

Minutes from Tri-County Batterer Intervention Network Meeting--September 3, 2002

Members Present – Diane Rivera (CODA), Bobbie Mekvold (Choices), Christine Crowe (Choices), Sarah Isaman (PSU Intern), Marc Hess (Multnomah County Adult Community Justice), Chris Huffine (Men's Resource Center), Courtenay Silvergleid (Portland State University), and Songcha Bowman (MCPC)

Minutes taken by: Courtenay Silvergleid

Topic for today: What should our (BI providers) relationship be with victims?

One member suggested starting the discussion with what would be the ideal relationship. This person suggested that the ideal is advocates providing separate services for partners/victims who coordinate with batterer intervention providers at the request/desire of the victims.

Another member volunteered that their program has actually hired an advocate who works out of a domestic violence shelter, running groups for the women of the men in their program. The domestic violence advocate shares information with the BI provider when she decides it might be beneficial for safety.

A third program sends out a letter to partners when men begin the program suggesting that they can contact the program if they have any questions. This program is in the process of revising the letter based on feedback from the partners suggesting they would like more specific information about how and when they can contact the program, as well as how they can learn more about the program, etc.

It may be difficult to make global statements about whether it is appropriate to contact partners/victims. Some women may desire and feel more supported with greater levels of contact from the BI provider and some may feel safer with no contact. If a partner/victim wants contact, then it is important to clearly discuss confidentiality– find out exactly what they want shared and be very clear about the laws around disclosure if subpoenaed.

The members present seemed to feel as though partner/victim contact is not always a bad idea or always a good idea. Like many things, it may come back to the quality of the person delivering the service. It is however critical to “do no harm” – for example, it is important to consider with this type of conversation that false hope can be generated.

So what should providers use as a guideline? The informed victim's desire, the partner who knows what her options for information and resources are. She should determine when, if and how contact should occur.

Some reasons to have partner/victim contact:

- ❑ It is important for providers to listen to victims when they want us to listen to them. Some victims really want their abuser's counselor/provider to hear their story.

- ❓ To debrief/clarify what men might be saying about the program. In other words, providers can help to minimize the degree to which batterers can use the program to abuse their partners by debunking myths and explaining program components. Sometimes when