

## **COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS: MEN, GENDER AND VIOLENCE**

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### **PURPOSE**

The battered women's movement made intimate partner violence a public issue in the 1960s. Since then members of this movement have engaged in a cultural conversation about the oppressiveness of masculinity (Connell, 1995, 2000), and have created institutional responses, spearheaded by the criminal justice system and batterer intervention programs, to re-educate and restrain abusers (Aldarondo & Mederos, 2002). This article will begin with a critical review of these institutional responses, and focuses on measures directed at abusers. The key questions we explore here are: 1) Do these institutional measures maximize safety and empowerment for all battered women? 2) Do they maximize the impact on abusers? 3) What alternatives and expansions of the current criminal justice response make sense? 4) What guiding principles should these new approaches follow? In this article, we also briefly describe five programs that are creating community-based responses to intimate partner violence and are expanding criminal justice approaches. Our companion paper posted on the Building Partnerships Initiative web site (at [www.endabuse.org/bpi](http://www.endabuse.org/bpi)) describes these programs in greater detail.

### **BACKGROUND**

The battered women's movement grew out of the women's liberation movement of the 1970s (Schechter, 1982). Initially, battered women's advocates created safe house networks and shelters for victims of violence, and advocated in state legislatures and criminal justice systems for effective interventions to protect victims of violence. These efforts resulted in the establishment of civil protective orders that direct abusers to stop abusive conduct, to leave a joint residence, to stay away from the victim and her workplace, and to give victims of violence temporary custody of children. Advocates also supported a strong criminal justice response, involving police, prosecutors, the judiciary, and probation departments, to protect victims of violence. They advocated for mandatory arrest policies and proactive prosecution of abusers. At the same time, battered women's advocates agitated for the establishment of educational programs for abusers (Mederos, 1999; Schechter, 1982).

The first batterer intervention programs were established in the late 1970s. These programs provided an urgently needed alternative to mental health approaches that were largely ineffective with abusers. The goals of these programs were 1) to help men stop violent and abusive behavior, and 2) to take into account the safety of adult victims and their children. Early programs, such as Amend, Emerge, and Raven, pioneered group treatment approaches that accomplished these goals. These programs also provided a focal point for pro-feminist social justice activists, many of them men, who were interested in issues of gender justice and masculinity, and who wanted to end intimate partner violence.

### **COORDINATED COMMUNITY RESPONSE INITIATIVES**

Initially, the criminal justice response to domestic violence heightened risk for many battered women because it was chaotic and uncoordinated (Pence, 1999). For example, when effective prosecution of abusers was followed by trivial sentences and ineffective monitoring during

probation, the overall message for abusers was that their domestic assaults were not taken seriously. Eventually, this problem led to the creation of collaborations among the criminal justice system, battered women's services, batterer intervention programs, and other agencies (Pence, 1999). These collaborations are usually called coordinated community response initiatives (CCRIs). The goals of CCRIs are to maximize safety for battered women, to hold abusers accountable, and to compel abusers to change their behavior or face imprisonment.

These initiatives typically include:

- Implementation of pro-arrest policies by the police;
- Proactive prosecution that is focused on victim safety;
- Effective judicial oversight of convicted offenders;
- Ongoing monitoring of abusers by probation officers;
- Batterer intervention programs that focus on behavior change;
- Imprisonment for abusers who violate probation or who re-assault or harass victims;
- Ongoing coordination with battered women's services; and
- Oversight of the process by battered women's advocates.

The CCRI is a life-saving innovation. It offers a protective framework for victims of violence and structures effective roles for institutions that previously ignored the plight of battered women. It has often provided the means to apprehend abusers and to compel them to stop their abuse. Current research demonstrates that the CCRI creates circumstances that help (or force) 80-90 percent of abusers to change their behavior and remain non-violent on a long-term basis (Gondolf, 2002).

The CCRI is also essential because it has involved state institutions in the effort to create and maintain a new standard of behavior in relationships. Many men understand that the system is likely to become involved in their lives if they physically abuse their partners. They know that the veil of privacy that used to cloak intimate relationships has changed. Nonetheless, it is also important to acknowledge that basic and coordinated protections for victims of violence are still missing in many locations. Although many towns and cities have implemented some aspects of CCRIs, many others have done little. We support the development of CCRIs as a basic protective framework for battered women. However, we do not believe that CCRIs alone can adequately address intimate partner violence.

### **UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF THE CCRI**

Because they promise a valuable response in situations in which women and children are at risk, CCRIs have become the principal recipients of Violence Against Women Act and similar funding. However, there are unexpected negative consequences to making CCRIs the primary intervention with abusive men.

First, the CCRI serves few women. Most police departments report that the vast majority of women whose partners are arrested for assault do not pursue charges. In addition, the 2000 National Violence Against Women Survey indicates that 75 percent of intimate partner assaults are not reported to the authorities. Why? Battered women's advocates report that many women of color fear or mistrust the criminal justice system and believe it has an oppressive impact on men in their families. Many of these women are aware of the disproportionate levels of

incarceration of men in their communities and of the historically oppressive impact of the criminal justice system on men of color. Likewise, many immigrant women avoid criminal justice system intervention because arrest results in the deportation of men who are undocumented or who have temporary work visas. Many immigrant women also associate law enforcement with the brutality that they suffered at the hands of the police in their countries of origin. Finally, many women want the abuse to stop, but they do not want their partners to go to jail. Yet, the CCRI and measures such as arrest and prosecution are often the only resources directed at abusers. Even a well-functioning and comprehensive CCRI does not provide protective resources that can be accessed by all victims, particularly those who do not wish to prosecute their partners.

In addition, a CCRI reaches very few men. Unless an abuser is arrested for assault or for violating a restraining order, the CCRI will not reach him. A CCRI does not include outreach to abusers or to community members who are at risk of engaging in domestic violence. It does not reach men in community settings such as street corners, barber shops, bars, sports events, or neighborhood organizations. Similarly, there is no educational outreach for other men in the community who could serve as models of non-violent marital and parental roles.

The CCRI relies primarily on standardized batterer intervention programs that ignore other avenues of engagement with men. Although these programs excel at confronting underlying beliefs of male supremacy and can teach participants alternatives to coercive control in relationships, they give minimal attention to class, race, ethnicity, and other life context issues. Yet class, race, ethnicity and other issues can complicate or facilitate the change process for many abusers. The most widely implemented batterer intervention program models, such as EMERGE (Adams & Cayouette, 2002), Duluth (Pence & Paymar, 1990, 1993; Pence, 2002), *Manalive* (Sinclair, 1989, 2002) and Compassion Workshops (Stosny, 1995, 2002), take a color-blind, culturally generic approach that assumes there is a universal pattern of coercive control in relationships. They do not mobilize protective factors in different cultures, factors, for example, that support respectful relationships with women. They also do not acknowledge culture-specific forms of male privilege or different life challenges that men from diverse backgrounds have encountered. For example, these programs do not take into consideration that exposure to racism and violence makes it easier to adopt a rigid defensive/aggressive posture in intimate relations and that such experiences can reinforce existing gender norms that support male supremacy. These programs also cannot speak to different traditions of male identity that can be both risks factors as well as sources of pride and models of respectful relationships. In addition, standardized batterer intervention programs may be successful with mandated program participants, but have had very limited impact on men who are not mandated to attend.

Other factors undermine the positive impact of batterer intervention programs. One such factor is the sizable number of practitioners who adopt a confrontational and self-righteous tone in their programs. For many participants, this reproduces the hierarchical and oppressive relationships that they encounter in their daily lives and that abusers are being asked to stop using with their partners and children. Instead of providing non-violent models for relationships, this confrontational style increases the risk that abusers will adopt a defensive or falsely compliant stand during sessions, and then maintain a defensive or hostile attitude when they return home.

Finally, most men mandated to attend batterer intervention programs through the CCRI are poor, underemployed, or unemployed, and have low levels of educational attainment. The CCRI approach is not intended to address these issues. CCRI miss the opportunity to reach men while they are on probation, to help them attain education and employment goals. Such improvements in education and employment might enhance abusers' stake in conformity, and increase the probability that they will remain violence-free. This omission is aggravated by the fact that abusers pay significant fees to participate in batterer intervention programs. For many indigent and low-income men, a registration fee of \$150 and a six-month minimum weekly fee of \$15 to \$25 are serious burdens. This fee structure is another obstacle to wider involvement in batterer intervention programs. Although understandable from a pragmatic and philosophical perspective, the historic decision not to fund batterer intervention programs at reasonable levels has served to further marginalize these programs.

### **ALTERNATIVES TO THE CCRI**

These unintended impacts of CCRI do not negate the positive impact of a coordinated criminal justice response to intimate partner violence. CCRI remains a life-saving intervention whose absence deprives victims of violence of critical protections. Nevertheless, we believe that these unwanted consequences of the CCRI can be reduced and that a broader approach to abusers is possible without undoing the benefits of the CCRI. It should be possible to create initiatives that:

1. Reach out, through preventative community education and early intervention activities, to abusers, to men who are at risk of becoming abusers, and to men who can act as educators for their peers.
2. Engage men in ways that reflect a deep knowledge of their cultural backgrounds, life challenges, and positive aspects of their traditions of manhood.
3. Engage a wide range of community agencies in educating and reaching out to men about ending intimate partner violence.

### **IN PRACTICE: ENHANCEMENTS AND ALTERNATIVES TO THE CCRI**

The programs in Boston, Atlanta, and Texas that are described below are examples of these approaches. The Boston/Dorchester initiative involves a community outreach program and a culturally based public education campaign. Both are intended to reach men at the very early stages of their involvement with the criminal justice system, as well as men in community settings who can serve as protective and educational resources for peers. All three Atlanta-based projects, Caminar Latino, Tapestri, and Men Stopping Violence, are examples of culturally based batterer intervention programs. In different ways, these programs take into account how life challenges such as oppression, poverty, and exposure to violence can encourage abusive conduct in relationships with women. They structure the change process for men in a way that reflects a deep knowledge of positive aspects of the men's cultural background, aspects that facilitate respectful relationships with women. A social change perspective and a deliberate focus on community outreach are also core themes for all of these programs.

The Men's Nonviolence Project of the Texas Council on Family Violence is a statewide initiative whose focus is on supporting activities such as community organizing, education and networking directed at helping men change. The goal is also social or systemic change and encouraging projects outside of the criminal justice system and the batterer intervention programs that are attached to that system.

### **The Boston experience**

Dorchester, a Boston neighborhood with about 92,000 residents, is home to a racially, ethnically, and socially diverse population. African Americans represent 36 percent of the total population, European Americans 32 percent, Hispanics 12 percent, and Asian and Pacific Islanders 11 percent (Boston Redevelopment Authority, 2002). Dorchester has large pockets of first generation immigrants, including Cape Verdeans, Vietnamese, Haitian, and Dominicans. This neighborhood benefited from the existence of the Dorchester Community Roundtable, a domestic violence multi-institutional outreach project (funded by the federal Centers for Disease Control in 1997) and of the Judicial Oversight Demonstration Project, a domestic violence court that began operating in 2001. Dorchester has a comprehensive CCRI with full engagement of the police, prosecutors, probation officers, battered women's services, health centers, and batterers' intervention programs.

The Dorchester Roundtable and the Judicial Oversight Demonstration Project have provided opportunities to identify gaps and unintended consequences of the CCRI approach. For example, it became clear that people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds seemed to withdraw or become silent when domestic violence incidents and arrests were discussed in public settings. It is obvious that people from different communities are not accustomed to discussing domestic violence or constructively dialoguing with men who batter. More alarmingly, many victims are unwilling to call upon the criminal justice system for help. The vast majority of women whose partners are arrested for assault do not pursue charges because they fear or mistrust this system and believe it has an oppressive impact on men in their families. Immigrant women fear that their partners will be deported. In the second half of the 1990s, the rate of deportation of immigrant men who were arrested for offenses related to domestic violence intensified sharply. Women in Dorchester obtain high numbers of restraining orders, but few men are arrested and few of those arrested are prosecuted. Unless a physically abusive man is arrested, there is little chance that he will be impacted in any manner by the CCRI. These realizations led to a series of new initiatives directed at men.

**The early intervention and outreach program.** The Judicial Oversight Demonstration Project established two community resource specialist positions. These specialists are community members who have extensive background as community educators. They use a non-confrontational model, avoid debate and arguments, discuss domestic violence in a non-blaming way, and use examples of abuse and male privilege that are common for different communities. Above all, they resemble, and speak the same way as the men with whom they work. The early intervention component of their work involves talking to restraining order defendants in the court and providing them with support and information. Their mission is to explain restraining orders in detail and provide referrals to social service and educational agencies (including homeless shelters if the men needed emergency housing after a protective order). The referral component is meant to help men stabilize their living situation and improve their lives. The community

resource specialists also explain in detail protective orders and the consequences for violating them.

The community resource specialists found that many defendants become enraged at their partners in court. Accordingly, the specialists began focusing on de-escalating the men's anger. They listen calmly to men's complaints about their partners, allow them to express their anger, and then say something like: "I know you are mad as hell right now, but I hope you can pull back. It's just going to make it worse for you. I don't think getting back at her will change things. It won't make her come back." This seems to help many men shift away from thoughts of anger and revenge and move toward a calmer and less aggressive stance.

Most significantly, the Community Resource Specialists discovered that only 10 percent of protective order defendants appear for court hearings. Clearly, it was necessary to make an effort to reach out to men who have restraining orders as well as to those who never enter the criminal justice system. The specialists decided to conduct workshops about domestic violence to groups of men at local community agencies (substance abuse treatment programs and residential centers, high school equivalency, English-as-a-second-language, citizenship classes, job training programs, and social service agencies). Through this community outreach, the two specialists (one is Latino and the other African American) communicate with their peers in a very concrete manner about domestic violence. They point out that domestic violence is not just about physical abuse, that it involves emotional and psychological abuse, and that it can involve threats, control of money, having affairs, and so on. They also explain protective orders, a topic that often results in an initially angry response from participants. In the ensuing discussions, they explain these orders in detail and point out that no one can be forced to remain in a relationship: "It may be hard, it may be something a man wants to sweep under the table, but he has to ask himself what he did to make it (the protective order) happen... You cannot have a good relationship if you are hitting her or abusing her. It also hurts your children." One of their group exercises is to ask participants: "Suppose you had a close friend who was physically abusing his wife, and you were going to speak to him, what would you say? How would you approach it?"

**The palm card campaign.** A parallel initiative, funded by the Dorchester Community Roundtable, focuses on community-based prevention and education. The JUST FOR MEN campaign involved community education to African American, Cape Verdean, Haitian, Vietnamese, and Latino men (in their respective languages) through credit card sized palm cards distributed in barber shops, liquor stores, community agencies, churches, sports events, and other local venues. These palm cards address issues such as fatherhood, difficulties in relationships, and access to resources. Future palm cards may address community violence, men's health issues and questions about immigration. The intention is to:

- (a) Choose topics that reflect the challenges and struggles of men in different communities.
- (b) Address these issues in ways that are credible and congruent with the men's life experience and cultural heritage.

- (c) Introduce information about intimate partner violence and about the impact of violence and oppressive behavior on their partners, their children, their community, and themselves. Introduce this information without using the language that is typically used in the criminal justice system or in batterer intervention programs.
- (d) Where appropriate, introduce simple skills—such as de-escalation techniques or alternatives to aggression—that will support non-violent responses in difficult situations. This can also include supportive, non-violent parenting.
- (e) Provide referrals to community services.

Focus groups with men from the different racial/ethnic groups mentioned above have been used to select topics for palm cards and to frame the language of the palm cards. The palm cards usually have four pages (approximately 3 by 5 in., folded in half). One of the outer pages features the title; the other has current sports schedules for Boston-based professional sports teams. For example, a palm card directed at African American men was titled: “HOW’S YOUR LOVE LIFE?” It addresses conflict in relationships, explains abusive conduct in terms used by African American men in focus groups, and provides culturally congruent advice on how to avoid abuse and violence. Including information about sports team schedules and intriguing titles is meant to make these cards attractive and useful to a wide range of men. Focus group sessions have been conducted with African American, Cape Verdean, Haitian and Latino men. The two palm cards that have been published were extremely well received. They were distributed in bars, barber shops, and service stations as well as in traditional venues like social service agencies.

**Lessons learned.** There were unforeseen problems and challenges encountered in this pioneering effort. First, although there was enthusiastic support for the specialists from the people in leadership positions in the Dorchester Community Roundtable and the Judicial Oversight Demonstration Project, court and community based battered women’s advocates were not directly involved in creating these positions. The two men who were hired do not come from batterer intervention programs. They are men from the community who have strong experience and excellent skills in outreach with peers. They are both deeply sympathetic with battered women, but they also express the community’s mistrust of the criminal justice system. This has sharpened questions about their role, impact, and credibility. In retrospect, it became apparent that much greater direct involvement of battered women’s services and more education for the men were both critical. Despite these problems, the specialists have provided an invaluable source of information about men who batter and about the criminal justice system. They make it clear that few restraining order defendants understand the orders and that only a small percentage appears in court for restraining order hearings. This intensifies the need to reach out to men in community settings.

The palm card campaign began as a small project sponsored by the Dorchester Community Roundtable and was coordinated primarily by the Batterer Intervention Subcommittee. The success of the first two palm cards generated enormous interest and a desire to expand the campaign into Spanish, Cape Verdean, Haitian Creole, and Vietnamese. Combined groups of volunteers and Dorchester Community Roundtable staff were formed and trained to conduct

focus groups and prepare palm cards. In reality, the palm card project quickly outstripped the available resources. There was funding for printing the palm cards, but little else. Participants found that it took a team of 2-3 people at least 20 hours to design focus group questions, find volunteers to participate, conduct the groups, analyze the data, and prepare the palm card content. It took another ten hours to arrange for the design and printing. This was extremely difficult for volunteers and for staff, who ended up working extra time on this. Resources also limited the distribution network for the palm cards. Nevertheless, the palm cards that were prepared and those that are being prepared are excellent and have been well received in the community.

### **The Atlanta experience**

Three programs in Atlanta have taken steps to enhance the traditional CCRI approach: Men Stopping Violence, Caminar Latino, and Tapestri. The experience at Tapestri, Caminar Latino and Men Stopping Violence in Atlanta has both common and unique aspects. All three programs emerged from women's initiatives or women-based organizations. Men Stopping Violence was initially led by a clinician and activist, a director of a battered women's shelter who joined with male clinicians, like her community activists and experienced organizers. Caminar Latino and Tapestri both emerged from women's organizations which were community-based rather than rooted in the battered women's movement. The history of men and women working together is a common thread, as is the fact that women have provided supervision and mentoring to all three programs. All three programs have been challenged by and learned from one another. The awareness of the need to view batterer intervention programs as tools for social change and justice is another common thread that runs through their histories and philosophies. Also in all three programs, facilitators work directly with the men (as the women have requested) while simultaneously working with institutions such as the church, higher education, mental health, the courts and criminal justice systems, and businesses. This is crucial, given the fact that this work is about challenging existing systems and structures.

All three programs are concerned about the intense focus on CCRI and the disproportionate resources that are allocated to this area. This is especially troublesome in view of the fact that such a small percentage of women ever access this system. The tendency for low levels of utilization is most notable among immigrant and refugee groups and communities of color. There is consensus about the fact that it is important to be part of the CCRI, since it provides an opportunity to influence policy and maintain the social change discourse in the movement. At the same time, all the programs are concerned about how difficult it is to work within the system without colluding with oppressive institutions and structures. The strong emphasis that each of the programs gives to advocacy, education, and outreach outside the criminal justice system, as well as their eagerness to engage in ongoing dialogue and discussion about the complex intersections of domestic violence and other oppressions, illustrates their unwavering commitment to seeking innovative solutions to the issue of violence against women.

**Men stopping violence.** From its inception as a batterer intervention program in the early 1980s, Men Stopping Violence was envisioned as an organization that would challenge the clinical model of domestic violence intervention. It is committed to addressing male violence, as well as other forms of oppression, through speaking out against male collusion and secrecy, keeping women's reality central to their work, and taking direction from women advocates.



Unlike clinical organizations, it includes the community in developing its social and strategic analysis and creating non-clinical approaches to working with abusers. Men Stopping Violence conceptualizes community-based domestic violence interventions as an essential element in the broader struggle for social change, promoting justice based on race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Among their many projects and initiatives are public policy advocacy, training for professionals, community education, and movement building, in addition to their direct intervention with males.

1. **Public policy.** Men Stopping Violence has created and maintained alliances with other national and local advocacy organizations, as well as with the Georgia Commission on Family Violence and local domestic violence task forces. Through education of decision makers in state and federal agencies and lobbying for effective anti-violence legislation, the agency has worked to influence public policy.
2. **Training for professionals.** Men Stopping Violence conducts training for legal, criminal justice, and military personnel, practitioners in the health and mental health fields, clergy, employers, and other national and local leaders. Through workshops, contract training, keynote speeches and talks, Men Stopping Violence attempts to influence institutions that help shape cultural norms.
3. **Community education.** The agency provides education to communities in a variety of ways: (a) presentations to schools, universities, workplaces, faith communities and civic groups, and through broadcast media appearances; (b) publications regarding topics that stimulate dialogue and discussion through their website, their semi-annual journal, professional journals, opinion editorials and letters to the editor; (c) participation in media coverage of relevant issues by providing background information and interviews for reporters; and (e) training men who want to become change agents in the community.
4. **Movement building.** Men Stopping Violence works at many levels to be an ally of other local, regional, and national organizations that are working to end men's violence against women and other types of oppression (racism, sexism, homophobia, classism). Their goal is to help build a strong, unified social justice movement that responds to the changing issues facing society.
5. **Intervention with men who batter.** The organization works directly with males in two main initiatives: (a) intervention with over 2,000 batterers each year through telephone contact, classes, courtroom sessions, and 24-week batterer intervention classes, including a Community Restitution Program for men who have completed the primary class; and (b) prevention through education and outreach with young men at risk for sexually exploiting girls and women.

In order to practice what it preaches, Men Stopping Violence is co-directed by a team composed of an African American man and a Caucasian man. At the same time, to address the commitment of the organization to be guided by women's voices, a two-woman supervising consultancy has been set up, and a by-law requires that women be the majority on the Board of Directors.

The focus on social change, closer ties to the African American community, and a deeper and closer awareness of oppression—including the racist oppression of many of their African American clients—led to progressive transformations of their work.

- Several years ago a participant asked if he could bring a man from his church to the class session (at the batterer intervention program). The facilitators decided that they would honor the man's request, to see what would happen. The results were unexpectedly positive. Men Stopping Violence became aware that the man was seeking support outside the class for what he had been learning in the program. This provided a means for the program to do something they had talked about for a long time, to create supportive social networks in different communities so that men who attended batterer groups could maintain the gains they had made during the court-mandated intervention. Today each participant is required to bring two men, once at the beginning of treatment and again near the end of treatment, to disclose their abusive conduct and to seek support in remaining non-violent. This has exposed hundreds of men from the community to Men Stopping Violence, a setting where they can observe other men struggling with their issues regarding domestic violence. This has had the additional result of increasing the numbers of community men who have been exposed to the ideas of non-violence.
- Far from shying away from the reality that many men who batter have been abused and oppressed, the program has incorporated the centrality of racism and oppression for African American men in its approach. There are group exercises where men analyze the elements and impacts of racism on themselves, and compare these impacts with systemic sexism directed at women and with their own oppressive conduct toward women. In these exercises, it is very helpful that several program staff are African American men. They can validate both the reality of oppression and how it contributes to patterns of abuse of women by African American men.
- All men in DeKalb County (one of the Atlanta counties) who have been arrested for domestic violence charges, but who will not be prosecuted (the so-called “first-time-offenders”), are given the opportunity to attend a one-time, three-hour class as a diversion option. At the request of the court, Men Stopping Violence developed the three-hour curriculum to enhance men's awareness of the issue. They have been providing these classes for several years to the approximately 40-50 men who attend each Friday afternoon. The agency has had ongoing dialogue with women advocates and court personnel to have a clearer understanding of the possible impact of this class on the partners of the men who attend the sessions.

In the past eight years, Men Stopping Violence allied with community-based advocacy and service programs in immigrant and refugee communities in Atlanta. Not only has the organization lent support to the work of these agencies and individuals, but it has also provided the opportunity for rich dialogue and collaborative analysis with groups that have diverging views and styles, but who share a common goal. Two programs in particular have shared Men Stopping Violence's philosophy regarding the role of batterer intervention programs as tools for social change: Caminar Latino and Tapestri.

**Caminar Latino.** Caminar Latino began in 1990, as the first support group for Spanish-speaking battered Latinas in Georgia. The agency affirmed from the beginning that the voices of battered Latinas would be the guiding force behind the program. This began to rapidly generate program innovations. The first of these had to do with children and teenagers. The women asked the advocates for a special program that could address the effects of violence on their children. With input from the women, groups for children and adolescents were established. Next, the women requested groups for their abusive partners. They argued that the reality of their daily lives would not change in significant ways unless their partners, with whom most of them continued to live, could get services to address their use of violence. The women also requested that the men's groups meet on the same evenings and at the same location as the women's and children's groups. This was a controversial departure from traditional practices, where men's and women's groups are kept very separate.

Caminar Latino decided to listen to the voices of battered Latinas. All members of the agency clinical team supported the women's request. This created a great deal of trepidation and concern on the part of mainstream battered women's services providers. The idea of providing a batterer intervention program in the same location and at the same time as the women's and children's groups was seen as potentially increasing the danger to the victims and their children. The women advocates from Caminar Latino, as well as the women participating in the groups, gave their unequivocal support, arguing that the ongoing communication, consultation, and supervision of the advocates would provide the necessary structure for working with the men. The team carefully designed and set in place strategies to address safety issues.

The program currently includes two battered women's support groups, two 24-session batterer intervention groups, and four children's groups that meet concurrently, though on separate floors (men are not allowed on the floor where the women meet). The women's voices continue to guide the program philosophy as well as the day-to-day program functioning. For example, issues that are raised by Latinas attending the groups are consistently brought back to the men's group. Children's voices are also incorporated into program curricula, procedures, and process.

The most recent initiative, which is still in its planning phase, is a monthly potluck dinner in which couples who have gone through the entire program and who wish to continue to work on themselves and their relationship will have the opportunity of meeting together to dialogue about topics that they will help to identify and coordinate. This latest innovation is a request from a number of women who had been coming to the program for a substantial period of time beyond the time of their partners' court mandates. Interestingly, their partners have enthusiastically supported the idea. The network of families who are jointly working towards a non-violent relationship will thus provide an important resource within the Latino community itself.

In addition, Caminar Latino takes into consideration the importance of family celebrations and has supported some traditions that have developed within the program. Once a year, the day before Thanksgiving, for example, there is a potluck in which the men and women (participants, staff, and volunteers) bring traditional dishes to share with everyone present (which often includes Mission staff as well). The sense of community that this has generated has made this one of the most anticipated events of the program. Another event is the yearly "clothesline" project in which the women and children decorate t-shirts with messages about domestic

violence. The t-shirts are then placed on clotheslines throughout the mission building. Facilitators and members of the adolescent group make presentations at three Sunday masses (attended by over 1,500 people each week) and distribute pamphlets, ribbons, and other materials about domestic and sexual violence. It is a very powerful experience that usually results in additional women accessing the program and creates the opportunity for one-on-one conversations with men regarding domestic violence.

From Caminar Latino's perspective, it is not sufficient to look toward the transformation of individual batterers. Transforming and undoing oppression must also include an active community involvement aspect. As a result, Caminar Latino is actively engaged in education, advocacy, and network building at the local, state, national, and international levels. One of the most meaningful and effective collaborations with which the program has been involved is Tapestri, Inc.: The Immigrant and Refugee Coalition to End Gender-Based Oppression.

**Tapestri.** Established in 1995, Tapestri is a membership organization made up of eight agencies that work in the area of domestic violence in immigrant and refugee communities. The Tapestri batterer intervention program was formed in 1999, when women advocates from the member organizations asked that men from these communities obtain training and begin a group for batterers that would address the culture-specific needs and issues of immigrant populations. Women advocates from Tapestri (like those at Caminar Latino) were concerned that many of the abusers who could not speak English well were being mandated by the courts into mainstream intervention programs. Most of the men were still living with their partners, and the programs they were attending did not take this into account, so some program participants were using what they were learning and their exposure to English to enhance their control strategies. Tapestri women advocates provide leadership, mentoring, and supervision for facilitators of the men's group. The women advocates maintain regular contact with partners of the men attending the intervention group, build trusting relationships with them, and provide ongoing support and advocacy.

A special aspect of Tapestri Men's Group is the diversity of its facilitators and participants. The 24-session intervention is open to men from immigrant and refugee communities as well as to U.S.-born men. The level of English fluency (the only common language) is often quite limited, a situation that has proven to be both a challenge and a possibility. The language limitation has forced group participants to explain in very clear terms the nature of their violent behavior and to relate to one another with a deep sense of respect. Finally, because of Tapestri's commitment to work with men, whether or not they are able to pay the sliding scale fee, courts often refer indigent men to the program, overwhelmingly African Americans, whom other programs frequently reject because they are considered "troublemakers" uninterested in completing the program. This has not been the experience at Tapestri. African American men referred by the courts have a very high completion rate, and a number of them continue attending the program beyond the required 24 sessions. Indeed, they often serve as mentors of immigrant men who have limited English fluency, helping them to understand the concepts and expectations of the program as well as the experiential exercises that are part of the curriculum.

One of the key elements at both Tapestri and Caminar Latino is the focus on respect. Accountability is achieved by challenging the men in clear, direct, and respectful confrontations.

Facilitators model the same respectful relationships that they ask program participants to have with their partners and children. This strategy appears to be very appropriate for working with men from immigrant and refugee communities as well as with U.S.-born men of color (some group participants at Tapestri are African Americans). Men report that they had been sent to other programs in which the hierarchical confrontations had left them feeling disrespected and angry, and much more prone to take their frustration out on their partners once they got home. These men often comment that feeling respected in the group has helped them be more open to working on their violence. Respect is one of the cultural values that seems to be essential in working with these populations. The Tapestri program thus serves not only as an intervention program for men who have battered their partners. It is also a space in which men from very different backgrounds, social classes, educational levels, religions, and languages can learn about respectful multicultural relations, and can break down racial/ethnic stereotypes.

The philosophy in both programs is the same. Domestic violence is conceptualized as a violation of the human rights of women and children (Perilla, 1999). Domestic violence is not seen as an individual problem of the abused woman, the male batterer, or the couple, but rather as a social problem that plays itself out in many families. As a result, the programs are not counseling or therapeutic interventions. Men's violence is not conceptualized as individual pathology that can be treated by mental health professionals in individual sessions. Each act of violence is a decision that a man makes regarding his partner and/or children. As a result, he bears sole responsibility for its occurrence and is the only person who can change the attitudes and beliefs that led to his violent behaviors. The programs see male battering and other forms of abuse of women as a series of behaviors and attitudes that have been modeled for males in their homes and in society.

The programs use an ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Martín-Baró, 1994; Ramírez, 1983;) and a concientización (critical consciousness) (Freire, 1997) model that includes information sharing, dialogue, and re-educational components. This approach emphasizes the idea that oppression is maintained through social structures and through ideas and beliefs that are deeply internalized by both the oppressed and the oppressors. Therefore, Caminar Latino and Tapestri promote both social and personal transformation as the response to domestic violence and other forms of oppression. A non-hierarchical environment where participants can engage in a self-reflective dialogue is one of the key conditions to change. In other words, if people feel empowered and supported, rather than controlled or lectured to, they have the capacity to develop their own solutions to personal and social problems.

The programs are further informed by European-American feminist thought (e.g., Bograd, 1984; Yllo & Bograd, 1988) as well as by Latin American feminism that brings to bear a wider range of issues in gender relations—including political, historical, social, and spiritual elements (e.g., Ramirez, 1999; Lagarde, 1997; Lugo, 1985). The contextual analysis of domestic abuse has identified common cultural values, traditions, expectations, and beliefs (e.g., rigid gender role expectations, supremacy of males over females, importance of preserving the family unit) that have shaped problems, as well as those that may be used as tools in the process of transformation (e.g., centrality of family, issues of respect, honor, and responsibility, spirituality).

### **The Texas experience**

The Texas Council on Family Violence (the Council) is one of the largest domestic violence coalitions in the country and has been in existence since 1978. As a non-profit agency funded by public and private sources, the Council works to end violence against women by engaging in partnerships, advocacy, and direct services. The Council operates the National Domestic Violence Hotline, assists shelters throughout the state of Texas, maintains resource files and a lending library, and offers training for people working with victims and perpetrators. The Men's Nonviolence Project exemplifies the Council's commitment to working directly with men to end violence against women.

Before 2000, the Council's outreach to men was mainly through the Battering Intervention and Prevention Project, a program that monitored and offered technical assistance to batterer intervention programs receiving state funding. In 2000, this project became the Men's Nonviolence Project. Among the reasons for this change were 1999 statistics compiled by the Department of Public Safety that indicated that only 3.3 percent of men reported to Texas police departments for domestic violence charges were sent to batterer intervention programs. The amount of time and resources allocated to the monitoring program thus did not appear to be a cost effective strategy, if the goal was the elimination of violence in Texas homes. At the same time, the program director had spent three days visiting Men Stopping Violence in Atlanta and had been convinced that a social change focus would be a better strategy. The project's objective became to reach the 96.7 percent of the men who did not make it into the batterer programs. The monitoring program was streamlined so the Men's Nonviolence Project could focus on social change. The program has begun efforts to raise awareness and promote social change by facilitating and supporting community organizing efforts throughout the state, producing and distributing relevant materials and providing technical assistance to support local community efforts.

The program recognizes that, while the batterer intervention groups by themselves cannot end violence against women, they play an important role that must be supported. Service providers need networks to enhance the effectiveness of their programs. The Men's Nonviolence Project has organized three conferences for service providers and activist groups working to end men's violence, and has facilitated networking efforts through email updates on topics relevant to the movement.

In an effort to help create new strategies for ending men's violence, the project is committed to utilizing research, evaluation, and demonstration projects that can help develop strong programs. To accomplish this goal, the Men's Nonviolence Project encourages research on successful approaches for working with batterers and participates in the evaluation of community organizing and education campaigns. The project works to initiate systems change through training and technical assistance, public policy and legislative efforts, and collaborative partnerships among batterer intervention programs and other local institutions.

Interestingly, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice has given its enthusiastic support to the idea of a social change model, since they see it as a prevention tool. The Department of Criminal Justice and the Texas Council on Domestic Violence have developed a strong alliance, a definite strength of the Texas experience. Criminal justice personnel have attended trainings. The

department agreed to the streamlining of the monitoring process, adjusting priorities so that staff time and resources could be allocated to the new broader goals of the Men's Nonviolence Program. Program staff remain convinced, however, that batterer intervention programs and women's shelters must continue to be available options. Batterer intervention programs are essential to the credibility of the work and to partnerships with key players in the struggle for social change.

Another central tenet of the program is the need for women and men to work together to end violence against women. The forums that have been organized have had an almost equal number of men and women, as well as an ethnically diverse participant group. The email updates that attendees receive maintain and nurture the network connections necessary to sustain service providers working in geographic isolation. The inclusive stance of the Men's Nonviolence Program—its strong working relationships with the criminal justice system, battered women's advocates, and service providers—enhances the program's ability to focus on societal transformation.

### **ANALYZING INNOVATIVE PRACTICE**

There is no clear roadmap for developing these alternative initiatives. But we would like to offer some suggestions pertaining to programming directed at abusers. Here are some guidelines that may help innovators move forward and that identify some challenges that should not be ignored:

- **Close collaboration with providers of battered women's services.** The boundary line between support, accountability, and collusion in new approaches to abusers has to be redrawn, clarified, and negotiated constantly. Battered women's advocates have raised legitimate concerns about the possibility that certain interventions, including some services to men, may harm or endanger battered women. Initiatives that combine accountability and support, and acknowledge that some men have been oppressed, are a radical departure from existing practice. There should be a firm and ongoing connection between new initiatives and the battered women's movement to ensure the proper balance of accountability for the violence and acknowledgment of how oppression affects abusers.
- **Close collaboration with battered women.** The battered women's movement has developed responses to domestic violence that do not fit the needs and circumstances of all battered women. It is critical to include women from diverse communities in new initiatives as program designers and cultural informants. They can provide much basic information that new initiatives need and can answer a wide range of practice questions, including: What type of educational approaches do they think will work best with men? What are the protective and healing aspects of their cultures with respect to domestic violence? How can new initiatives directed at men build on cultural strengths rather than ignore them? What types of abuse should be highlighted in programs and educational materials directed at men in their community?
- **Culturally competent approaches.** The underlying premise of such approaches is that culture offers positive models of manhood, protective resources, and avenues of healing from domestic violence. This approach is not naive about cultural influences. It acknowledges that most cultures have gender and family system traditions that facilitate oppressive

relationships with women and with children. However, a culturally competent approach seeks to reinforce values that facilitate positive relationships and to remind men that they have non-abusive choices that are consistent with their cultural identity. It is the basis for showing abusers and at-risk men how to change their behavior in a way that fits their life experience and cultural backgrounds.

- **A holistic approach.** Abusers should be viewed as multi-dimensional individuals who have often encountered complex challenges in their lives, including oppression, abuse, trauma, the dislocation of immigration, and poverty. These factors can act as an obstacle to change and can facilitate movement toward domestic violence. There must be a commitment to provide support with life challenges as a way of enhancing men's resistance to domestic violence and increasing their stake in conforming to legal sanctions against domestic violence. A holistic approach also acknowledges that men are members of families, that part of the healing and educational process for abusers and at-risk men includes establishing responsible fatherhood and co-parenting consistent with the safety of adult and child victims.
- **Emphasis on respect.** A respect-based approach is not based on telling people what to do, threatening them with arrest (which terminates many dialogues) or preaching, but rather in walking with them through the difficult process of analyzing, internalizing, and understanding their violence as well as supporting them to find their own non-violent solutions. A respectful approach involves helping men think through the effects of the violence on their partners, their children, themselves and their communities. Such an approach helps men see the benefits of stable and functional relationships that revolve around every person's capacity for self-determination, mutuality, and interdependence. This means a sustained effort to help men better understand the ecology of their violent acts and the reasons that led them to their decision to use violence against their partners and/or children.
- **Belief in social change and transformation.** Direct intervention with men who batter is not a matter of helping individuals change, but of strengthening the capacity to educate and restrain men who have been violent, and of changing social institutions and cultural values that support domestic violence and other forms of oppression.

It was notable that the battered women's advocates who supported these projects have a broad perspective and a willingness to work with men. They tend to make alliances and to take a pragmatic approach. They also choose allies carefully. They have a "show me" attitude—they expect a commitment to women's safety and self-determination, and this commitment must be at the center of collaborative initiatives. The openness to alliance and pragmatism is more pronounced with advocates who are part of (or who work with) communities of color and refugee and immigrant communities.

It was also noteworthy that Caminar Latino and Tapestri seem to be more consistently innovative and more confident about moving in new directions. These projects began with direct work with battered women who were not well served by mainstream services. By making room for these women's voices, following their lead, and changing programs to meet their authentic needs and aspirations, they created a theory and practice deeply grounded and legitimate. In a sense, the



fact that these projects were not part of the mainstream battered women's movement may have facilitated innovation.

### **CONCLUSION ... BUT NOT AN ENDING**

Exploring and understanding these projects and others that are attempting to develop alternatives and enhancements of the CCRI are preliminary steps toward reaching the large percentage of men who batter and whose partners will never seek assistance from the criminal justice system or a shelter. The task at hand calls for a shift in the ways in which communities respond to this social problem, to create strategies that include a careful combination of support, respect, and clear accountability. Truly successful prevention requires creating and popularizing these new strategies so that no one must rely solely on a system that reaches a small percentage of men who batter and thus fails to address the safety of a considerable number of battered women and their children.

We acknowledge that there are many questions about the validity and legitimacy of enhancements and alternatives to the CCRI. In the hope of inspiring a debate—and in the spirit of the Boston project, Caminar Latino, Tapestri, Men Stopping Violence, and the Men's Nonviolence Project—we offer the following questions:

- What enhancements or transformations of the CCRI approach to abusers make sense? Can such efforts produce any worthwhile results for battered women who may be reluctant to use the criminal justice system? How does one measure the impact of these projects?
- How should these programs relate to the battered women's movement? How can an accountable and flexible relationship be structured?
- How should they relate to battered women from diverse communities? How could these programs empower these women?
- Can such initiatives offer support to men as they meet life challenges while also holding them accountable?
- Can these initiatives affect the capacity of men to talk to each other about abuse? Can they offer models of respect, non-violence, and the acknowledgment of women's self-determination in relationships in ways that reflect positive aspects of their cultural background?
- Will this lead to an expanded definition of accountability, one which has multiple axes? Can we have accountability that encompasses the needs of battered women from diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds?
- Do we need to engage in an honest dialogue about how domestic violence resources are used? Does it make sense to continue allocating resources so unevenly to criminal justice responses when this system provides services to so few battered women and so few batterers?

We look forward to the dialogue.

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