

## Tri County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Attendance: Chris Huffine (Allies in Change Counseling Center), Regina Rosann (ARMS), Johnnie Burt (ARMS), Wendy Viola (Portland State University), Ashley Boal (PSU), Linda Castaneda (Manley Interventions), Guruseva Mason (Choices), Amanda Briley (Bridges to Safety), Susanne Evans (Bridges to Safety), Ryan Alonzo (Choices), Justin Donovan (Allies/Pacific University student), Phil Broyles (Teras Intervention and Counseling), Aaron Potratz (Cedar Counseling Center), Jacquie Pancoast (Change Point), Jennifer Warren (Seeds of Change Counseling, LLC), Annie Neal (Multnomah County DV Coordinator), Emmy Ritter (Raphael House), Laura Ritchie (Dept. of Community Justice—DV unit), Samantha Naliboff (VOA Home Free)

Minutes by Wendy Viola, edited by Chris Huffine

### Meeting Topic Discussion: Completion Requirements

This topic was partly inspired by the most recent standards proposal that would leave it to providers to determine when a group member is completed. That raises the question of how to determine when someone has met the minimum completion requirements? What are reasonable completion requirements? What does that even mean?

There's a fear that setting a new minimum number of sessions in the standards will be interpreted as a new maximum.

Gondolf's discharge criteria may be a useful guide or jumping off point (from *Issues in Family Violence*, fall 2002) in determining minimum completion requirements.

Most providers avoid the word "graduate" or distributing certificates so as not to imply that participants are ever "fixed." Staying abuse free is similar to avoiding substances, in that it's a lifelong struggle. In communicating both with participants, judges, and partners, most providers are clear that men can never be considered to be completely done with DV.

There are some programs that solely use a set number of sessions (e.g., 48 + 3) to determine when men have met completion requirements. This is also true in programs where this may not be the explicit requirement, but the group facilitators tend to model and talk about the minimum number of sessions in the group, and their participants tend to complete exactly that number of sessions. Others talk about "minimum completion requirements" instead, and men in those groups tend to stay longer, and avoid counting weeks, which changes the culture of the group so that incoming men also avoid thinking about their participation in terms of the number of sessions.

Are we, as providers, doing a good job of informing participants of program expectations and their progress, so that they're aware of whether or not they're setting themselves up to be done around the minimum number of weeks? Some providers stress that men have to be responsible

for keeping track of their own benchmarks. Sometimes men's completion of requirements other than attendance may not become visible until week 47 or 48, at which point programs may realize that they can't discharge a participant, so it's very important to stay vigilant about progress. Some alternatives to talking about the number of sessions completed are:

- Focusing on developing and achieving competencies
- Preface that the 48 + 3 does not guarantee that participants will be done in 48 + 3 sessions. It's important to stress that these are minimums, and programs have other benchmarks as well. It makes a difference to offer these explanations on the front end of program participation.
- Conducting half-term check-in's so participants have a sense of how they're moving along.
- One approach might be putting it on the participant to explain to their judges that they haven't been making good progress.

How do we determine when we're keeping a participant for too long? One provider doesn't want to hold people in the program indefinitely if they don't foresee them changing, but they do provide discharge summaries explaining their progress, or lack thereof, so others can decide on next steps for them. We also have to be aware of the financial burden that programs place not only on perpetrators, but on their partners and children. If we can't say why it would make sense to hold a man in a program for an extended amount of time, it doesn't necessarily make sense to keep him there. There needs to be trust between BIPs and referral sources, so courts understand that a program may hold a man for years because the man is only slowly changing, not for the program's own financial gain.

Men have different levels of academic-related competence, which makes it difficult to determine how much effort they're putting into their programs. It's important that men with less formal education are not punished for limited reading or writing capabilities.

One thing that can help accelerate resistant men's change process is a good working relationship with probation. By working closely with probation, participants who aren't complying with program requirements can be sanctioned with progressively more severe sanctions (e.g., highway clean-up, two days in jail, etc.) that may help motivate them to be more compliant.

It's very important to provide complete and detailed discharge summaries so referral sources know if men are being released from the program because they've met minimum completion requirements, because of compliance issues, or because the program doesn't believe that any more time will help them make any further progress. The discharge summaries must be transparent about the reasons for discharging men from the program.

One source of occasional tension between programs and courts is over what behavior needs to be stopped before an abusive man has considered to be changed. For example, the primary behavior that will get men arrested (i.e., physical abuse) can be stopped relatively quickly, but

the more subtle forms of emotional abuse and controlling behavior (many of which are not illegal and may not be considered to be community safety issues) can take well over a year to change. Providers would really prefer that they address these more subtle forms of abuse, but that's asking more than some probation officers would like to be responsible for.

The dilemma can be how much to use the leverage of probation to get men to work on and change these more subtle forms of abusive behavior. One level of completion is the bare minimum to get off probation (doing homework, achieving cognition of central issues) but men may still be controlling in the home. On the other hand, it might take years to get an abusive man to stop all of his more subtle forms of emotional abuse and control, even though his risk for committing further crimes has been low for a long time. In that case, it may not be appropriate to hold probation over their heads to keep them in group. The gold standard for completion is that the men are consistently respectful, and partners feel that the men have substantially changed and that they feel safer. It may not be reasonable to hold court-mandated men to this gold standard. Discharge summaries can include suggestions to referral sources for men to continue participation because providers suspect that they're still engaging in controlling behaviors. Pushing for aftercare is one option. Additionally, probation is very rarely done with perpetrators once they have completed the program-- most of the time, perpetrators will just be moved to a lower-risk classification.

Some men report not feeling stable in the changes that they've made, or still being afraid of getting trouble for their behavior if they begin a new relationship, so we need support in the wider community for men to stay on track. Free aftercare is one option. If probation asks for reports on aftercare, however, then programs have to charge. But if probation will just call in and ask if a man is attending, then the man can keep participating for free. If men show up for aftercare after a very long absence, it's usually because there has been another incident, and then most of the time, they need to be back in the program, not just coming for monthly follow-ups, in which case they ought to be charged.

Why would men stay in the program for a longer amount of time? Some possibilities might include: the providers are trying to earn more money by making him stay, the provider is in a power struggle with the man, the man has other challenges that delay his progress (cognitive, financial challenges), the man is trying to do more thorough, in-depth work, the man has plateaued and the program hasn't realized it yet.

A key completion aspiration is that abusive men have shifted from being externally motivated (e.g., to comply with probation) to internally motivated (e.g., that they want to be non-abusive) so that they internalize what they're learning, recognize when and where they still have work to do, and recognize when they are not ready to be done with the program. Abusive men who are internally motivated are more likely to stay non-abusive whereas externally motivated men become more likely to be abusive once the external motivator is gone (e.g., they get off of probation).

There's a relatively small group of men who are doing exactly what they should be doing in terms of homework, attendance, etc., but are still expressing attitudes and beliefs that are not okay. They remain stuck in this perspective even after an extended stay, repeated confrontation, intervention, etc. Many of them have personality disorders, and most of the time punishment does not work and they tend to drag the group down. They tend to be more candid and honest about their lack of change and don't try to fake progress. This is a group that's considered "time served," who are unlikely to get better as a result of BIPs in general, regardless of sanctions. These men make it explicit that they have not changed and are never going to do so. These men usually become apparent around 9 months, and it's really no help for them, their providers, or the other men in their group to keep them in the group. Referral sources don't even want them to be there for a year if they're not going to change, either. It might be best for probation to continue to keep an eye on this group, or to issue "conditional discharges" and be explicit about their lack of progress in their discharge summaries. For this sub-group it might be especially important to contact their current partner to share the belief that he is unlikely to make any further changes.

For men who do not appear to be changing, would providers ever contact these men's victims to alert them that they're not changing? Providers assume that no victims are safe, that all of the perpetrators are violent, and we'd like to warn all of the victims. To what extent providers have contact with victims partly depends on the particular provider's victim contact policies, and partly on to what extent the victim or partner is initiating contact with the provider. Partner contact continues to be a complicated and controversial issue with a diversity of opinion on to what extent providers should be contacting, sharing information, or soliciting information with partners.

The minimum requirements can certainly be faked. Men can talk the talk and turn in homework, while providers can still be very skeptical of what changes they're actually making. Similarly, some men may appear to not be doing well but are actually resonating with the program (e.g., men who are less verbal in group or slow to complete homework assignments). Validated tools are also problematic for determining progress, because as men become more self-aware, they self-report more violence, which makes them look worse. The real question is whether the men have the knowledge and skills to remain violence free, whether or not they are actually doing so, because no one can say with confidence whether or not men are remaining abuse-free. What we can say with confidence is whether men have met completion requirements, whether we believe that they understand concepts and have the skills to apply them. What we cannot say with any confidence is whether the men are actually being non-abusive. Some programs are shifting towards applying and practicing concepts outside of group, and role playing in group to try to assess men's progress. One test is explicitly asking men how they would apply skills and concepts.

Men have to be talking and disclosing, which means that they need to have safe- space for disclosures. If their requirements keep being extended the more abusive behavior that they report, then they're not going to disclose as much.

