

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Providers Network Meeting Minutes November 4, 2003

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Minutes edited by: Chris Huffine

Members Present: Chris Huffine (Men's Resource Center), Paula Manley (Manley Interventions), Amy Horwell, Gail Bills (Safety Matters), Elsie Garland (Multnomah County DCJ GRIT), Mai Kayanuma (Men's Resource Center), Tim Logan (Batterer Intervention Trainee), Gino Galvez (Portland State University), Matt Johnston (Portland State University), Dean Camarda (ARMS/Mankind), Courtenay Silvergleid (Portland State University), Marc Hess (Multnomah County), Gloria Brooks (PSU Community Justice), Lianne Dyche (MCDJC, Family Services Unit), Marjan Baradar

Topic for Today: Power and control issues among providers: How do we remain respectful when working with abusive men?

Discussion began with a brief review of meeting minute notes from a previous Tri-County Meeting on 4/24/2001 that focused on a similar topic: Addressing our own power and control issues. Please contact Chris Huffine at chuffine@pacifier.com if you would like a copy of those minutes.

One member set the stage for our conversation by offering that parallel process is a clinical term that refers to a dynamic that may occur between therapists and the abusive men they work with. It is important for providers to reflect on and take responsibility for how they treat themselves, their colleagues, families, etc.

Another member offered that Alan Jenkins, in his book Invitations to Responsibility uses the idea of colonization to describe the process of trying to get the men in our programs to get our beliefs/values. He goes on to say that colonization isn't "true" change. It is changed under tyranny. When the colonizer (the provider) goes away, the "change" usually goes away too.

One member recounted a story of how s/he was able to get through to a highly defensive man in the group using "all the wrong" things. Sometimes you don't know what is going to work. Sometimes you have to work outside of the box. Of course, no matter what happens in the group, it is critical to remember that the danger isn't to you as the therapist, but to victims outside of the group. If you use coercive tactics with the men in your group, there is a good chance that they will turn around and take their frustration out on their partners, not on you.

One member recounted how s/he used a passive aggressive statement during group and then came back the next week and did a journal out loud, sharing her/his feelings, thoughts, etc. so that group members wouldn't think that her/his behavior was an appropriate way to handle his/

her frustration.

Another member offered that a key piece of what can lead people to be abusive and controlling is whether they are objectifying those around us, rather than seeing them as people. This can easily happen to providers. We can get caught up in the ideas/concepts, and forget about the personal. It is important that providers remember that these aren't just batterers, these are people. As people, we all just want to be heard. It isn't necessarily that we agree, but that we teach men how to express themselves and how to listen respectfully.

One member pointed out that colonization, violence and using power over techniques to "teach" do show immediate effects of working which is why they are so tempting to use.

One member responded by saying that s/he has to have patience. What patience means is that in the beginning it may mean letting a man tell his story. This work is a process. Men who question, stand up, disagree with what is being presented by the facilitators tend to indicate the potential for genuine change. This provider finds it far more encouraging when a man engages with him/her than when a man just nods his head and says the right thing. A man who just nods with the program is far more likely to fall back into familiar patterns.

Another member pointed out that even though it is critical that as providers we see these men as humans, rather than batterers, this gets increasingly difficult when the man continues to cross the lines. How do you maintain your respect for someone when they cross the lines? How do we balance healthy skepticism and a recognition that he may be coming from a different power orientation with wanting to trust and work with him? If you focus too much on building trust, you can also tip towards collusion and end up getting snowed by these guys, but if you approach with only skepticism, all you really end up with is "colonization".

Another member pointed out that this tension speaks to one of the fundamental tensions in batterer intervention between a criminal justice approach versus a therapeutic approach. Does the fact that 75% of clients in batterer intervention are mandated by the courts make this issue more messy? As a field we have to grapple with whether we are part of a criminal justice response, doling out an educational program as "punishment" or a system intent on trying to help men. Educators sole goal is to impart information. They often don't think of their job as changing men.

The question was then raised as to whether there is a difference when working with voluntary versus mandatory men. One provider acknowledged that s/he makes a special effort to not alienate voluntary clients, whereas with mandatory clients there is the knowledge that there will ideally be "consequences" for not attending.

One provider offered that s/he comes from an agency that uses self-disclosure in order to deal with power and control issues. At this agency, it was perceived as helpful in order for providers/facilitators to recognize their own abusive behaviors, because modeling is so important.

Is there room for the opinions and thoughts of others? Is there tolerance for that difference? We want men to be honest and genuine about what they believe. We can discuss it. In reality, men will either drop out, shift attitudes or just not shift at all and therefore never complete.

Suggestions for providers when trying to confront their own power and control issues:

- 1) One member offered that it is helpful to adjust expectations for the men. As providers, we can not ultimately control what they are going to go with what we offer. We can only dispense the information. It can be more tempting to use power over techniques and manipulate if we have higher expectations.
- 2) Controlling behaviors tend to elicit controlling behavior. One provider suggested that since his program doesn't "punish" men, men tend to be more responsive. Providers who are more controlling with men, tend to find men are more controlling with them.
- 3) Utilize co-facilitation. Especially when you have co-ed co-facilitation, scrutinize yourself, are you modeling egalitarian relationships?
- 4) Read and take to heart Patrician Evans' (1992), "The Verbally Abusive Relationship" in order to understand the difference between power over and personal power orientations.
- 5) It is important to remember that we can't change people, only they can change themselves. We can only offer different skills, suggestions for how to be different in their lives.

In conclusion, one member commented that in the Oregonian, it was reported that a new "Johns" school has been opened. Apparently, the problem with the old program was that they were using techniques, such as a heavily politicized education and yelling with the men. The courts threw out the old program because of their abuse of power and control tactics. Joe Parker is currently leading the new program and was quoted as saying that he is offering a more purely educational curriculum more narrowly focused on the specific behaviors they are there for, presented in a more respectful manner.