

Tri County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes April 9th, 2013

Attendance: Chris Huffine (Allies in Change), Jennifer Hopkinson (Clackamas Women's Services), Yvette Wright (Life in Focus Education), Jeff Hartnett (ChangePoint), Mark Amoroso (MEPs Counseling), Jennifer Warren (Seeds of Change Counseling), Patrick Lemon (prevention consultation), Regina Rosann (ARMS), Ron Clark (Agape, The Engaging Men Project), Nick Guerrero (Raphael House), Krystal Duff (Bridges 2 Safety), Brian Valetski (DCJ DV Unit), Jacquie Pancoast (Central City Concern ChangePoint), Wendy Viola (Portland State University), Charley Zimmerman (Pacific University/Allies in Change), Sherry Beckman (Allies in Change)

Minutes by Wendy Viola, edited by Chris Huffine

Presentation: The Engaging Men Project (TEMP): Learnings from our Interview and Discussion Process

These minutes summarize a PowerPoint presentation made by Nick Guerrero, Ron Clark, and Patrick Lemon as well as some discussion, comments, and questions from the larger group.

Over the years, there have been several attempts to get men more involved in the DV movement. Often, there are few to no men involved in mobilizations of the DV movement. The Engaging Men Project (TEMP) was formed in February 2010, when community meetings regarding men's involvement in the DV movement were initiated in Portland. Thirty to 40 people came to the first conversation, and the decision was made to establish a small working group. A group of about eleven people came together to address the issue, of engaging men in the DV movement, and have been working towards doing so since then.

The TEMP working group wanted to be careful not to overlap with ongoing work in the community. As opposed to shorter moments of activism (like replacing urinal splashguards so that they're marked with phrases like "you hold the power to stop rape in your hands"), TEMP intended to do something more enduring. They identified approximately 200 projects in the community that work, at least peripherally, around engaging men in the DV movement. They selected 25 of these organizations to interview about the work that they do, their awareness of other groups in the area, their collaboration with other organizations in the area, and their experiences trying to engage men in the DV movement. One of their goals was to find out why more men haven't been involved in the movement and what can be done to engage men to a greater extent. The results of the interviews have now been compiled into a 30-page paper, which the group is currently revising.

TEMP is currently giving presentations of their findings to smaller groups throughout the community before they convene another large, open community meeting to decide how to move forward to apply TEMP's findings. The group would like these smaller community presentations to produce feedback on their findings, their use of language, their interpretations of their

findings, etc., which they may be able to address before holding the larger open meeting. After presenting their findings at the larger meeting, TEMP intends to disband, with the expectation that a new group will be formed in the wake of the larger meeting. This new group would presumably start to move forward with specific projects and action plans, based on the work that TEMP has already done.

Everyone that TEMP interviewed was wrestling with how to engage men, and encountering challenges to doing so. It seems like there are a lot of assumptions about fears of having men in survivor support and advocacy roles. Many of the people that TEMP interviewed assumed that other people don't want men in survivor support and advocacy roles, but none of the interviewees said that they, themselves, were reluctant to have men in these roles. Survivors seeking services do not seem to have much fear of men in support and advocacy roles, but agencies are still reluctant to put men in these roles. The one role where men's involvement is not questioned is that of clergy—none of the interviewees seemed skeptical that victims are comfortable seeking out male clergy members.

These results beg the question of how much of agencies' reluctance to put men in victim support and advocacy roles is based on their own assumptions, as opposed to what they've learned from survivors. An additional consideration is that we are socialized to view men as protectors, and having men around victim service agencies may be interpreted in more nuanced ways. For example, it's unusual for survivors to respond negatively to having men in support and advocacy roles; survivors are more concerned with the presence of masculine energy (authoritarian interaction styles, grandiosity, etc.). Having groups of men in a waiting area is often more uncomfortable for survivors than the presence of a single man in a support or advocacy role.

There tends to be more trust of men who work or volunteer with support or advocacy organizations. However, some survivors have stated explicitly that they are uncomfortable with men as primary advocates, as primary advocates have substantial control over survivors' cases, and they did not want to be a position wherein a man has so much control over them.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the acknowledgement of healthy motivations for men's involvement in the DV movement. For example, perpetrators, as well as their victims, suffer as a result of the violence that they perpetrate; stopping their own abusive behavior (and, by extension, getting involved in the DV movement) is beneficial for them, as well as their victims.

Challenges and opportunities are more external to the movement, whereas weaknesses and strengths are aspects of the movement itself. Many of the challenges are cultural. Some of the complications that came out of the interviews speak to the intersectionality and overlapping nature of oppressions. Additional complications that prevent men's involvement are: that the dynamics of organizations are simpler without trying to integrate men; the lack of concrete tasks for men to engage in, which organizations fear men may find dissatisfying; men's struggles with guilt or defensiveness about being male; the extent of self-examination that is necessary to be

engaged in victim support and advocacy, which cannot be easily left behind at the end of the day. To illustrate the last point, men are often enthusiastic about intervening in sex trafficking in other countries, but get uncomfortable once the conversation shifts to manifestations of the problem, and ways that their own behavior may contribute to the problem more locally.

Reinforcing sexism is a risk of involving men in the DV movement. Having men in positions of power, or the presence of high-profile men in the movement, may reinforce traditional gender dynamics that place men in positions of power and centrality. Because of the scarcity of men in the movement, any man who does the same volunteer work as a woman gets exponentially more praise than women who do the same thing. There is also a valid risk that women in the movement are not particularly enlightened about gender issues and may also reinforce sexist dynamics. Women can also have agendas, be relatively uninformed about the issues, and be closed off to other people's perspectives.

Organizations that TEMP interviewed also acknowledged a reality that men have more access to engaging with other men. There was not a desire to exploit sexism, but a frank acknowledgment that men have an edge over women when it comes to communicating with other men.

One of the more surprising things that emerged from the interviews was an understanding that, because women are dominant in the field and survivor support and advocacy is viewed as women's work, the work is very low-paid. Men often have access to higher paying jobs. The reason that many women are able to do this work is because they're married to partners who earn more money. Traditional gender roles dictate that men should earn more money than their female partners, and be the breadwinners for their families, preventing them from taking this low-wage work.

An often-cited reason that more men aren't involved in the DV movement is that organizations aren't particularly inviting or warm towards men. A resulting question is "why is it women's jobs to warmly invite men into their organizations?" Some believe that it is beneficial for men entering the DV movement to experience the discomfort of trying to break into a field that doesn't necessarily welcome them, as women experience that phenomenon so often, and in so many domains. Exposure to gender-based micro-aggressions may be women's typical experience in the world, and a context-specific barrier for men.

Any time a member of the dominant group is going to do anti-oppression work, there's going to be some discomfort and tension. However, there is also explicit objectification and sexism directed towards men within some largely female organizations. There's a difference between acknowledging privilege, and treating people who are privileged with disrespect and overt hostility. It can be especially discouraging to experience micro-aggressions from people who define their work in terms of stopping sexist micro-aggressions. "Sexism" may not be the appropriate label for micro-aggressions perpetrated by women towards men, because women don't have a history of power over men, which is often associated with sexism. A benefit of involving men, is that other men are likely more prone to listen to other men; this helps to build a critical mass of men in the movement.

Another reason that few men are involved in the DV movement may be the lack of appropriate space for them to process and debrief the involvement in the work, particularly aspects of the work that involve their male privilege.

Even having the most enlightened feminist men involved in an organization still necessitates women's education and care of men, which is taxing on women.

There are also many opportunities for men's involvement in the DV movement. Some of the most idolized men in the country are athletes and actors, who often have dysfunctional relationships. Tapping into a culture that values teaching, education, non-profit work, etc. would be helpful in getting more men involved in the movement.

Men are never going to know what it's like to be a woman in this society. However, men have the opportunity to acknowledge that they cannot know what it's like to be a woman, and also to do their own work. It's not productive for men to overly humble themselves to women and make themselves inferior. Men owning their own experiences and interacting from that place, acknowledging and valuing others' experiences, is much more productive. The concept of cultural humility suggests that the only culture we can truly know is our own. In knowing our own culture well we must then practice humility in not automatically imposing that culture on others or presuming that anyone else automatically shares those exact same cultural values. It means being open to and curious about the cultural background of others.

In order for the 200 organizations that TEMP identified to keep working together as a community, the weaknesses that they encounter in integrating men into the DV movement need to be addressed. Perhaps they can work together to do so.

A strength of the organizations that TEMP interviewed is the willingness to struggle through hard conversations to redefine and reflect on uncomfortable issues of privilege, etc., which will make them more successful in involving men in the movement.

TEMP's report will ideally guide conversations and keep the effort to engage men locally moving forward. TEMP will distribute the paper that they've produced, and call together the large community meeting to share thoughts about concrete next steps.

Many of the same faces, show up at trainings and speakers in the community, so many of these events seem like preaching to the choir. However, many of the people with whom perpetrators interact collude with them, and perpetrators seek out books, movies, etc., which support and justify their abusive behavior. Thus, perpetrators' spheres are largely separate from those of people who attend trainings and speakers. Even as facilitators attempt to provide a bridge between the DV movement and their clients, information that they share is filtered through their own voices. How can we bring men in BIPs in contact with men in the community who are involved in the DV movement? Hopefully, TEMP's paper will provide some information for

doing so. There are also organizations like Boys Advocacy and Mentoring that attempt to bring boys and men in contact with men who are engaged in the DV movement.

Many BIP participants come out of victim impact panels with a lot of excitement and energy around stopping DV, and having resources available to harness this energy and preserve it would be very valuable. Harnessing and preserving anti-DV energy is the intention of aftercare (which is no longer required, as per the Oregon standards). Preserving BIP participants' anti-DV energy and motivation is difficult because there isn't the same community support for being accountable in this domain as there is for abstinence from substances: the objectification of women is culturally engrained. There is a concern that, as participants' anti-DV energy wanes, they will drift back towards more sexist or objectifying attitudes. There is also skepticism of some of former BIP participants' attempts to preserve this energy themselves. Current or former participants' self-help groups may be particularly problematic, as they may veer off track without a facilitator to make sure that the conversation moves in the right direction. Additionally, a lot of the work that BIP participants still have to do once they complete their program is below the surface, which other perpetrators are not as prepared to help each other address.

BIP facilitators' job is to engage the men in their groups in the DV movement. Is there some generalizability to the things that facilitators do with their groups to engage men more generally? Within BIP groups, there's a power dynamic (whereby facilitators have power over participants), which may be subverted to a certain extent. With higher-functioning groups in particular, there's more power between participants so the group dynamic is less authoritarian. The power dynamic isn't as pronounced in voluntary groups, and groups of mandated men may begin to function as though they are there voluntarily.

Editor's note: At this point the formal presentation related to TEMP was completed. With some time remaining, the conversation shifted to a separate discussion of prostitution and pornography, starting with presentation of a rough cut of a youtube video for use in the John's school put together by some members of the TEMP committee.

There is a need for greater collaboration between the BIP community and the John's School. The John's School is a one day class for men who have been arrested for solicitation charges. It is intended to help them desist seeking out the services of a prostitute in the future, in part by helping increasing their awareness of the costs of prostitution to everyone. Many men who have sat through a day of the John's School are ripe for being integrated into the DV movement, via the BIP community. What are some ways to enable them to get involved with the BIP community? Members of TEMP made a video of working with men in the John's School which can be accessed via this link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXJYRb_r2eQ&feature=youtube . The video portrays a fair representation of the energy of participants in the John's School, which is very similar to the energy of BIP groups. A lot of the complaints voiced by participants in the John's School and BIPs (that they're dissatisfied with their sex lives) are the same. If the video is packaged as a film about guys who use prostitutes, BIP participants will write it off by othering themselves from men who use prostitutes.

However, if the video is re-packaged as men talking about their dissatisfaction with their sexual relationships, it would be more palatable to BIP participants. Hearing the material come from other men can be very powerful.

Even within the DV movement, it can be incredibly challenging for women to engage male colleagues around issues of prostitution and pornography. When perspectives come from a personal, vulnerable, emotional, female place, it can be very hard for men to palate. If the same messages come from other men, they will likely be better received. Anyone can talk frankly with BIP groups about the effect that pornography has on them (e.g., men who watch more pornography may have a harder time climaxing in real life). However, getting men to palate stories and perspectives about pornography from a woman's point of view is a substantial part of the battle. A lot of faith-based groups to address the use of pornography don't address women's voices. Men can start to knock down walls with groups, so that the groups will be more receptive to women's stories: men have to open the door for women to have an impact on other men. Men have 15 seconds of access with other men up front that women don't have just because they're men.