

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network 9/11/2012 meeting minutes

Attendance:

- Amanda Briley (Bridges to Safety)
- Steve Stewart (Allies in Change)
- Charlie Zimmerman (Allies in Change)
- Regina Rosann (ARMS)
- Samantha Naliboff (VOA Home Free)
- Emmy Ritter (Raphael House)
- Mark Amoroso (MEP's Counseling)
- Brooke Duple (Allies in Change)
- Svetlana Mitsina (Allies in Change)
- Katherine Stansbury (ChangePoint)
- Sean Clark (Cedar Counseling Center)
- Guruseva Mason
- Phil Broyles (Teras Intervention & Counseling)
- Andrew Altman (DCJ)

Minutes by Steve Stewart, edited by Chris Huffine

DISCUSSION: (PARENTING ISSUES WITH ABUSIVE MEN)

Parenting is an emotional issue, one that excites sympathy with each other in groups. It is often an incentive for men to attend groups and manage their image so they get custody of their children.

ARMS provides similar parenting training to the men as with the women.

Men commonly personalize their children's actions, believing the children are trying to manipulate them.

Men who are new to the programs tend to disclose affection for their kids. They describe themselves as good fathers, but aren't able to describe parenting resources or specific skills.

Is there consensus about parenting violence as closely connected to domestic or partner violence? There seems to be agreement in this group. There seems to be a cultural idea that a man can be an abusive partner and a good father at the same time, without recognizing that as a discrepancy, an absurdity. Violence to children gets some men into these groups, but they often don't see the connection that violence to children is violence to their mother.

Social agencies seem to work hard to provide batterers with access to their children; but women with abusive behaviors seem to get less access to their children. Women (men and courts) commonly believe that children need contact with their fathers despite the father's abuses;

however these people also tend to not permit women with histories of abuse to have any contact with their children.

Fathers of daughters tend to speak protectively of their daughters, but don't see the bigger picture of making society safer for women in general. Men frequently block that insight/connection.

What are effective public awareness strategies? One point is to help people connect specific women (the partners they like) as being part of the larger society of women. Abusers (to perpetuate their abuse) have an investment in seeing their partners as separate from "women." Abuse is not an individual issue; it's a community issue, a systemic issue.

We often hear: "My parents kicked my butt, and I turned out fine" yet these men don't connect "turning out fine" for them includes being arrested and in a DV/ BIP group

Among our clients, child contact seems to be fairly evenly divided among those who don't have contact, and those who have supervised or unsupervised contact.

Statistically, abusive partners want full custody more than non-abusive partners.

Our DV community is a microcosm of our larger community: women's issues and needs seem to be minimized and dismissed by the courts, too. The cumulative impact of DV on the community is a necessary issue to address in BIP groups. BIP intervention providers have an obligation to repeat core advocacy issues to the courts and community.

Parenting issues pertain to non-fathers as well as fathers. Men who aren't fathers often date women who are mothers. They interact with and influence other men who are actual or potential fathers. They may yet become fathers. They are often around other children (e.g., nieces and nephews). Many men, even on their first or second date with a mother, start parenting the woman's children (e.g., "they need a strong man's influence").

One member present suggested that the system should restrict any abuser's access to children and partners until they've (fully) completed the program.

Why do men get "gold stars" when they're involved with their children, but not women?

It's sad that much of women's conversations about DHS-Child Welfare is negative. The agency isn't perceived as supportive or helpful, but punitive if the women aren't "perfect" and fully compliant. Women are typically terrified of DHS-Child Welfare.

Oregon (DHS) has a disproportionate history of abusing children from abusive homes, and most often from African-American, Native American, and Latino communities. "Disproportionality in Oregon" articles were referenced: http://web.multco.us/sites/default/files/ccfc/documents/disproportionality_in_oregon.pdf

<http://cms.oregon.gov/dhs/children/docs/tf-summary.pdf>

Children seem to have little input into the radical changes being made in their lives. They should have more input, especially if they've witnessed the abuse.

Are parenting issues part of the state standards? Yes, parenting is mentioned as part of the curriculum that needs to be addressed by programs that work with abusive men.

How do you educate the public about DV's effect on children without stigmatizing the mothers? This is a larger cultural issue of tending to blame victims more than addressing the perpetrators. Our silence is taken as collaboration with cultural abuses.

What are the conversations with men around child support? This issue is a stepping stone for being accountable for their impact on the survivors. Being accountable also means providing support without the court's intervention or supervision. Are there agency guidelines about this issue? Is it part of agencies' curriculum?

When abusers are parents, they become a permanent part of their victim's lives. Co-parenting creates a radically different recovery process for survivors. Parenting gives active abusers long-term access to their victims. Some abusers have even cited that as a reason for getting their girlfriends pregnant. Such women can never get full autonomy from that abuser.

Facilitators need to guard against conversations in parenting or BIP groups that help men learn to expand (rather than stop) their abuse and control.

Charging money for BIP interventions (instead of being funded by the community) is awkward: we're part of the system that takes money from the surviving mothers and families.