

Organization Name: Project Be Free

Organization Mission

Project Be Free (PBF) provides crisis response to individuals affected by Domestic Violence. They utilize partnerships within the community that allow support and navigation of mental health needs to increase advocacy and promote individual wellbeing. Their immediate response services and therapy methods work towards breaking the cycles of generational trauma.

What are the compelling reasons for Impact 100 to partner with this organization?

PBF is disrupting the cycle of domestic violence through holistic healing and culturally responsive advocacy. They are also transforming the law enforcement response to domestic violence crisis calls. No other domestic violence non-profit agency is 100% staffed and run by people of color and responds to crisis calls alongside first responders. They have well established partnerships with law enforcement agencies and other social services providers, and are actively expanding this network. PBF represents a real possibility to illustrate an alternative model for how a community might respond to DV holistically - not solely through police intervention.

What does the organization do?

Project Be Free provides a holistic response to domestic violence victims and their families. Their services and programs include:

Mentorship (Breaking Generational Cycles Program) - This program is for youth ages 11-17 (and their parents/guardians) affected by DV. This program runs in partnership with their fiscal sponsor Northwest Family Life.

Crisis Response - Their team provides crisis response services within the county by trauma informed providers with Mental Health credentials and are trained in Domestic Violence Advocacy. Their organization utilizes community partnerships and maintains an intake line to be able to respond to people within the community.

DV Advocacy - Clients are assisted with safety planning, resource connection, DV legal advocacy, immigration DV advocacy, paperwork and connection to mental health providers within their network. They currently provide this support in 8 languages: English, Spanish, Amharic, Oromo, Russian, Swahili, Thai and Polish.

Family Support Group - free, starting Feb 2022, for 18+, for individuals that are supporting a family member/friend experiencing DV

Mother's Support Group - doula-led women's pregnancy and postpartum group (pregnancy to 9 mo post) for women who have experienced or are experiencing DV

Training Center - for community members and partner organizations to understand crisis response, DV, and the effects on an individual's mental health. Covers terminology, definitions, and risk factors.

Who does the organization serve?

PBF is headquartered in Renton and serves individuals impacted by domestic violence in the areas of Bellevue, Redmond, Kirkland, Seattle, Renton, Kent, Federal Way, Tacoma and Auburn. In 2021 they responded to 137 crisis calls in partnership with local police departments. PBF is able to provide services in 8 different languages, which is critical to helping immigrant women and families. Police departments often have a DV advocate on staff, however that person does not go on response calls and often speaks only English, creating barriers to victims accessing services. Not only does PBF aim to serve victims of DV, they also provide resources for abusers (they treat DV as a mental illness that is also often generational), and those who support and are in community with victims.

How does the organization reflect, maintain proximity to, and stay accountable to the community it serves?

PBF's staff and leadership are all POC with lived experience with DV and/or addiction. A member of their leadership is a survivor of domestic violence and a licensed mental health therapist, working with DV victims in her private therapy practice. Another leader and staff member is a former police officer with first hand experience responding to DV calls. His experience revealed gaps in the way law enforcement responds to DV calls and the lack of immediate support available to victims and families. Victims who have been walked through crises by PBF have returned to the organization and offered to volunteer as mentors to other, fellow victims.

How is the organization addressing the root causes of social issues?

PBF's model completely transforms the way law enforcement currently responds to DV calls and interacts with victims and families. PBF disrupts the cycle of domestic violence and pursues holistic healing by providing families with comprehensive wraparound services. Further, by centering POC and providing culturally competent advocacy to help mitigate the fears and frustrations of working with law enforcement, PBF works to establish trust and reform the relationship between law enforcement and communities of color during times of crisis.

How is the organization collaborating with other community-based organizations?

PBF has established relationships with shelters and housing services throughout King and Pierce County. Through partnerships, PBF provides barrier reduction support to food, shelter, transportation, childcare, mental health, substance abuse services, and access to technology. They have ongoing and prospective partnerships with several police agencies and local hospitals.

What is the vision for the organization in 5 years?

PBF would like to see sustained partnerships with several police departments in the region, where response to all DV calls would provide an advocate at the time of crisis. Unfortunately, these partnerships do not currently come with funding, which is why philanthropic support is so necessary. PBF leaders and staff are passionate about their work and volunteer significant time

and personal resources to respond to as many victims and families as possible. They strive to answer every call and leave no one waiting for their help and services.

What is the organization's area of greatest need?

PBF has a significant need for funding, as a new organization. Their ED is fully unpaid and many services are being offered on a pro-bono or volunteer basis in the absence of funding. An unrestricted grant to PBF would be extremely meaningful. They expressed a need for operational support and mentorship from other non-profit leaders. There are likely many opportunities for support and impact including and beyond funding.

Highlight a story of impact.

One of Project Be Free's co-founders with prior experience in law enforcement described an example response to a DV call as an officer. In this example, he responded to a home where the victim answered the door with visible injuries and the whereabouts of the abuser were unknown. His job was to take pictures and notes and ensure the scene was safe. He was not responsible for tracking down the abuser and left the scene without providing any services of support to the victim. He informed her she could call him back if her abuser returned but never heard from the victim after that visit to her home. This story outlines the limitations of police support at the time of a DV response call.

A PBF response to a DV crisis looks entirely different. Their co-founder described walking through a DV and sexual abuse crisis with an undocumented woman and her two daughters in Federal Way. A Federal Way police detective who was familiar with PBF reached out to Katya, their co-founder, with this case. The response required in this instance included immediately removing the mother and her daughters from their home and making them completely untraceable. They were given new phones and placed in a temporary shelter with the YWCA. PBF connected her to a legal advocacy resource and her daughters were connected with therapy services and a school advisor. With the support of PBF, they eventually moved into a New Beginnings shelter in North Seattle and, more recently, into permanent housing back in Federal Way. PBF walked alongside these victims for the entirety of this journey.