

Organization Name: Project Be Free

Date of Interview: 21 April 2023

Organization Interviewees: Katya Wojcik, Irasema Petralia, Marcos Sauri

Impact 100 GRT Interviewers: Melissa West, Heidi Narayan

Application Link: <https://impact100seattle.community/application-details-semi-2023?recordId=recWgsKtbLaTPzSbV>

Organization Mission: Project Be Free (PBF)'s mission is to provide crisis response, through a host of holistic methods to individuals affected by domestic violence, with the goal for clients and their families to live healthier lives.

What are the compelling reasons for Impact 100 to partner with this organization? Domestic Violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children. Kids who witness abuse are 10x more likely to become the next generation of abusers or victims. PBF aims to surround everyone - victim, perpetrator and children - in a broken family with supports that help each family member heal and break the cycle of generational domestic violence. The organization has blossomed in the last year in part with Impact 100 Seattle support. They have a moment in time to take advantage of the opportunity to integrate their services in police departments throughout the Puget Sound and change how DV is managed throughout our region. The founders are committed and passionate, and the past year of success with the Renton PD and Seattle Community officers has informed their approach moving forward. PBF is now seeking to hire in order to meet the needs of more communities, and the vast majority of their funding is highly restricted making this difficult. Impact 100 Seattle's gift would be extremely meaningful.

What, if any, reservations do you have about this organization as a potential grantee partner for Impact 100? No reservations.

What does the organization do? PBF addresses systemic inequities in accessing mental health support and resources for people from low-income backgrounds, immigrants, and people of color who live in King County that have been directly and indirectly impacted by domestic violence. PBF increases equitable access to services by prioritizing our BIPOC communities, especially those from low-income backgrounds.

Current services include Crisis Response, DV Advocacy, DV Family Support Groups, Mother's Support Group, a Youth Mentorship Program, Monthly Family Resource Night and Survivor Wellness Symposiums.

Individuals affected by DV are connected to PBF's services through nonprofit partnerships, Family Resource Night, referrals from diversion programs and county programs, as well as through direct contact with individuals seeking resources and support. Project Be Free realized that DV work must be done with unconventional hours to meet families where they are- so they monitor a phone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They take particular care to ensure that when individuals reach out, they can connect with someone.

Who does the organization serve? Project Be Free primarily serves BIPOC individuals throughout King County who are being affected by domestic violence. Over 60% of the clients

are immigrants or undocumented which allows abusers to capitalize on fear of deportation. Clients are served through partnership with the Renton Police Department where PBF works alongside law enforcement, as well as by responding to calls given via local hotlines. PBF is on track to receive triple the number of calls in 2023 that it took in 2022.

How does the organization reflect, maintain proximity to and stay accountable to the community it serves? The vast majority of PBF staff and board members identify as People of Color, many who have lived DV experiences. This intentionally allows PBF staff to deeply understand the impacts of DV and the systemic challenges BIPOC communities face when in need of services and support. PBF places a great emphasis on having bicultural/bilingual staff to provide services as it establishes an element of trust and communication for those victimized while in crisis. This ensures that survivors are met with effective, compassionate, and culturally competent support. PBF go to individuals in an open and understanding way seeking out and connecting to a provider that has similar background and native language if it is vocalized as a preference from a client.

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

Despite instances of Domestic Violence skyrocketing, DV funding is being cut at state and local levels. Project Be Free advocates for funding and support for DV work throughout the Puget Sound. Based upon the incredible success of its partnership with the Renton Police Department, Project Be Free is working with city councils, police chiefs and other policymakers in the region to create a system where there are at least two crisis responders supporting law enforcement in each city in the Puget Sound.

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

PBF is working with 11 different organizations in Renton and Kent to support its DV clients with shelter/housing, legal, youth mentorship and other critical needs. They have started a Family Resource Night on Tuesday evenings, where anyone can come to get services from a range of providers. One of the new partners is Global Perinatal Services (met through Impact 100!) which can provide pre-and post-natal support to expecting moms and new babies. As PBF expands throughout Pierce, King and Snohomish Counties, they will determine the most critical locally-based supports for their clients and develop relationships with them as well.

What is the vision for the organization in 5 years? Project Be Free is building on its success through:

- Launching a survivor Training Center to provide meaningful support services to survivors;
- Developing counselors who are trained in crisis Domestic Violence response, including narcissism, coercive control, gaslighting, manipulation.
- Working with Bellevue Police and other new city police departments to integrate the model they've developed with Renton PD working to provide crisis intervention for every DV response call. Their goal is to have two crisis responders working alongside each city PD.

What is the organization's area of greatest need? The biggest need is additional staff. They are hoping to hire a retiring Sergeant who has his own DV story and has been with the PD for 25 years to be their Community Liaison. They also would like to hire a Youth Outreach Specialist as more than 30% of the calls they receive are related to youth-initiated DV. PBF seeks to be leaders in supporting employee wellness so they are at their best in supporting their clients.

Highlight a story of impact. On Tuesday after its first Family Resource Night in March, a police officer dropped off a victim. Katya (founder) sat with her for 90 mins, and learned she had been in an abusive relationship for over 6 years. At the end of the evening she said, "Thank you for sitting with me, I feel like I have a direction now and I'm ready for a new cycle." PBF filed a protection order on the client's behalf and she started therapy. The ultimate goal is to transition her out of her home over time.