

# On My Terms

## Executive Summary

### SOS HISTORY:

SOS Sexual Violence Services is a program within Saint-Paul-Ramsey County Public Health (SPRCPH). SOS staff and trained volunteers provide confidential services at no charge to victims of sexual violence. The mission of SOS is to provide trauma-informed, victims-centered, culturally competent services, which include: 24-hour crisis line, legal and medical advocacy, referrals, consultation, community education, and support groups.

SOS has been serving the Ramsey County (RC) community since April 1976 and has a strong history of interdisciplinary collaboration.

In 2022, SOS partnered with the St. Paul Police Department Sex Crimes Unit and applied to the Office of Justice Programs for a grant offered under the Violence Against Women Act to help improve and expand the experiences of victims who choose to report their sexual assault. The focus of the grant was to develop a pilot program to provide alternative reporting options for victim, and to reach underserved communities.

### BACKGROUND RESEARCH:

Research was taken from [\*Opening Doors: Alternative Reporting Options for Sexual Assault Victims\*](#) and the [\*Protocol Development Guide\*](#) to explore alternative reporting templates. SOS and St. Paul PD leadership met for several months discussing existing alternative methods of reporting in Ohio, Colorado, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Missouri, and the U.S. Military. The goals and objectives that were identified within these meetings reflect the integration of information from the documents and partners' input regarding what is feasible and operational in Saint Paul and RC.

Additionally, SOS reviewed the [\*Sexual Assault Systems Review\*](#) from 2018 which evaluated 646 Criminal Sexual Conduct (CSC) cases from RC over the course of five years which identified improvements and evidence-based practices, and the [\*Implementation Plan for Systems Change\*](#) from 2019 that focused on: **a)** initial reports and patrol response; **b)** development and retention of investigators; **c)** cultivating a victim-centered response; **d)** investigation of cases; **e)** collaboration between law enforcement and prosecutors; **f)** strengthening prosecution; and **g)** increasing multidisciplinary collaboration.

Identified themes were **under-reporting of sexual assaults in marginalized and targeted communities, attrition of victims in the criminal justice system, and offering choice and options for victim to choose** how and whom to report.

## PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT:

The grant required the recipients to develop something new within the criminal justice system and to partner with a law enforcement agency, rather than fund an existing process.

Since March 2023, one FTE SOS advocate was funded and partnered with Saint Paul Sex Crimes Unit to create a platform and implement an additional option for reporting sexual assaults called, *On My Terms*. Original consultation for this program included primary players from Standpoint, End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI), St. Paul Sex Crimes leadership, SOS, and the Ramsey County Public Health legal team.

Through trial and adjustment, *On My Terms* developed two unique elements to victims of sexual assault where the crime occurred in Ramsey County MN, was not deemed an acute case, and the victim was over 18 years of age. The elements include (a) an option for the victim to report directly to an advocate and have the report created and transferred to St. Paul Sexual Violence Unit and (b) to identify how the victim would like the case processed within the police department.

Three options of processing reports were developed, which include:

1. **Report:** The victim selects to have the report delivered to police on their behalf and to opt out of a formal investigation;
2. **Report and Review:** The victim selects to report and set up an informal, informational meeting with a sex crimes investigator to discuss next steps that may take place in the investigation before opting to move forward; and
3. **Report and Investigate:** The victim selects to report and requests to have their report reviewed and assigned for formal investigation.

## BENCHMARKS AND BARRIERS:

The following section details several benchmarks and barriers throughout the first full year of *On My Terms* (2024).

In quarter one, the program was rebranded from *Alternative Reporting Program* to *On My Terms* requiring new printed materials and marketing images. A survey was distributed to all SOS advocates providing direct services to inquire about best language and value points to highlight. A large media rollout occurred in March of 2024 which included a [Kare11](#) news feature, [Pioneer Press](#) article, and launching of the [SOS-On My Terms](#) website. *On My Terms* advertisements began to rotate through St. Paul- Ramsey County Public Health social media platforms. The FTE SOS staff member and identified St. Paul Sex Crimes investigator presented information regarding the program at several community meetings to raise awareness and network. All Ramsey County advocacy agencies received an e-mail and invitation to refer clients to *On My Terms* for co-advocacy support.

Throughout quarters one and two, SOS and St. Paul PD reviewed and evaluated *On My Terms* reports to enhance the process and collect data. All who selected "Report and Review" moved to "Report and Investigate" after meeting with the sex crimes investigator. This demonstrated the importance and need for affording victims a slower, more gentle method of disclosure and introduction to the criminal justice system.

In quarter three, SOS and St. Paul PD met to discuss those who were using the program and how to best support *On My Terms* program goals and developments. Language was added to the submission paperwork that stated all cases were still subject to evaluation of the legal elements and charging decisions were made by the Ramsey County Attorney's Office. Additionally, *On My Terms* printed posters were displayed in coffee shops, libraries, colleges, breweries, YMCA's and recreation centers.

### STATISTICAL REVIEW- ONE YEAR (2024):

In 2024, the FTE SOS staff member provided *On My Terms* training for advocacy organizations, government agency staff and at colleges. The outreach efforts and training resulted in 69 direct referrals to SOS, 24 victims actively engaging in the process and the completion of 16 *On My Terms* reports. The results include:

- 3 victims receiving alternative services that better fit the victims' needs;
- 3 criminal sexual conduct cases were referred and formally charged by the Ramsey County Attorney's Office in 2024;
- 3 criminal sexual conduct cases were referred and declined for charging by the Ramsey County Attorney's Office;
- 3 victims disengaged with the program before the formal approval was made for submission;
- 2 victims expressed interest but did not return contact with SOS;
- 3 victims were deemed ineligible due to location or other factors;
- 4 "Report Only" submissions were successfully made;
- 2 reports were "pending" due to insufficient evidence supporting the legal elements of a crime; and
- 1 criminal sexual conduct case has been charged to date in 2025.

### VICTIMS' EXPERIENCES:

Victims have expressed healing and benefits from using *On My Terms*. Two of the reported cases were outside of the statute of limitations yet the process allowed the victims an avenue to report as part of their healing process. Of the three cases where a criminal investigation did not meet the needs of the victims, alternative services were provided and protection orders were offered. Each victim who selected to meet with an investigator prior to a formal investigation selected to move forward due to the softened entry point and the intentional connection to advocacy. Each victim who stayed engaged with SOS was also connected to therapy, support groups, and safely identified a network of family and friends to continue garnering support.

A survey was offered to all 24 individuals to provide feedback on the program and SOS. Highlights from the four returned surveys include:

*"[SOS] has been super helpful and supportive throughout everything!"*

*"Couldn't do the full thing but wanted to be sure he can't get away with it again if someone else reports it."*

*"I wasn't sure in the beginning if I wanted to report what happened to me, much less file a police report. The options of this program to take it step by step without having to commit to reporting felt manageable and safe. Being able to make a report with an advocate was amazing. I can't imagine going to the police station or calling the cops to my house to make a report after going through this trauma."*

*"[SOS] created a safe environment for me to be comfortable enough to speak and report on such a terrible trauma that happened to me."*

#### **FUTURE RESEARCH AND PROGRAM PROJECTION:**

The STOP VAWA grant will end in June of 2025. At that time, *On My Terms* will be a permanently imbedded program within SOS and an MOU will be offered to the St. Paul PD to continue our partnership. Currently, only the FTE who was funded by the grant completed the *On My Terms* reports. This was done with intention to provide extensive observation during the development phase and to protect both SOS and the victim's confidentiality privilege. The four charged *On My Terms* cases are still moving through the court process. It is intended, once those four have concluded, training of other advocates will take place, opening options for faster and stronger connection for the community to reach *On My Terms*. It is the hope and intention of SOS that this program will be of continued interest and benefit to the community, victims and advocacy agencies, and that culturally specific knowledge of the program will help to dismantle barriers for victims to feel safe and secure in reporting sexual assault.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

SOS, most importantly, acknowledges the victims/survivors who have come forward and connected to our services. Regardless of the choice to report traditionally, through *On My Terms*, or not at all, reaching out for services hosts challenges and a braveness to embrace the rape culture and victim blaming that we still see in 2025. We believe you. We support you. We are here for you.

SOS would like to highlight the following individuals who provided direct support in the program creation and development: Emily Huemann, SOS Program Supervisor; Megan Rae, SOS Legal Services Coordinator; Assistant Chief Paul Ford, St. Paul PD; Senior Commander Wes Denning (former St. Paul Police Sexual Violence Unit); Commander Eric Skog, St. Paul Police Sexual Violence Unit; Sergeant Vladamir Krumgant (former Executive Officer Sexual Violence Unit); Karen Kugler, Sex Crimes Prosecutor-Ramsey County Attorney's Office; Rana Alexander (former Executive Director, Standpoint); and End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI) staff.

Without the curious conversations, investment to try something different, and support in the mission and vision of the *On My Terms*, program would not be possible.

For more information on *On My Terms*, please visit our [website](#) or call our 24-hour Resource Line at 651-266-1000 to connect with an advocate today.