

## Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes June 12, 2018

Present: Chris Huffine (Allies in Change); Peggy Kid (CASA); Shannon Barkley (Clackamas County Parole and Probation- Victim Services); Sarah Van Dyke (CYF); Regina Holmes (ARMS); Tim Logan (Sovalti); Matt Johnston (Domestic Violence Safe Dialogue); Jacqui Pancoast (Eastside Concern), Jason Kyler-Yano (Portland State University)

Minutes by Jason Kyler-Yano, edited by Chris Huffine

### Discussion Topic: Effective uses of confrontation and working with resistant/unmotivated group members

Most of the guys participating in BIPs are pretty resistant to change and “getting better.” However, mental health workers are not necessarily trained in forensics and confrontation and instead go in with assumption that their clients want to get better. The topic of today’s discussion is about working with resistant and/or unmotivated group members and particularly effective uses of confrontation. Aspects of using confrontation with resistant/unmotivated group members that were discussed included the use of arrest reports, the importance of effective and appropriate timing of confrontation, the connection between confrontation and accountability, the role of the group in confrontation, and confrontation and the change process.

Having clients read their arrest reports in group has been used by some as a way to increase accountability by group members. Both those who use this confrontation method and those who don’t had some discomfort with having men read their arrest reports in group. Arrest reports themselves were critiqued as incomplete and as “a low bar” for accounting for abuse, because it’s only a record of illegal violence and specifically illegal violence that was reported and caught. What is missing is the higher bar of all the other forms of abuse and control that are not of the purview of police. An arrest report could be used by a group member to minimize the whole body of abuse to the singular incident captured in the report. In terms of the effect of this confrontation tactic on men’s engagement in group, it was noted that forcing them to admit to all of the contents in the report can raise their defensiveness and harm the greater goal of longer term change in their beliefs and behaviors around abuse. Some used arrest reports for their own reference to “fact check” what participants have revealed about their abusive behaviors during their intake interview. When using arrest records in group, some suggested doing so only after participants have progressed to a certain point in the program (e.g., 14 sessions or the second stage of program).

The timing and manner of confrontation was largely supported as important. In general, it was largely agreed upon that confronting participants on everything right away is not a good use of the all of the tools in the BIP toolbox and can do more harm than benefit. However, when clients are disrespectful of staff and/or are disrupting group, heavy confrontation to challenge these behaviors up front can help to establish expectations. Regardless of when confrontation occurs, it is important to do so in a respectful way that does not embarrass, humiliate, or escalate the client.

An important reason for this is to maintain minimization of risk to partners, since confrontation that escalates clients have been found in some cases to associate with abusive behaviors with their partners. Confrontation should also not necessarily lead to kicking clients out of program early on. Clients have been found to be heavily resistant in early sessions of their program only to finally turn a corner much later on. This positive change would not happen if resistance to change and to confrontation led to their ousting early on.

The group setting was identified as an important and useful tool in the confrontation of resistant/unmotivated clients. The group is seen as an integral part of norms and culture setting for new clients. Letting them “marinate” in group and open up their ears and minds can help them soften their stance and improve their progress and reduce resistance, defensiveness, and shame in group. Trust in the group and in the facilitator is an important precursor to effective confrontation. Smaller breakout groups with sharing of experience and similarities can be useful in helping clients feel a sense of safety to share in larger group and reduce resistance based in shame and fear of judgement.

When confrontation is necessary for a client, group members who are more advanced in group and have internalized the norms and values of group can act as the confronters in a more lateral and relatable manner than the top down structure of a facilitator’s confrontations. For example, one program has the norm that the group stays in session as late as the last man who arrives (without calling in advance). So if group lasts 90 minutes and starts at 7pm, if the last man arrives at 7:30, then group doesn’t end until 90 minutes after 7:30. In this way, when someone does come late without calling, clients’ accountability to the other group members (and not necessarily the facilitator) keeps the accountable to being on time. An additional function of the group in confrontation is that confrontation of one client in group is in effect an indirect confrontation of all the other men in group for the issue being addressed.

Our discussion about confrontation took a turn to examine the question of how the men in our groups can change, particularly those who are resistant to change and who require confrontation at some level of the system. Some of the men in the system go through the steps, say what they are supposed to say, complete a BIP, check all of the criminal justice rehabilitation boxes and continue tormenting their partners with non-criminal abuse. This perspective led some in the group to be reminded of the importance of understanding that changing abusive belief systems cannot usually change in a year or less, and that supervision by the greater system, and voluntary engagement by abusive men, and community engagement and intervention in IPV is so important.

Briefly we discussed the possibility that some men in group might be resistant and/or unmotivated because of cooccurring conditions such as substance abuse, unaddressed trauma, learning issues, and personality disorders that make active participation in group and in change very difficult. This will be discussed in greater detail at next month’s meeting!