



ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A BARRIER TO WORK

**BUILDING COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
SERVICE PROVIDERS AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AGENCIES**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to a report by the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, each year in the U.S. an estimated 1.5 million women are physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner and approximately 500,000 women are stalked by an intimate partner.¹ Domestic violence not only acts as a barrier to education, training, and employment but also can escalate when survivors seek or participate in such activities. In order to maintain control over their partners, abusers also may interfere with efforts of women on welfare to meet program requirements and become self-sufficient. Studies on the prevalence of domestic violence estimate 22% of women in the general population have been abused as adults; however the figure is as high as 60% for women receiving welfare, with up to 30% of this group having been abused within the past year.² Furthermore, poverty and lack of adequate income often make it even more difficult for domestic violence survivors to escape from abuse.

At the national and state levels, domestic violence survivors and their advocates increasingly are focusing on issues of poverty and economic self-sufficiency. Building economic security for battered women was the topic of the October 2002 national meeting of state coalitions against domestic violence convened by the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence.³ However, most employment services agencies that assist women with finding and retaining employment have limited capacity to address issues of domestic violence, and cannot readily attain it. With so many low-income women being mandated to participate in job readiness and placement programs, collaboration between job programs and domestic violence services agencies presents an outstanding opportunity not only to increase awareness about the ways that domestic violence acts as a barrier to employment and self-sufficiency but also to expand access to domestic violence services.

The Kraft Domestic Violence Services Project began in October 2000 and continued through the end of 2002 at sites in Houston, Chicago, and Seattle. This national demonstration project investigated how domestic violence acts as a barrier to women's training and employment and the interventions that are effective for assisting women remain safe and employed. The Center for

¹ Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, "Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence," National Institute of Justice and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, July 2000. Accessed at <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/181867.pdf>.

² For a discussion of data and findings from a wide range of studies on the prevalence of domestic violence, its forms and effects on the lives of low income women see, "Surviving Violence and Poverty: A Focus on the Link Between Domestic and Sexual Violence, Women's Poverty and Welfare," NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, September 18, 2002, p. 1-2. Accessed at <http://www.nowldef.org/html/issues/wel/Surviving.pdf>.

³ For further discussion of this topic, see the following National Resource Center on Domestic Violence reports: Jill Davies, "Policy Blueprint on Domestic Violence and Poverty," March 2002; Katie M. Ciorba VonDeLinde, "How Are Domestic Violence Programs Meeting the Economic Needs of Battered Women in Iowa? An Assessment and Recommendations," March 2002; and Amy Correia and Katie M. Ciorba VonDeLinde, "Integrating Anti-Poverty Work into Domestic Violence Advocacy: Iowa's Experience," October 2002. Accessed at <http://www.vawnet.org/NRCDVPublications/BCSDV/Papers/>.

Impact Research (CIR) undertook the project's research component and provided technical assistance to the participating employment services agencies and domestic violence service providers. From its inception, this project was designed not only to provide direct services and build the capacity of participating agencies, but also to include a research component for documenting and sharing program and participant outcomes. Thus, the purposes of the project were twofold:

- To develop a collaborative model of providing domestic violence services within a job-training environment to expand access to domestic violence services for low-income victims.
- To develop a model for strengthening programs that assist low-income women attain economic self-sufficiency by addressing needs of domestic violence survivors.

This report summarizes the project learnings and best practice recommendations for integrating domestic violence services into employment services agencies. It discusses establishing and maintaining interagency collaborations, training of case managers, conducting screening and referrals, and ongoing delivery of domestic violence services within the employment services setting.

A second project report complements this practitioner's report; its audiences are policy makers and advocates as well as practitioners.⁴ It is intended to inform public policy debates about the need and benefits of offering domestic violence education and services onsite at employment services agencies. The policy report presents data that documents the challenges, service needs, and outcomes of low-income domestic violence survivors as they struggle to keep themselves and their children safe, become and remain employed, and attain self-sufficiency.

During the two-year period of services:

- 1,845 people attended domestic violence educational presentations at the employment services agencies.
- 243 women completed the initial interview and received counseling services.
- 125 women completed the second interview three months after the initial interview.
- 47 women completed the third interview nine months after the initial interview.

IMPACT OF THE COLLABORATION

Both the employment services agencies and the domestic violence service providers saw the project as having expanded and improved their capacity to assist low-income women work towards employment, safety, and self-sufficiency. The largest of the domestic violence service providers among the sites reported that prior to collaborating with the employment services agency, it had limited experience in working with low-income women in the context of employment and job retention. Through the Kraft project, it increased its ability to assist domestic violence victims who have limited work experience and face multiple barriers to employment. The executive director of another domestic violence services agency found that the project

⁴ Both reports are available at <http://www.impactresearch.org/publication/publicationdate.html>.

focused attention on the lack of connection between domestic violence services providers and employment services agencies. In her view, the collaboration enabled her agency to build an important partnership with an employment services agency, thereby increasing the agency's understanding of the needs of low income women.

The employment services agencies uniformly regarded the collaboration as equipping them with badly needed tools for addressing domestic violence as a barrier to employment—a barrier that had been tacitly recognized but typically ignored because of their lack of knowledge and capacity to address it. According to the director of an agency, the collaboration's benefits are marked: "Staff are more confident and better understand the issue of domestic violence. The training has helped them as well as the experience of seeing clients do better when they receive domestic violence services." When commenting on the availability of the domestic violence counselor, she added, "The proximity and immediacy of having the domestic violence counselor onsite are key to the project's success. The case manager doesn't have to worry whether the client will follow through with an offsite referral. The counselor's presence also ensures that adding domestic violence to a case manager's list of concerns hasn't been too much of a burden."

Caseworkers at all of the sites agreed that the accessibility of the domestic violence counselor improves outcomes for clients. One noted, "It's a load off my shoulders to know that the counselor is here and can give clients more intensive services." A caseworker that specializes in retention issues said, "Domestic violence is being addressed better now. Everyone in the agency has a better understanding of the complexity and subtlety of the issue." In talking about how domestic violence was being addressed differently at their agency as a result of the Kraft project, one caseworker said, "There's a big difference. We went from training people for the workplace to a more holistic approach." By orienting their work more to removing barriers to employment, caseworkers have also become more knowledgeable about agencies providing the needed services in their community. This caseworker continued, "The project opened the door for change."

When asked about the project's impact, another case manager replied, "The impact has been significant. It has increased our ability to retain clients with domestic violence problems. It makes people feel our agency is more in tune with their needs and helps us retain contact with them. It impacts how and how effectively we do our work. Seventy to 80 percent of our clients say they are affected by domestic violence—current, past, in their own lives, in parents' lives, etc. This makes it relevant to them to learn about the issue and to have someone to call."

RECOMMENDATIONS ON BEST PRACTICES

Building the Collaboration

- Involve key management and staff from collaborating agencies in discussions about the mission and capacity of agencies, program goals, objectives, and outcomes, and staffing and infrastructure requirements.

- Determine who is responsible for activities and tasks; develop a project protocol that delineates the roles and responsibilities of partners.
- Ensure that appropriate policies are developed and observed at employment services agencies that conform to standards for confidentiality, privacy, and security required by domestic violence services programs. Policies are also required to safeguard the participant's right to access domestic violence services confidentially without informing the case manager.
- Train staff at the employment services agency about domestic violence, the needs of domestic violence victims, and service provision; train domestic violence counselors about the operations and contractual obligations of the employment services agency.
- Establish channels for collaborative decision-making and for efficient and effective communication between partner agencies.

Program Activities

Each of the project sites was responsible for the following set of core activities. Within each of these activity areas, the collaborations developed innovative methods that were suitable for the particular context of the employment services agency and the needs of the clients.

- **Outreach**
Create an agency-wide environment that fosters awareness of domestic violence and disseminates information about services. Maximize internal and external communication about the project, reaching out to the different client bases within the agency, to outside agencies, and to the broader community.
- **Domestic Violence Educational Sessions**
Incorporate domestic violence educational sessions into the curriculum of the agency's job readiness and other training programs. Present domestic violence services as integral to the job readiness program. Provide different points and avenues during the educational sessions that allow opportunities to disclose if they are victims of abuse. Encourage participation and feedback from participants.
- **Screening, Disclosure, and Referrals**
Provide domestic violence information early and often. Ensure that there are multiple channels for contact with the domestic violence counselor. Train caseworkers in screening, disclosure, and referral procedures and increase their knowledge about safety issues. Develop and keep updated a referral guide for resources in the agency's service area.
- **Individual Counseling**
Offer individual sessions with the domestic violence counselor. Address safety issues and other participant-identified concerns first. Evaluate the effects of abuse on training and employment. Explore the Family Violence Option before placing domestic violence survivors in jobs.

- **Support Groups**
Offer separate groups for men and women. Involve group members in process of naming and determining the scope of their group's discussion topics, activities, and special events. Enhance the attractiveness of groups and reduce barriers to involvement in them by providing refreshments and childcare.

- **Follow-up**
Develop a plan with clients for follow-up contact. Coordinate follow-up activities of the caseworker and domestic violence counselor when appropriate. Ensure clients who are working have access to the domestic violence counselor for follow-up contact and counseling.