



**The author(s) shown below used Federal funding provided by the U.S. Department of Justice to prepare the following resource:**

**Document Title:** Evaluation of Technology-based Advocacy Services (ETA): Technical Report, Executive Summary

**Author(s):** Ruben Parra-Cardona, Ph.D., Leila Wood, Ph.D., MSSW

**Document Number:** 304980

**Date Received:** July 2022

**Award Number:** 2018-ZD-CX-0004

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# **Evaluation of Technology-based Advocacy Services (ETA): Technical Report**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

Evaluation of Technology-based Advocacy Services (ETA) is a formative evaluation of technology-based advocacy services for victims of crime at a community violence prevention and intervention program in Austin, Texas. This project examined the formation and implementation of chat and text services on SAFeline, the 24/7 hotline service at SAFE Alliance in Austin, Texas. Both quantitative and qualitative methodology were used to assess the following objectives:

1. How technology-based advocacy is being implemented at SAFeline and used by SAFE Alliance to provide support to service users;
2. How advocacy models to support crime victims are being adapted for different technological platforms;
3. Who uses technology-facilitated advocacy, their needs, and experiences in seeking services; and
4. What agency and community supports and resources are needed to implement technology-based advocacy and conduct subsequent process and outcome evaluations.

Using a collaborative model, the evaluation team partnered with SAFE Alliance staff to understand program use, reach, and programmatic theory of change.

### **Project Data**

Data collected and analyzed included SAFeline program documents and analysis of program data and de-identified chat and text transcripts (n=442). The evaluation team surveyed 171 SAFeline program users and interviewed 14 staff and 50 prospective and past service users of SAFeline, and conducted a literature review of 145 relevant articles. Statistical analysis, grounded theory, content analysis, and thematic analysis were used to analyze data. All activities were reviewed and approved by the UT Austin IRB, with reliance with UTMB.

### **Service Use and Service User Needs**

- Since 2018, SAFeline has completed an average of 18,735 call, chat, and text sessions per year, indicating high levels of use.
- In a survey of SAFeline service users, 67.9% reported that was their first time contacting SAFeline.
- The majority of survey participants reported their primary goals in contacting SAFeline was help with counseling (49.7%) or help with housing (both shelter and non-shelter) (43.3%). In a review of SAFeline chat and text transcripts, service users most often expressed a need for housing (both shelter and non-shelter) (29.1%), legal advocacy (24.8%), and counseling/emotional support (23%). This was confirmed in interviews.

- There was an average of 2500 requests for admittance to SAFE’s emergency shelter per year and were highest in 2019-2020 and reduced by 15.6% during COVID-19 (March 2020-February 2021).

### **Service User Experience**

- Of SAFELINE service users that were surveyed for this evaluation, 82.9% reported being satisfied with the amount of time SAFELINE advocates spent with them

Even through text, there is that connection. They still have a way in letting—I feel like in—through that text, they sent out an arm and almost hugged me, you know? There still was that connection. There still was that assistance that I needed that was given to me at that moment that I needed it. [SAFELINE Service User]

### **How are services provided?**

The logic model developed as part of this evaluation includes the following five (5) goals:

1. Rapid engagement for support and connection
2. Identify needs and options related to violence, abuse, harm, and related concerns
3. Expand understanding of violence, abuse, and harm through community and survivor education
4. Improve survivor safety to prevent future violence and harm
5. Increase access to timely supports and address needs by opening door to the agency and beyond

Outcomes are short-term and long-term and include increased safety, reduced isolation, and increased resource knowledge. Barriers to successful chat and text hotline interactions include: Lack of comfort or access to the platform, perception that the service lacks warmth, and inaccessibility to needed services at the agency due to high demand for interpersonal violence services in the community.

### **Implications**

Chat and text hotlines are vital to service availability and access for victims of IPV, child abuse and neglect (CAN), sexual assault, and human trafficking and extend the benefits of national chat, text, and phone hotlines. Chat, text, and phone hotlines provide an important role in community education by linking people to local supports for education and importantly, teach people how to access help. Technology-based advocacy can increase access to historically marginalized and hard-to-reach populations. Chat and text service user volume is sensitive to local, state, and national events.

### **Dissemination**

The evaluation team developed the following products as part of this project.

- Fidelity measure checklist.
- Logic Model. The logic model includes five goals that guide technology-based advocacy and key skills associated with each goal.
- Brief client survey. This tool can be used as a “client satisfaction” survey and includes 14 questions about service interaction, service user needs, and self-reported outcomes.

Academic and practitioner presentations were implemented with more planned.

### **Next Steps**

Following the evaluability assessment, the evaluation team will build on this formative phase of this project by conducting a process and outcome evaluation of chat- and text-based services for victims of interpersonal crime. The next phase of the evaluation will also include an additional site, the Houston Area Women's Center. Future phases of this project will also seek to further refine the advocacy model related to cultural responsiveness and equity in technology-based advocacy services to better reach diverse groups of victims of crime.

For information, see:

Wood, L., Hairston, D., Temple, J.R., Baumler, E., Torres, E. & Parra-Cardona, J. (2021). *Evaluation of Technology-based Advocacy Services (ETA): Technical Report*. University of Texas, Medical Branch/University of Texas at Austin/ Galveston, Austin, Texas.

Contact Leila Wood at [leiwood@utmb.edu](mailto:leiwood@utmb.edu) with questions.

