

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes October 7, 2003

Members Present: Chris Huffine (Men's Resource Center), Songcha Bowman (Multicultural Batterer Intervention), Paula Manley (Manley Interventions), Mychelle Moritz (Domestic Violence Resource Center), Angela Newburg (Domestic Violence Resource Center), Ron Leber (Washington County Jail), Courtenay Silvergleid (Portland State University), Marjan Baradar (Private Practice), Janet Martin (Men's Resource Center/Women's Counseling Center), Tim Logan (Private Practice)

Minutes by: Courtenay Silvergleid, edited by Chris Huffine Due to a corrupted file, the minutes taken at the meeting were lost. UG! The minutes provided below were reconstructed from memory and sorely lack the rich detail provided by attendees. Courtenay extends her sincere apology to the members present at the meeting and encourages anyone who wants to augment the recollection below to email Chris with additions.

Topic for today: How to keep batterer intervention providers sensitive to the victim experience?

The topic for today's discussion emerged out of concerns that providers who work exclusively with male perpetrators of abuse may, after hearing only one side of the story over and over, inadvertently begin to collude with their clients. It was noted that this form of bias can occur anytime someone works with only "one half" of the population. Victim advocates present at the meeting commented that for this very reason they felt it was useful to come to meetings with providers.

Several specific dangers were noted if providers did not consciously make an effort to remain sensitive to the victim's experience.

- 1) Providers might not notice or comment on some of the more subtle forms of abuse that men display. Only by hearing about how abuser's actions and words affect their victims can providers become more sensitive to these more subtle forms of oppression.
- 1) Providers might inadvertently make suggestions to the men in their groups that actually endanger the partners of these men. Again, only through listening to the stories of victims, can providers become more sensitive to what actually puts women in danger on a day to day basis.
- 1) Providers may remain restricted in their ability to convey the victim's perspective to the men in their groups. The more that providers listen to victim's stories (either directly or through advocates), the better equipped they are to convey how partners may be feeling when a man is abusive. The ability to draw on real stories when attempting to build empathy or compassion

among the men is critical. The more stories providers have to draw from, the greater their impact on men over time.

- 1) Providers might start to “believe” that they are hearing the whole story when men talk in group and begin to unconsciously dismiss the concerns of victim advocates and victims as relating to some batterers but not the batterers that they work with.

One member commented that s/he sees a fundamental tension surrounding this issue. Providers (and for that matter victim advocates) have to have a great deal of self-confidence in order to do this work. On some level, in order to “mess with people’s lives” providers have to believe that they know what they are doing, what they are talking about. The danger of this sort of confidence is that they can inadvertently become closed to listening to the perspective of others. They begin to believe that they know what is going on – they work with their population day in and day out, they know what they are like and what they are capable of, etc. The problem is that no matter how many perpetrators they work with, they are only hearing one side of the story and so they are necessarily biased in their knowledge. This member suggested that s/he thinks that everyone working in the domestic violence field could benefit from a bit less confidence and a bit more humility and openness to the perspective of the “other”.

Group members agreed that being sensitive to the victim’s experience is not something that “comes naturally” for providers (particularly male providers). Group members also agreed that being sensitive to the victim’s experience is not something that can be accomplished through a single training and then forgotten. Instead, it takes repetitive exposure to victim’s experiences, something that requires a conscious effort on the part of providers. Several suggestions were offered for providers.

- 1) Team up with a co-facilitator who primarily works with victims and who can readily offer the victim’s perspective during group discussion and keep an eye/ear out for the more subtle forms of abuse and collusion. Not only will the men in group learn from this person, but the “provider” will as well.
- 1) Regularly attend trainings. Most victim advocacy organizations would be willing to allow providers to participate in their trainings in order to become more sensitive to the victim experience.
- 1) In addition to trainings, providers can make a point of regularly attending meetings such as the Family Violence Coordinating Council where they would have the opportunity to hear from victim advocates about the concerns of victims.
- 1) Providers can read stories, watch videos, and in general expand their exposure to the victim experience.
- 2) An understanding of oppression generally is essential. It seems impossible to do good work with perpetrators of domestic violence without a knowledge of

the impact that sexism (as well as racism and classism and other “isms”) have on women in general as well as victims in particular.

- 1) Individual providers can seek out professional “mentoring” relationships with victim advocates, meeting on a regular basis to discuss cases, situations, concerns, etc. The opportunity to dialogue in real time can be invaluable.
- 2) Have perpetrators sign releases so that providers can consult with victim advocates about specific cases.
- 3) Attend survivor panels where actual survivors share their stories. Such panels are offered through some domestic violence trainings. In addition Washington County is offering a quarterly Victim Impact Panel which features several survivors telling their stories and answering questions.
- 4) Keep in mind, also the impact abuse has on children who witness it--either visually, auditorially, or indirectly through how their caregivers are affected. Part of this is also to keep in mind the developmental level of children at various ages.
- 5) Provider organizations can form official alliances or partnerships with victim organizations. These partnerships can help staff from both organizations learn more about the experiences/perspectives of the “other” and enhance the work of both agencies.
- 6) Another aspect of raising perpetrator (and provider) awareness is to the victim recovery process. This is particularly important for men who are reconciling and having contact with their victim. While every woman's recovery process can be a little different, there are certain common behaviors that are often present that the perpetrator may misunderstand or misinterpret (e.g., her increased anger, increased independence, limited acknowledgement from her). If providers have a good understanding of typical features of women's recovery process they can help explain and flag those as they see them. Besides getting this information from trainings and consultation with advocates, Chris Huffine has a hand-out that he regularly uses that explains common features of the victim recovery process for abusive men.
- 7) Keep in touch with our own personal experiences of having been abused, oppressed, and/or controlled. Just as encouraging men to do this can increase their awareness of and compassion for their victims, so can our own awareness of our own victimization experiences can help us to stay in touch with the victim experience.