

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes July 14, 2015

Present: Katherine Stansbury (Eastside Concern), Guruseva Mason (Safety First Supervised Parenting Time Center), Dawn Penberthy (Clackamas County Probation and Parole), Shannon Barkley (Clackamas County Probation and Parole), Linda Castaneda (Manley Interventions), Kristen Besler (Allies in Change), Michael Davis (Eastside Concern), Jacob Hunt (Eastside Concern), Alison Dunfee (Pathfinders of Oregon), Matt Johnston (Domestic Violence Safe Dialogue), Kate Sackett (Portland State University), Rachel Smith (Portland State University), Sandi Rorick (Multnomah County Dept. of Community Justice), Phil Broyles (Teras Counseling), Jennifer Hopkinson (Clackamas Women's Services), Chris Huffine (Allies in Change)

Minutes by Rachel Smith, edited by Chris Huffine

Discussion Topic: Partner Contact - What do we do, what do we think we should be doing?

There is not any real consensus around this topic among DV service providers.

When working on Oregon's original BIP standards, there was a lot of contention around the issue of partner contact. Some felt that if partners wanted to have contact then there should be contact, while others were rather concerned about allowing direct contact between abused partners and the providers working with the abusive partners. The resulting compromise in the Oregon Administrative Rules (OARs) emphasizes safety of the partner, but ultimately allows partner contact, initiated by the BIP, under specific circumstances, and includes a separate section regarding partner-initiated contact. The Oregon BIP Standards Committee decided to err on the side of safety because not all programs are as conscientious of victim safety as the committee believes they should be. There are also concerns around violating no-contact orders by having BIP-initiated contact and that being perceived as constituting 3rd-party contact.

Mandatory reporting, partner contact, and violating confidentiality: The best thing you can do is be diligently transparent about reporting, do not ask probing questions if you do not have to, and keep your primary concerns around issues of safety.

The general agreement among people in the field is that all providers need to attempt contact with the victim and/or partner. Some ways in which this can be done: (a) Send an informational packet to victim (containing DV services resources), (b) work with victim services to make contact, (c) have an administrative staff member of the BIP agency whose job is to deal with partner contact, (d) have the individual BI providers themselves make contact (this is the most controversial).

Initial partner contact is an opportunity. Most of the partners of the men we see have not previously contacted survivor services. BIPs need to be more intentional about providing information to victims, because they (victims) are not necessarily going to receive domestic violence educational information elsewhere.

It is important for the victim and/or partner to be informed that they can talk to the BIP, because many of them do not know that. Hearing from the program can be really helpful for the victim because it can facilitate her getting additional support and services for herself.

One provider mentioned that if you do talk with a partner, make sure you don't say anything to her that you wouldn't say to him. This provider has had multiple experiences with the partner not only revealing

to the man that she had contact with the program, but even quoting what the provider said to her about him.

Because BIPs may be a resource for the abused partners, it is important that they have a good familiarity with specialized services and resources for abused partners. An on-going relationship with local DV survivor agencies is important so that providers can make sure they are providing current and comprehensive information.

BIPs and Victim Services often rely on Probation and Parole to help navigate contact among all parties involved in a given BIP client's case. It is helpful to get a "360-degree understanding" of the offender: While partner contact raises concerns, it is helpful in the end in terms of providing effective treatment. In some cases, or in many cases, BIPs' contact with the victim can provide insight on the effectiveness of facilitators' intervention strategies on an individual basis (e.g., if a facilitator is being highly confrontational with a BIP client who is not being accountable, we can find out if he is taking out his frustrations in the program on her). At the same time, this can exacerbate abusive issues.

There is a tension between wanting to be responsive and respectful to survivors who contact BIPs (or BIP clients) and not wanting to end up providing BIP services alongside victim services. Also, BIP clients may get suspicious if they are aware of ongoing contact between the provider and victim.

Confidentiality and Imminent Danger.

It is not always adequate to inform law enforcement of concerns of imminent danger (re: [Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California](#)¹), and contact with the victim may be appropriate, and necessary, when the BI facilitator has legitimate concerns about the offenders' risk of being abusive while engaged in the BIP. The general default for many programs is to not to disclose to the abuser the content of any information the partner shares with the program unless she explicitly says she wants it to be disclosed to him. Any information she shares should also be recorded on a record separate from his file so that he couldn't see it later if he ever accesses his file.

Contact with BIP Clients' new partners

If we think the abusive man is in a significant new relationship, we will try to get as much information as possible. Many of the BIP clients will not disclose new relationships, especially early-on, as getting new partners is often a way of maintaining denial of one's own abusive behaviors.

Soliciting information from new partners can be extremely helpful, particularly with "significant" or "serious" new partners. The BI provider can learn how BI participants are continuing to treat or talk about the partner to whom they were abusive. It is good to tie the abusers' behaviors back to the abusers (i.e., it is not the victim's fault, it is the abuser's fault for responding to life with abusive behaviors).

It was mentioned that it is best to give the partners information and resources early on. Hearing from them, on the other hand, becomes more important later. Hearing from the partner later on can either confirm that there has been real, sustained change and/or highlight areas that are still needing work or attention.

There was some discussion about how to use any information we might receive from a partner on how he's doing and/or concerns that she has. In general people don't disclose such information to him. However, even without disclosing it to him that information can still inform the work, both generally as well as the specific work done with him. You have to make the information you use in group vague enough so that no individual BI group member can reasonably suspect that their partner shared

¹ See also: <http://www.apa.org/monitor/julaug05/jn.aspx>, <http://www.publichealthlaw.net/Reader/docs/Tarasoff.pdf>, <http://nationalpsychologist.com/2009/03/tarasoff-“duty-to-warn”-clarified/101056.html>

information to the BI provider. So, for example, if a partner reveals that the man continues to be quite controlling with the finances, that could lead to the group talking, in general, about economic abuse on a night when he is in attendance.

How does this relate to the role of no contact orders? It was suggested that it is important that no contact orders be managed in a very thoughtful manner. One provider shared the opinion that if there is going to be contact between offender and victim, it is vital that it happens while the abuser is still in the program (and on probation). That way the provider can ask about how the contact is going and provide additional support and guidance if the contact is not going well (which is common). Allies in Change recommends a "controlled separation" to some of their voluntary attendees, which is similar to a no contact order. Refer to the 3/10/2015 meeting minutes for more discussion on no contact orders.

Partner Groups

Allies in Change, which offers several groups exclusively for non-mandated abusive men, also includes a semi-annual partner's group for those specific groups. This is a meeting in which only the partners of the men in the group are invited to attend, without the men being present. This provides the partners a chance to meet the group facilitators, meet each other, to ask questions, and to share information. It is completely voluntary, but many partners choose to attend. Most report finding the meeting very helpful. These groups seem to go rather well in terms of providing information and education to the partners who may not be able to get such information otherwise. Partner groups also get at the "next layer of the onion" in terms of the intervention as a whole (can be thought of as a "parent-teacher conference"). These groups provide the partners with opportunities to bring attention to things about the offenders that they are noticing outside of the BI context. The groups also get at another reason partner contact by BIPs is important, which is that the BI clients will often distort their experiences in the BI context, which is very common among men who are earlier-on in the program.

Partner groups also serve as an opportunity for providing survivor intervention. Typically, the partner group participants leave more empowered, but this does not necessarily mean they leave on a positive note (e.g., losing false hope). This underscores the fact that you can learn a lot by being in contact with the partners of BI clients. The men sometimes vilify their partners and the partner groups provide a way of hearing from the partners and getting more clarification on the extent to which "his" descriptions of her are distortions.

Summary

Providers vary a great deal in how they feel about contact with partners and the nature of that contact. While some find such contact can be very helpful, others express concerns about the safety of the partners when there is such contact. Programs in the state and around the country vary greatly in how they address this issue. Areas of general consensus include that resources need to be shared with the partners and if the partners initiate contact with the agency they should be responded to in some manner. There is also general agreement that someone needs to make sure that partners have the opportunity to understand what involvement with a BIP looks like to reveal any distortions/mischaracterizations of the program that some abusive men sometimes present (e.g., that the group says she's the abusive one, that she needs to do certain things for him to complete, etc.).