Tri County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes
January 10th, 2012

Attendance: Chris Huffine (Allies in Change), Olga Parker (Modus Vivendi), Katherine Stansbury (Turning Points), Barry Cadish (Turning Points), Steve Stewart (Allies in Change), Jennifer Warren (Seeds of Change Counseling), Mark Amoroso (MEPs Counseling), Jacquie Pancoast (ChangePoint), Allison Schultz (Clackamas Women's Services), Samantha Naliboff (VOA Home Free), Wendy Viola (Portland State University), Guruseva Mason (Bridges to Safety), Regina Rosann (ARMS), Katy Pendergraft (Hope for Families), Stu Walker (Multnomah County Dept. of Community Justice, DV unit), Simon Quartly (Allies in Change), Joan Scott (SoValTi/Allies in Change)

Minutes by Wendy Viola, edited by Chris Huffine

Topic: Peer Associations

Research has shown that one of the predictors of criminal recidivism is with whom perpetrators associate. If they spend time with anti-social peers, they're more likely to recidivate than their peers. On the other hand, if they associate more with individuals who are respectful and law-abiding they are less likely to recidivate than their peers. This research has primarily been done with addicts and other criminal types, but has not specifically focused on abusive men. What is its relevance to DV and how is it addressed in groups?

It's important to look at whether associates' language and attitudes convey support for changes in perpetrators' values and behavior. Some providers will ask clients explicitly about changes in their associates (e.g. "who are you pushing away and who are you bringing in?"). It's also apparent to providers that it tends to be the case that men who affiliate with the "wrong" people are more resistant to change. We have to emphasize not just breaking affiliations with bad influences, but developing positive affiliations.

It's important to explain to participants *why* these affiliations are important. There are a couple different levels: getting men to recognize that their associates' *behaviors* get them in trouble, and getting men to recognize the match between their values and the values that they're exposed to. The first level is more immediate, but the more advanced, value-oriented level has greater resonance. One approach is to ask men how they've made changes in the past and what's supported them in making those changes. This can both establish men's strengths to validate, and help them move forward making changes.

We have a culture that generally supports abiding by the law, but does not necessarily fully support the non-abusive beliefs and values that we are encouraging. Some providers report that some of the men in their groups long to affiliate with men who also support being actively non-violent and non-controlling, which isn't always easy to find.

Many participants need help with skills for connecting with people with more pro-social values. For example, instead of just suggesting that men attend church, it may also be necessary to help them develop the skills necessary to form relationships with people there. Some of these skills are how to start conversations and how to disagree with someone. However, many participants are pretty resistant to change and close-minded about communication patterns.

In working with female survivors, one agency has participants think about their future relationships and the importance of the match between their values and those of their future partners. Some perpetrators friends may appear outwardly pro-social but have more anti-social/pro-abuse beliefs that aren't readily identifiable. It can take skill to identify the subtleties that indicate men's values or patterns of power and control. This is not only true for women who want to be dating a non-abusive partner, but formerly abusive men who are looking for connections that support this new lifestyle.

Because many aspects of our culture support pro-abuse beliefs, it is important to look not only at one's circle of friends, but other influences as well. For example, consider the values conveyed by the music they listen to, books they read, talk shows they listen to, etc. It may be important to not only shift one's circle of friends, but other cultural aspects as well.

Another challenge is that while one can choose one's friends, one can't choose one's family. Often, the family normalizes abusive behaviors and patterns, and when these dynamics begin to shift, the family is unsettled. Often, men must continue interacting with family members who have more traditional values around gender roles or participate in victim blaming. In some cases, the men come around to support their partners and shift their values, but other family members may not support them in doing so. Resolving these differences relies, in part, on men working collaboratively with their partners to determine how to approach both of their families. These issues tend to come up much more with men who are already accountable, such that they recognize differences between their values and those of their families. It's evidence of accountability when men take the initiative to sit down with their parents and advocate for their new pro-social values.

The issue of negative associations usually isn't so much a concern with regard to female perpetrators because they don't tend to have values in keeping with DV even though they may have also perpetrated DV. Because many of them have been secondarily abusive their perpetration of violence is more reactive to their situations than value-based. They are more likely to already have friends that support their pro-social lifestyle.

How do you help bring men to the realization that they have to get rid of the criminally oriented friends in their lives? It involves pointing out that their friends are getting into trouble, and that won't help them avoid trouble. It's less obvious to participants when their associates are not breaking the law, but maintain values that aren't supportive of their changing attitudes.

Is there a stage when men recognize that they want more pro-social friends, but people who are more pro-social don't really want anything to do with them? Yes, and at this point they tend to form friendships in the group. These associations may either encourage negative attitudes, or very appropriate attitudes and beliefs based on their progress in the program. Making connections with other participants also encourages men to stay in the group and confront each other, so there are some positive outcomes. Sometimes, men may maintain these connections through their participation in AA. There are some BIPs throughout the world that involve mentoring, similar to the sponsorship model in AA. Making the transition into the mainstream can take a lifetime, as it involves working into a society that defines itself based on its *lack* of participation in the behaviors that define these men.

There aren't any support groups or groups similar to AA for DV, because of the greater danger for collusion. There are groups that exist to support pro-social values for men, but they tend to draw lines and alienate men who have a history of DV, instead of supporting them.

There are also some cases of men taking on the role of educators within their peer group, and trying to get them to shift their attitudes along with them. Men can also normalize talking about perpetration of violence and open up conversations by owning up to their histories of perpetration. It seems that men both try to shift their peers' attitudes and distance themselves from their associates, but it's a small group of men who are even talking about these difficulties with their associates. It does seem rare that perpetrators' and victims' associates even know about the abusive behavior. When does that conversation happen? It's also quite likely that the behavior is implicitly supported by peers' values without their peers even being aware of the fact of the violence.

Another aspect of association is the workplace, many of which are actively violent, both physically and emotionally. The amount of time that men spend in programs is not nearly enough to offset the amount of time that they spend in violent workplaces. In those environments, men experience extreme pressure to use particular language or behave in a particular way to avoid being ostracized. There are some men who are able to inoculate themselves against the values of their workplace and behave differently, but this is a relatively small number of them, most of whom have had extensive involvement in group.

There is a subset of men who are very isolated and aren't associating with anyone. The only person they emotionally trust is their partner, which is why they're so controlling of her. The skill sets to work on with this group include getting them to be more open to developing associations outside of their partner, which would reduce their power and control behaviors. A lot our impressions about perpetrators' social lives are formed on the basis of men who get arrested, which may exclude certain subgroups of perpetrators.

How much of this dynamic could be influenced by developing interests that would bring them into contact with people that isn't purely romantic or in the workplace? The more structured time you have, the more you can structure it in a pro-social way. You can develop interests, hobbies, and activities, but they might be at the expense of relationships, and the interactions that take place around these hobbies might not be pro-social. The foundation is being aware of others and respectful so that the hobbies can be performed in more respectful ways.

Do men ever recognize that the church that they attend does not manifest the values that they learning in group? We don't know very much how this works for men, but it seems to be the case for victims. Groups try to encourage men to pay attention to the values and messages of all of the institutions in which they participate, including religious institutions. It's particularly difficult for the Russian-speaking population because nearly all of the Russian churches in the area support controlling and abusive behaviors. There are a lot of churches where these issues are swept under the rug, and at least one church that maintains that women are in charge at home, which reinforces female perpetrators' controlling behaviors in that domain.

It may be more meaningful to consider communities' values than individuals', because abusive men find implicit support for their behaviors throughout pop culture and the media, as per Jackson Katz's *Tough Guise*. There's a point at which we realize how deliberately and consciously these images are constructed.