Update on the Domestic Violence and Mental Health Collaboration Project
by Alison Iser, Project Coordinator

It is difficult to say what is impossible, for the dream of yesterday is the hope of today and the reality of tomorrow. — Robert H. Goddard

Back when I was a domestic violence advocate I dreamed of a time when we could more proactively meet the mental health needs of survivors and when advocates and mental health therapists could work effectively together. When the King County Coalition Against Domestic Violence (KCCADV) hired me to coordinate the Domestic Violence and Mental Health Collaboration Project in 2007, I had hope that those dreams could come true. Now they are actually a reality!

Somewhere along the way we seem to have reached a tipping point where it is now commonplace to talk about domestic violence and mental health at the same time. Domestic violence advocates and mental health service providers are incorporating a trauma-informed perspective into their work and they are talking to each other about how to best meet the needs of those they are serving.

It has been a privilege to experience all of this through the work of the Collaboration Project. We have trained over 500 people at our four partner agencies about the intersection of the issues and how to more effectively and collaboratively respond. Our liaison system and our cross-disciplinary case reviews have improved communication and increased knowledge sharing between our fields. Our Seeking Safety support groups, co-facilitated by domestic violence advocates and mental health therapists, increased participants’ coping skills while decreasing their isolation and their trauma symptoms.

We recently created a guide to cross-disciplinary consultation and will be engaging in reciprocal consultation between our partner agencies. These consultations will strengthen the ability of service providers to address the complex needs of survivors who have mental health concerns and who may face multiple barriers to safety and self-determination.

We have also been busy sharing what we have learned with advocates and mental health service providers who are not part of our collaboration. We launched our online courses about domestic violence and mental health. We are also providing training and technical assistance locally and nationally.

While we are thrilled about what we have been able to accomplish, we have big dreams for the future. We hope to be able to work on the intersection of domestic violence, mental health, and the civil legal system. We want to bring domestic violence advocates, mental health service providers, and attorneys together to address how perceptions about mental health impact survivors’ experiences with civil legal matters and how the civil legal system impacts the emotional wellbeing of survivors. If we are funded to do this, we will begin that next phase of our project in 2013.
If you are interested in learning more about our project or in accessing our free materials and training, we invite you to visit www.kccadv.org/reports/mental-healthdv-reports/ or to contact me at alison@kccadv.org or at 206.568.5454.