

TCBIN MEETING MINUTES: October 1, 2002

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chris Huffine (Men's Resource Center), David Houston (Men's Resource Center), Songcha Bowman (Multicultural Counseling Center), Stacey Womack (ARMS), Michael Davis (ChangePoint), Elsie Garland (Multnomah County Juvenile Community Justice), Bobbie Mekvold (Choices), Paula Manley (Private practice), Mai Kayanuma (PSU MSW program), Diane Rivera (CODA), Margaret Gerlt (Men's Resource Center), Christine Crowe (Choices), Kristi Moynes (BI, Inc), Stephanie Thompson (BI, Inc).

Minutes by Elsie Garland, edited by Chris Huffine

AGENDA TOPIC: ISSUES IN MALE-FEMALE CO-FACILITATION

The topic under discussion today focused on the efficacy of male and female co-facilitation of Batterer Intervention groups. Of the committee members who were present, the consensus was that group work is more effective when both genders are present in the leadership.

The question was raised about whether a trainee should sit in the group and learn from the co-ed facilitators. Clients and trainees can see the model of cross-gender, egalitarian power-sharing and can experience the benefits of diverse perspectives. Input also included the importance of working collaboratively as co-facilitators. Any conflicts must be debriefed to eliminate clients "splitting" the leaders. Cross-gender co-facilitation is a model of male – female respect giving.

Regarding facilitator substitutes: Should we bring in the same gender substitute when we are going to be absent?

Some programs bring in a substitute co-facilitator. Others just go with the one facilitator that week. There were advantages identified for each method. It is important to have a consistent substitute on whom clients can count and who is somewhat familiar with the members. For the offenders this is the only time in a week where they can be totally real. The concern is for the clients' feelings of comfort and safety. If there are too many new faces in the facilitator role over time, that may reduce their level of safety. They need to know "that they're not going to burst into flames in the next two hours."

Regarding co-facilitator "airtime": One thought on that subject is that each facilitator has her/his own style, own way of communicating and own confidence level. We all need to recognize those differences and capitalize on each other's styles. For example, one person may be more of an observer and assessor who brings that kind of thoughtful perspective to the mix. It is also ok to bring in a new facilitator/substitute. It challenges the group, stirs things up and can be the catalyst in bringing up difficult issues. The challenge is to negotiate that co-ed "dance" of facilitation time and power. Again, it is an opportunity to model egalitarian attitudes and behaviors.

Regarding ethnic groups and their attitudes about women: The difficulty with some ethnic groups is that group members tend to give more attention to the male leader. One comment was that it works better with an older woman and a younger man.

Younger women have experienced gender-bias from clients, getting called, “the girl”, “little girl”, etc. Clients assume she has limited experience. Question: How do you address being a woman, the only one, when attention is focused on you as “the woman?”

An example was given of those moments in group when the co-facilitator is the “token” female in discussing difficult issues like sex abuse. The suggestion was to ask, What are you looking at me for? Appreciation was expressed for the perspectives of women on “male privilege”. It is critically important for female co-facilitators to have worked through their own issues in that regard to avoid collusion with male clients in accepting male privilege.

There are some circumstances where co-ed co-facilitation may be difficult. In rural settings it may be difficult to find and retain two skilled co-facilitators. It may also be challenging to find qualified people when offering a culturally specific group. Because of the necessity of paying for two staff, a small group may also create economic limitations to offer co-facilitation.

Power imbalances between co-facilitators need to be continually examined. Who’s talking and how much? Who is collecting the money? Who is seen as the authority? Less experienced co-facilitators may feel more easily experienced by the more experienced and knowledgeable facilitator.

Regular on-going communication between facilitators is vital. There needs to be a time to debrief the group process after group.