link) would cause harm, they will not make such a request.
2. We offer survivors the chance to provide formal feedback without coercion. This means casually offering the possibility to fill out a feedback form as part of the standard intro to an in-office appointment, leaving forms in the client rooms as a form of passive invitation, and including QR codes to virtual forms in materials that we offer to survivors.

We regularly seek external feedback from community partners. To ensure the effectiveness of our partnerships and collaboration, we maintain open lines of communication with our community partners. Through these ongoing dialogues, we continuously evaluate the progress

and the impacts of our joint efforts, assessing how our partnerships are functioning and identifying areas where adjustments or changes may be necessary. This proactive approach allows us to adapt and refine our working methods, fostering an environment of constant improvement.

We foster a culture of transparency and learning. At SASS, staff are trained to offer constructive feedback and critique in all spaces. Staff input is sought formally through staff workgroups, advisory meetings, and participating in decision making. Staff input is also sought informally through supervision. Leadership demonstrates to staff that continuous improvement is a value, that critique is not discouraged, and that mistakes are opportunities for growth rather than punishment. Formal reviews are about growth and potential, rather than punitive control, and staff are encouraged to offer feedback to their supervisors about the successes and failures of the leadership team.

We engage in continuous improvement and assessment at all levels. SASS engages in strategic planning for both staff and board, for the agency as a whole and for individual programs. We reject the idea that “the way things have always been” is the way that things should be done and we encourage each program to think critically, try new things, and reflect on outcomes.

How each of us uses our unique position to advance equity

The role of the Board

The Board of Directors has the power to set policy, to direct the agency’s priorities, and to ensure that we are meeting our mission and living out our vision. The Board brings the gift of outside perspective and uses their distance from the frontline work as a way to see the forest through the trees. The Board helps to realign and reorient when we stray from the path or when our mission gets lost in the creeping expansion of priorities. They keep the leadership team accountable and provide them guidance. In order to advance equity, the Board is responsible for directing SASS leadership towards the programs and practices that create liberatory potential. They are responsible for supporting leadership to make bold choices, even when those choices are not ultimately successful.

The role of the leadership team

The leadership team has the power to enact policy, to build plans that match our priorities, and to ensure that the agency keeps moving forward stably and strongly. The leadership team brings a big-picture perspective and uses their awareness of how all elements of the work fit together as a way to see where improvements can be made. The leadership team collaborates to build systems that reflect the agency’s values and morals. They support frontline staff and ensure that

the workload is distributed equitably. They help staff meet their metrics and provide support, mentorship, and feedback. Leadership is responsible for supporting staff to enact liberatory practices without fear that they will be critically judged as new approaches go through iterations and cycles of success and failure.

The role of staff

The frontline staff has the power to directly serve survivors, to respond creatively to problems, to share with leadership what is and isn't working, and to reflect on the impact of systems, programs, and choices. They represent the agency in the public and share our work widely. They innovate and experiment with new methods of service provision, new approaches to client needs, new programs to benefit the community.