Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes October 11, **2016**

Present: Matt Johnston (Domestic Violence Safe Dialogue), Rebecca O'Shea (Pathfinders), Alison Dunfee (Pathfinders), Linda Castaneda (Castaneda Counseling), Sarah Van Dyke (Clackamas County DV Systems Coordinator), Shannon Barkley (Clackamas County Probation and Parole), Lauren Mullins (Lifeworks NW),Malea Miller (YWCA), Tammie Jones (Multnomah County Court), Kate Sackett (Portland State University), Jacquie Pancoast (Eastside Concern), Michael Davis (Eastside Concern), Amy Simpson (Eastside Concern), Chris Huffine (Allies in Change)

Minutes by Kate Sackett, edited by Chris Huffine

Discussion Topic: Shifting our focus away from physical abuse to other forms of abuse

Statistically, in the past 25 years rates of domestic violence in the U.S. have declined by nearly two thirds! Much of that decline happened in the second half of the 90's. These stats are drawn from annual reviews of crime victimization completed by the Bureau of Justice. There are a couple reasons, at least, for this decline. One is that efforts around the U.S. have made a difference in reducing the rates of DV—the decline coincides with significant increases in funding to help stop DV (e.g., VAWA), increased public awareness and attention due to the OJ Simpson murder trial, and various other changes in how communities respond to DV. A second explanation for this, though, is that abusive partners have gotten the message that it is not okay to be physically abusive or they might get arrested. As a result, it has likely led to a growing number of abusive partners no longer giving themselves permission to be physically abusive even as they continue or escalate their other forms of (legal) abuse.

What does this mean for how we address this in our groups?

Almost all the men in groups learn that domestic violence is more than just physical abuse. The message from society focuses on physical abuse, but walking through the checklist and doing education on what abuse is can shift that perception.

Verbal and emotional abuse (gaslighting, etc.) often have stronger emotional reactions from survivors, noted by attendees at the meeting who work primarily with survivors. An estimated 90% of survivors that one provider has worked with say the emotional and verbal abuse is worse: "The physical abuse made me hate him, the emotional abuse made me hate myself." Abused partners in therapy sessions often spend time trying to understand the *intention* of the partner's abuse (e.g., "why did he do this," "what did that mean").

The active ingredient in physical abuse can be considered the emotional abuse - the *meaning* of the physical assault is what causes the damage (think of an accidental bump versus intentional shove - physical result is the same but the context is different). It is not the actual physical injury but its context and meaning that constitutes abuse.

We can apply this in groups by seeing that focusing on behavior itself is not as helpful as focusing on the mindset and intent behind it: how do the guys think, what are the common traits there. This is what survivors and offenders can all benefit from.

One of the signs of the mindset (of DV in the 21st century) relates to a critical moment not when the abuse is done, but in the moments that follow abuse. Rationalizing, denying, blaming, minimizing is what "sets" the trauma. People can make mistakes but those who do not have patterns of abuse are quick to apologize, make adjustments, and make changes. Survivors thus have a good reason to focus on what happened after he did it (the physical abuse) and so focusing on the denying, minimizing, blaming is very helpful. Spiritual scripture can also be used to justify, continue that pattern of trauma.

Changing the police system to recognize that behaviors are just a symptom of the belief system is also important. While the belief system is in place, anything can be used to abuse and control (abusers are very creative in doing that). As they truly make a shift in their belief system, it ripples through and changes all of their behaviors even without conscious intent to do so. That is the key work, to shift beliefs.

Often men enter groups angry and in denial of any physical abuse. Once they start seeing the emotional, verbal psychological abuse *as* abuse, there is a huge change. That's when you can see them start to work the program, take responsibility, and their defenses go down. They can relate to having done that a lot of times in ways they might not relate to physical abuse, extreme abuse.

The Duluth curriculum vignettes and control log can be very effective in working on this. Groups have a lot of different kinds of learners (audio, visual, kinetic) and the vignettes and control log help men experience internally what verbal and emotional abuse is about. They start off by judging the old films, but they really show and help the men feel emotional stuff that you can't get to with just concepts or diagrams on the board. Showing the videos even at the beginning (e.g., in "School doesn't make you smart" there is no yelling, no physical abuse) show in a beginning group called Defining Violence (Stage 1 class) ways to try to break through the denial and precontemplation stages. In Stage 2, you can show other videos like one about specific abuse like using scripture. This opens guys' eyes to see how other things can be used for abuse. Then they can do a control log on a behavior of their own that was not their arrest event, which often ends up focusing on emotional and verbal abuse – this can instead focus on the beliefs, intents, denial, minimization that goes along in that and not just on the behavior itself. The process can help men get into and recognize their own emotional and verbal abuse.

"Working with" compared to "working against" is demonstrated nicely in that first video ("School doesn't make you smart"), and also how talking about behavior alone does not cover everything that is abuse.

Also, lots of sexual abuse that guys do is not covered by the definition of physical abuse, and this also does not get enough attention. We need to also address appropriate ways to engage with a partner sexually and what healthy sexuality looks like in a relationship.

A meeting attendee posed a question regarding what is effective in addressing financial abuse? First, you as a provider have to talk about it. This is a good example of what gets ignored. This type of behavior was not listed as abuse at first at the Men's Resource Center, but when providers heard from partners that it was happening it became listed as a form of abuse and once it was, levels of disclosure increased. You need to discuss this with the men because they have such narrow, legalistic definitions of abuse, so either intentionally or through ignorance they miss a lot of the ways that they have been abusive.

It is also important to address their beliefs about money and their role in money (e.g., sense of entitlement in being a provider) - these can justify financial abuse and control. Taking away their control of the money can also help. "Benign" control is a way that men see this behavior as for their partner's own good (e.g., "I'm helping her out," "I'm helping us out") and they don't attach negative meaning to the behavior at first.

Our social conversation is also very limited about what abuse is (e.g., what is shared in the media) so that is often where men are coming into groups. Some providers hear examples of this like "I didn't stop her from working, but no we didn't have another car" or "She controlled the money" but he was constantly berating her for her decisions.

This is a micro-example of privilege. Men often have financial privilege within their families, so they may not understand how far money does or does not go. A whole realm of abusive behaviors are enabled by their (men) always having money on hand, while she might be responsible for the financial welfare of the entire house and the children. This is not true for all men in the programs but it is for many of them. Some providers see examples of men who see their partner as spending "way too much money," and these men do not have a realistic sense of how far money actually goes.

Not having access to finances creates an unsafe situation for people who experience IPV and creates a lot of barriers to how they can protect themselves. Financial education can be very needed for survivors, as the patriarchal influence of society can prevent women from being taught about money early on. Financial abuse can be very covert and very planned (e.g., bringing receipts back from grocery shopping, always need to account for every penny). Privilege and power makes it easy to not think about this - men may not have ever had to think about this.

Egotism and not taking the perspective of their partner is another way that some men may financially abuse their partner. He might assume that his financial values are The Values (shared by everyone in the house), which is very controlling and dismissive. If she doesn't shop according to what he thinks is important, then she's done it wrong. There's a right way (his way) and a wrong way. In this case the partner's beliefs are not considered, made invisible, and/or

never included in decisions about all aspects of life. None of these hurtful behaviors are illegal or would signal to her that she needs help or that she needs to go or could benefit from a shelter.

Providers can ask men in groups “In your current relationships, what agreements do you have - have you discussed finances, what are you assuming, what are your beliefs around that?” or “When you’re not fighting over money but you have a problem, how do you come together to solve it?” or “What is going on when you minimize, deny, blame in that situation? How does that impact your partner?” You can also re-frame concepts like “an allowance” to something like “budgeting” - shifting to healthy agreements that both partners are discussing. This transforms the conversation from “why do you need that, I’ll always be here, I’ll control everything so you don’t need to do anything” to “what if something happens? How can you avoid these 'arguments' over money?” One attendee knows of an example where the abuser set up a family trust so that his control over financial decisions would extend even after he died.

Another broad range of abusive behaviors is violating or refusing to make agreements at all. Explicit and implicit agreements are made through any relationship, but men in the programs do not honor or seek agreement with their partners. This is also where sexual abuse can happen by violating or refusing to make agreements in that aspect of their relationship. This is different from having honest, open conversation and negotiating agreements.

When you make an agreement with someone who you inherently do not respect or believe their role has validity, you are not likely to respect that agreement. This is where feelings of contempt can stem from. They are also not curious about when their partners break agreements, which is seen as a hard boundary that the partner violated. Promoting a weekly check in can also include reviewing agreements, which has to do with caring for the relationship by maintaining agreements and sustaining the relationship on a regular basis.

If you are in a position where “I have to have power and control over” their language can literally show the conflict and push against equality (e.g., if a partner started making more money and they say “she has the power now”). This implies win/lose thinking and is where emotionally abusive tactics can be glimpsed.

Another attendee posed a question about how courts respond to this, based on an example of a lawyer putting out a restraining order against a soon-to-be ex-husband who is attempting to make financial decisions that are not in the interest of the partner. There is a barrier here because restraining orders are one of the few legal tools people can use to attempt to stop someone else’s behavior, but to get this there has to be physical abuse (or threat of such so that you are in immediate physical danger). This itself is a challenge because most of the behaviors and beliefs are not illegal and the laws do not cover or speak to any of this stuff.

There is such a strong focus on criminogenic needs of offenders, which helps them become more law-abiding but does not cover any of what has been covered in this discussion. Focusing on criminal behaviors and criminality does not do nearly enough.

“Low risk” voluntary men are doing all of these behaviors but virtually no physical abuse, so they are not breaking any laws but they are destroying their families. These men may need little correctional supervision (they are going to follow rules) but they are doing all of these emotional, verbal, mental abusive behaviors.

It can be very frustrating to work with survivors whose abusive current or former partners are no longer being supervised because there is nothing that correctional supervisors can do in those cases any longer. An example was shared where all options had been exhausted and there was no physical abuse, but the abuser is taking the survivor to court because he is determined to get visitation at her home and she is terrified of this. His attorney fought for it and the judge said they were not comfortable with it at this time. The judge took a break and said “you guys figure this out” when the guy threw a hissy fit in court. The two lawyers worked out that a different location would be set up for this and the guy then berated his lawyer for not getting it at her house. Since then he has skipped mediation, she has exhausted all resources, he continues to text her that she’s such a bad mom, he gets her child involved, he’s continuing to terrorize her, and from the outside it looks like the survivor is a train wreck because she is so exhausted and terrified and so triggered. There is barely anything the system can do to help her even though she is in therapy, because he has constant access to her. He’s recruited a friend to drive by her house so she is being stalked but can’t prove it. And this man completed probation, completed a program with a successful evaluation but he had no intention of changing. This is the scariest aspect that even when physical abuse stops, a subsection of men go through the programs and probation and have an easy time following the rules but there is nothing probation can do. You can’t violate him on probation for giving his daughter a pet spider when the mom is deathly afraid of spiders. They tried to keep him on probation and couldn’t.

This is a perfect example of how the DV community here and nationwide needs to respond to this terrorism and manipulation. This is an example of why we need to expand on the protection that we already have, for example by modifying restraining orders to expand beyond physical threats. We need to have a voice politically to raise the bar so that this individual and others get the help they need. Continuing to empower victims with resources (financial, legal, community, intellectual) also makes it easier to protect them and continue to change the ways of thinking on the perpetrator's part.

The level of change that is attempted in batterer intervention programs, changing those kinds of behaviors, takes probably at least two to three years because it is such a fundamental change. Providers need to talk to the partner to see if this is genuine change, trust it when she feels different and it stays. Some men can do this in as short as a year but more often it takes three to five years - and some will never change.

A lot of men who are committed to making that change want support afterward to help them continue that change. This issue goes back to funding. But even hearing that, the men do not show up when longer-term support is offered. This also goes back to infrastructure - the key to

continuing care is to not stop coming. They need to be able to afford to do this and it needs to be an ongoing commitment.

This isn't simply behavior change, it's a lifestyle change: changing the way they think about the world, not just avoiding certain behaviors. This involves shifting their values. They need continuing education and the opportunity to do that every week. This is not something that programs can afford and sustain for all men in their programs. If it falls off their radar, they will stop coming back. If we could have free groups in good programs, many men would keep coming year after year. At East Side Concern, alumni groups give men a chance to give back in the program by going to Stage 1 groups and taking pride in being an alum.

One attendee posed a question about why the aftercare requirement was dropped in Oregon's standards. This used to be a requirement of 3 months of groups, attending at least once a month. The change in the standards does not mean it is prohibited by the standards, it just is not currently required.

A weekly commitment is needed to get them to come even once a month (though schedules and finances may prevent it). After being mandated to a program, some men might also feel like it's more important to be off the hook and not have anyone tell them what to do in any way, so even making it free might not be enough of an enticement.

The key thing is to make it regular. This could be by offering classes for free, or it could be in other ways to encourage them to commit to attending regularly. Some even formerly mandated men may choose to stay voluntarily. This can be seen in recovering substance abusers, for example. Men going out into the community and being called on their behavior out in the community can also help sustain changes - men need to be engaged in helping other men.

You can ask the men in groups about role models and integrity and put that up on the board and ask them to see themselves in one light knowing they have done other things in the past to help them see the discrepancy and ask them how to support that change. You need to sell the week-to-week group attendance and ongoing commitment. We also need the bigger picture support for the emotional abuse and the damage that it does. This relates to an example of a genocide pyramid, where little behaviors are the foundation for things much worse. Men might never get to the top of the pyramid but they are terrorizing a partner day in and day out. Help them see how this equates to domestic violence and fatalities.

Again we need to get away from focusing on abusive behaviors as the problem. We've all done some of these behaviors in moments (of control, of minimizing, etc.), but we need to keep bringing it back to the underlying belief system. Controlling behavior is *intended* to dominate, create fear and control. The pyramid needs to be defined not by acts but by how they reflect abusive ways of thinking.

A lot of the systems that these men work with (e.g., judicial, probation, DHS) all approach treatment as a checkbox. This is not helping in how they present this to people. A question was

posed by an attendee regarding what kind of training is happening with judges and defense attorneys. These people play an important role but they may not be aware of that role. This relates to the social part of this work. The substance abuse field is a nice model of moving beyond criminalization so that there is awareness in schools, free rides on holidays, and other responses in the community. We are still struggling with moving beyond short-term anger management or locking abusers up and still fighting to legitimize the real change work that batterer intervention is doing. This is difficult with judges because they believe this is a matter of individual criminal behavior and do not understand how much more is behind the one recognized incident of abusive behavior (e.g., “this is a one-time thing, misdemeanor, with no prior history”)

The substance abuse model shifted the perception from an individual problem to see its huge ripple effects. Domestic violence is not about two individual people, it also has ripple effects. The criminal justice system is how people are currently recognized for domestic violence and the response needs to help challenge the beliefs and underlying values that are learned from culture.