

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes-9/28/99

Present: Michael Davis (Changepoint), Virginia Lopez (Ayuda), Songcha Bowman, Paula Manley, Guruseva Mason (Transition Projects), David Heyward (Transition Projects), Lillie Zable (ASAP), Sandie Bacharach (Programma Des Mujeres)

Topic

Issues in creating a safe space for people to express differences in our meetings

Case presentations

-One concern is a fear of presenting cases, where a person may feel judged or pressured to intervene one particular way.

-Others may be hesitant to speak out of feeling inexperienced/less experienced.

-It was suggested that a clear protocol for how cases are staffed and feedback is given be established.

Differences between programs

-“Therapy” perspectives vs. “intervention” perspectives seems to be a key source of conflict among providers, which can create a significant amount of tension.

-Some people may be put off by the politics/political positions. They may not want to get into the political aspects.

There are two levels where political issues appear. One relates to the larger social and cultural issues, which some group members believe are vital to address. The other relates to the internal politics of various alliances, who is saying the “right” things, etc.

-If a person’s approach is more unorthodox or not the “standard” she/he may be more hesitant to attend the meeting or to share her/his perspective.

-It’s important to respect the right of each person to have their own opinion.

-Why do some programs attend just 1-2x and then no longer attend? Should we call each one up. Ask them to return and why they aren’t attending? Perhaps have a student/neutral party inquire as to why they haven’t been attending.

-It was observed that the history of these meetings and interactions need to be taken into consideration. There may be lingering feelings on old issues. Perhaps those lingering feelings need to be expressed to allow people to move past them. Identifying and talking through old issues and old incidents might be helpful. However, that is often difficult communication to engage in, requiring an even higher level of communication skills and listening ability.

-How do we express and respect a diversity of opinions?

-How do we set norms without becoming dogmatic?

Differences between people

-Learning style differences may be an issue. Some people might find the intellectual style of dialogue/debate

not as helpful as other styles.

-There are also concerns about people who tend to be more outspoken and quicker to jump in with their thoughts or opinions. Does this make it more difficult for others to speak and express themselves. How can this be addressed?

-One suggestion was to do a quick go around on any issue so that everyone has an opportunity to speak without having to try to jump in. People could pass if they had nothing they wanted to say.

Power issues

-We need to model non-controlling behaviors in our interactions with each other.

-Sometimes power plays may take on the appearance of appropriate confrontation. The speaker may present themselves as an expert or with an authoritarian opinion. Some flags of this is using words like “you”, and leaving off qualifiers like “in my opinion” or making global, rather than specific statements.

Gender/cultural issues

-What does it mean to be equal? It was suggested that the larger social context of cultural oppression needs to be taken into consideration. In that orientation, the opinions and voices of traditionally oppressed groups (e.g., women, people of color) need to be given heavier weight for things to truly be equal.

-For the men, how can gender issues/differences be acknowledged without feeling silenced?

Communication skills

-Taking a dogmatic, closed-minded view about one perspective shuts down the opportunity to engage in dialogue. Among all of the providers there needs to be an openness to input and the perspectives of others.

-People who respond to input with “yeah, but . . .” can feel dismissive to the person who provided the input. There is only superficial acknowledgement of what the speaker said.

-A member may feel attacked if they are told that they’re wrong or that they have to do something a certain way.

-Good communication skills among all members seems vital, to allow for the respectful sharing of information.

-In healthy, appropriate confrontation concerns may be expressed and/or alternatives identified, but the choice of what to do is left to the recipient. Their right to choose is respected.

-It was suggested that when speaking, the speaker be conscientious in using phrases like “in my experience” or “my opinion” vs. speaking more generally or vaguely or universally. It was also suggested that people speaking as specifically as possible.

-It was suggested that people should make a point of acknowledging what they find good and valuable and helpful in others, as well as providing criticism.

-Should confrontation of an individual be done publicly or privately? When confrontation is

done publicly there is a danger of group shaming. The person may feel ashamed or embarrassed. There is a danger that the speaker may also take a one up or superior position with the person they are criticizing. On the other hand, public behavior affects everyone present and should be addressed with everyone present.

-It seems like one of the roles of the facilitator is to monitor the safety level. The facilitator can monitor, note, and check-in with people present.

Other groups

-This

topic—creating a safe space for dialogue, seems to be an issue that every group wrestles with in the DV community.

-Should this discussion be shared with other groups? It was suggested that people review this summary and then discuss what should be done with it.

Summary by Chris Huffine of a discussion by members of the Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network.