

## Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes--4/6/2004

Present: Cassandra Suess (Men's Resource Center), Dean Camarda (Abuse Recovery Ministry Services/Changepoint), Paula Manley (Manley Interventions), Steve McCrea (CASA for Children), Amy Horwell (MRC/Therapeutic Strategies Incorporated), Mychelle Moritz (Domestic Violence Resource Center-Children's Program), Claudia Gimeriez (Domestic Violence Resource Center--Children's Program), Marjan Baradar (Oregon Counseling Center), Tim Logan, Chris Huffine (Men's Resource Center), Don Voeks (Gresham Intimate Violence), Stacey Womack (Abuse Recovery Ministry Services), Marc Hess (Multnomah County Domestic Violence and Family Services Unit), 2 additional survivors of domestic violence

Minutes by Paula Manley, edited by Chris Huffine

### The Impact of Batterer Intervention Programs on the Partners of the Men Being Worked With

While we emphasize the importance of staying in touch with victim advocates, we seldom hear about how partners of perpetrators in a program are being affected. Are there things we can do as providers to make it easier on them?

At least three survivors in abusive relationships were present at this meeting, plus several emails from others were also shared. Ellen Gerace-Owens, who runs a DV survivors group in Washington County also queried her group members and summarized their responses in an email (referred to as the DV survivor group email). Many (although not all) of the comments below come from these women.

A provider working with perpetrator groups and victim groups thinks it's helpful to hear the voice of the victim. That way, they truly hear what's going on. Otherwise, it might be easy to get hooked on the guys' stories.

#### Victim blaming

A survivor talked about how she felt she was the cause of his abuse. Another discussed the perp's attitude, "The abuse stopped, so why are you. . . ?" Several also commented that their partner's used what they were learning to point out their *partner's* allegedly controlling behavior. One victim was told, "Well, he (her partner) never abused his former girlfriends" which made her feel even more that it must be her fault. One abuser will talk about what she has done, then victim will admit to her issues, while batterer tries to make her look bad.

From the DV support group email: told their partners that they needed help too "It's not fair that they are only making me go, the BIP counselor said you have problems too and

need counseling." "We were both at fault."

From the DV support group email: The men came home from group in terrible moods (NOTE: this was discussed as a potential risk factor as well.)

Sometimes the extended family of victim feels overwhelmed and helpless, so may back off because they don't know what to do.

The shame for the victim is increased when the perpetrator is really good at presenting himself as a "good guy." What the victim experiences is not what the general public sees at all.

One person shared the "Cooking the frog" analogy. If you put a frog in boiling water it will jump out. But if you put a frog in room temperature water and gradually increase it, the frog will get cooked without even knowing it. This describes the effects of DV. The gradual increase of abusive behavior and the accustoming of self to the violence makes one put up with more.

#### Impact on the children

One perpetrator did a lot of intentional lobbying of the children, thus doing a lot of harm to the children. Their mother had to be very vigilant. She said the best she could do for her children was for her to contrast her behavior to what their father did. Over time, they saw the difference. In her opinion, her ex should never have been able to see their children again. She said she needed some education as a mom in that situation, and tended to be over-protective, hover, etc.

When children see the stop in physical abuse, what is the effect? Children tend to respond quite differently (among themselves) to the changes. The children wanted to believe their father, but still wanted to believe their mother, in one case. The kids' father did everything he could to manipulate the kids. He denied everything she said. One thing that helped one survivor was, "Kids don't want their parents together as much as they want their parents happy." Teenagers may continue the same abuse they learned from their father, using it against their mother. The mom needs to draw firm lines, setting limits as to behaviors in her children that she will accept. The kids will generally come back. Teens often tend to lean one way or another. Some of the kids were afraid of their father, survivors report. Even after the battering stopped, some report the trust level was still down. But it depends a lot on the age and the kids' personalities.

If men are learning tools in the BIP's, are they not also learning things in the parenting classes which they then use against the victims? Do we perhaps need special parenting classes designed for batterers? This is happening now a lot in Washington County. For example, Men's Resource Center, Women's Counseling Center, and Western Counseling

Treatment Services, among others, are now offering parenting and DV classes that focus specifically on parenting in families in which DV has occurred. Lundy Bancroft is doing a track on this topic at the Child Abuse Summit later this month.

In the child service field, a batterer may get more contact than the mom because he has completed a batterer intervention program. Mom may be the better parent but may be still working on her issues. In family law, we need custody evaluators who are experts in DV.

#### Distortion/misuse of program concepts

Some men feel that because they aren't "as bad" as the other men. Partners have heard this line, which seems a common theme. "There's a lot of idiots in there." There may be a lot of twisting of what goes on in class. From the DV survivor group email: some feedback that the women heard was that the BIP had a anti-Christian, anti-male philosophy and therefore the batterer "shut down and wouldn't learn". The batterer compared himself to others, minimizes wrong doings: "I'm not as bad as this other guy in my group."

Men also misuse program tools. For example, on time outs, he may start a disruption, get her all frustrated then leave on a "time-out", making her feel like she's the bad one, and not addressing his issues when he comes back, acting like all is OK. Another example is using silence "to avoid the fight". This is another way of describing the silent treatment, "which is sometimes as bad as getting hit" because the victim feels crazy. Another variation of this is him "staying calm" while she becomes more escalated and agitated. The victim is made to look like the victimizer. A man may stay totally calm, manipulating her.

From the DV survivor group email: used their new vocabulary against their partner.

From the DV survivor group email: Overall, the biggest risk factor was that the women felt that the batterer used the techniques learned in groups to create false hope and reunification with the victim. "I believed him, so I took him back."

#### Programs contacting partners

A survivor commented she doesn't know how BIPs can do their job without talking to the victim. She believes that it is absolutely vital that the partners be contacted. She said it was validating to her to have her side heard. Her batterer told her this is how it is in every home, normalizing his behavior to her. Another survivor said the program never talked to her, and she wished they had. But there is a big safety issue with a survivor sharing her story.

From an email: "I would have appreciated more contact with his group leader during the time of the weekly meetings. I knew that I could call whenever I needed to, but felt that I

might have been interfering so didn't do it. An occasional update from him would have been welcome.

One provider commented that dealing closely with the victim advocate to get the perspective seemed safer for the victim. A victim said the perpetrator's counselor also told her what to expect from the perpetrator if she stayed in the relationship. What does the involvement of perpetrator in a program mean to the victim? Another said she was told up front this was a long-term, five-year process.

Another concern is what the *victim* may say to the perpetrator about the conversation with his counselor. One provider commented that providers should always assume that anything they say to the partner may be passed on from the partner to the perpetrator, even if the partner requests the conversation be kept confidential.

A victim said she had all the symptoms of PTSD. Any kind of interaction with her partner and she couldn't even think straight. The beauty of the program was that she was contacted by the women's program when the perpetrator wasn't there, and was offered help. At that time, she says, she was in survivor mode, needed a lot of help, and needed to be away from him. Shortly after that, they separated. (She has a permanent restraining order in her divorce decree.)

The issue of false hope is very important - not only to the victim, but also to the Court. One person commented that the person working with the partner needs to let the woman know that he may not change. A survivor said, "Don't use statistics." Women don't want to hear that.

Give the victim an idea of the time frame. One woman was told it would take him time to mature emotionally, then time to admit the problem, then more time, and even then, it's a gamble. This helped her come to the conclusion that he needs to do that for him, I need to take care of me, and if it happens to work out between them, OK, but if not, fine.

Mention readings to partners, such as *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*. This can open partner's eyes to a lot of it. The victim advocate may be viewed as trying to brainwash them, but it can be powerful to hear the concern of the BIP.

An article in the paper about one of the programs is what saved her life, one woman said. There was a glimmer of help that maybe the abuse wasn't normal, and maybe help was available. One woman was told to give herself permission to go back to him if that's what she felt she needed. Another woman was sent the list of warning signs, which helped her.

Most women go back to the perpetrator if they don't have support. One woman said she "had to get his voice out of my head, hearing that I was so stupid, an idiot," etc.

One woman shared a list of the most helpful things that had been said to her that helped with her recovery process (most of which were said to her by the woman running her support group):

-There is a process of waking up for the victim. Before wake-up=victim, after=volunteer.

- Sexual abuse is the most painful because you have participated in your own abuse.
- Only two choices: make a good victim (compliant) or be a bitch.
- Get out of vs. work out of.
- Even if I could change the feelings for you, I wouldn't, because you need the information.
- Abuse writes with indelible ink upon the soul.
- I am a completely whole and well person, but subtleties of childhood set me up to accept wrong behavior as normal.
- Invest your energy into how you want your life to be. Build what is buildable. In order to not be a part of it, you must remove your energy from it.
- Emotions are not facts, but they contain important information.
- Not issue of love, but of woundedness.
- Let his world be his.
- Not the amount of good or bad qualities, but the weight of them.
- Honesty breeds intimacy.
- Trying to get something from someone unable to give it is like going to the gas station for groceries.
- I choose to not be in a relationship that destroys me.
- If it is what it is then you need to know it.
- You need to go through what you need to go through for however long you need to go through it.
- Life is not fair or unfair, it just is.
- There is no way out but through.
- Be curious about feelings but not judgemental, then we have permission to find the answers.
- There is a great deal of shame, humiliation, and pain from being a victim. Part of the abuse cycle is that you cannot process pain because it violates the message of the abuser that what happened's not real. Making it real cause the cycle of abuse to begin again. The accumulation of this unprocessed pain reaches the breaking point eventually.

#### Encouraging dialogue between partners and perpetrators

One survivor said that one thing that helped her to get unstuck was participating in the restorative justice program in which she was able to have a facilitated dialogue with an abusive man she did not know. She had been in counseling for a year up to that point (and he had been through a batterer intervention program). When she talked to the abuser, this helped her move on.

Some agencies may meet with perpetrator, his counselor, victim and her counselor. This can only be done very carefully, a long way into the classes, and not routinely. This is only when the partners are living together. Such meetings can help assure that everyone is on the same page, identify areas and issues that he needs to continue to work on.

### Has he truly changed?

One survivor suggested that we need more evaluation at the end, as well as at the beginning--to determine if a man has truly changed. What amends are they willing to make? A perpetrator may make some changes and then present himself as being "fixed". And if someone actually makes some changes, how should this be indicated by the program? Progress is not so much the absence of negative behaviors, but his active encouragement of her being true to herself. It's him not pushing his own agenda, but encouraging her in what she likes to do. There is some indication in the way they present their letter of accountability. How they feel, how they do direct and indirect amends. A victim said, if their heart is truly in it, they will keep going to the group and work on their program on a daily basis. He will see his changes as an on-going process, practiced on a daily basis. While there might have initially been external motivation to attend/change, it's important that at some point the motivation become internal.

From an email: "My husband has only attended one class since his program ended eight or nine months ago. I think it would have been helpful if, during the six months to a year following the completion of the program, his group leader had called occasionally to check in and to invite him to attend a class. I had hoped he might attend class once a month or so afterwards, to bring back the points he learned so well. It's easy to backslide when there's an abrupt ending to such an intensive program."

Here are the emailed comments of one partner unable to attend: "Without (the batterer intervention provider) I'm not sure where either my husband or I would be. I early on made the decision that if my husband was going to be successful, he was going to have to be responsible for his own 'work' in group. Throughout treatment I kept a very hands off approach and did not ask and did not want to know from him how he felt the progress was going or what he was learning. If he wanted to share what he was learning I would listen but I too often had bailed him out and I was not going to be responsible for the work he needed to do.(The batterer intervention provider) did not contact me about his treatment and this was OK with me and worked for us. I was also in the women's group and after about a year of treatment one of the men's leaders came and spoke to us about what the treatment consisted of. This was very helpful and it was the right time for me. More of this kind of information would have been nice. I feel that it may have been helpful to have had the option to meet with the leader of both the mens and womens group as a couple to see if we were all on the same page and to discuss the progress. Besides this I feel the program is effective for the men who want to change and highly recommend it."

Here are the emailed comments of another partner unable to attend: "My experience was extremely positive. I realize that the succes of your program depends largely on the motivation of the men involved. In my case, my husband was very motivated to succeed as he is a businessman with no record of arrests or trouble with the law up until this point,

and as he is very close to his extended family, this was a great embarrassment to him. The program generated quite a bit of discussion in our home, as he was quite open regarding the subject matter in each class. Up until this time, he was not willing to talk to me honestly about his early life, his difficult and alcoholic father, and the pain this caused him. It was amazing to listen to his comments and feelings, as I am certain he would never have been this honest with me without his participation in the men's group. As he opened up and softened, we all noticed the change in our family's dynamics. It was very gratifying to say the least. I felt that he worked hard at his assignments and succeeded in changing many of his negative behaviors. Since he completed the program, things have gone fairly smoothly. I no longer fear his anger, as he is no longer threatening to me or to our son. There is some backsliding occasionally in some behaviors, but I can say that for the most part, our relationship has remained calm and easygoing."

From an email summarizing information shared from multiple women in a DV support group: Many positive and negative changes were observed after their partners completed the BIP, or were in the process of completing the BIP. Positive changes included:

- \* the person was more open
- \* communicative
- \* made friends outside of the relationship
- \* "finally getting it"
- \* had empathy
- \* apologetic to her
- \* Some women received feedback from their partners that they felt good for being able to help the other guys in the group.

#### Initial changes may be disceiving

Usually there is an initial change. This is not always a meaningful or lasting change. Several women commented that while the physical abuse decreased after enrollment, the psychological violence went up. Men will lower some levels of abuse and increase others. They will use their limited improvement to mask other abusive behaviors. A man may use the tools to manipulate, "See how much better I'm doing. . ." with the tools he has. Emotional abuse can really increase, and the "crazy-making" behavior the perpetrator does. Another said she saw it as very positive the physical abuse stopped, but didn't understand at the time how the emotional abuse was still an important factor. Every woman wants to believe he will change so she may falsely believe he is getting better when she sees this initial change.

From an email summarizing discussion by several women in a DV survivors group: many of the changes referred to above only last a short time (3 months was noted).

One survivor commented how, even with minimal physical abuse, there was a lot of psychological abuse, and even discussing this, her heart was pounding. When there are no bruises, but emotional abuse, it is harder to deal with, because the pain is not easily

identifiable. BIP's sometimes do not focus enough on verbal and other emotional abuse. This is the heart of domestic violence. Often the victim is not educated as to the emotional abuse. She may think the abuse isn't bad, minimizing the abuse to her.

The presence of the abuse is still there, even if it is no longer being perpetrated. The stress is the same, after physical violence, whether or not he is hitting or not. One survivor described the stopping of physical abuse as akin to dogs being kept in a yard with an electrical fence. Once they've been shocked by that fence, they will not try to cross it, even if the electricity has been turned off. Even though the man is "getting better" in his behavior, the victim does not feel any better. The effects of the abuse are very long lasting.

From the DV survivor group: the women felt that the men were saying what they thought their partner wanted to hear: i.e., paraphrasing what the BIP counselor told them to say or what the BIP counselor said the victim would want to hear. Many women felt that the words that the batterer now used were "canned responses" and "not from the heart." No longer genuine.

One survivor said, "Don't believe the batterer!"