



# **ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A BARRIER TO WORK**

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

LISE MCKEAN, PH.D.  
CENTER FOR IMPACT RESEARCH  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS  
OCTOBER 2004

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## PROJECT FUNDER

### **Kraft Foods**

*Program Officer*  
Patricia Lara Garza

## PROJECT PARTNERS

### **Center for Impact Research**

*Project Staff*  
Lise McKean, Ph.D., Project Director  
Jody Raphael  
Elizabeth Bax  
Cecile Brigadeau

### **Chicago Project Site**

*Strive Employment Services*  
Mary Anne Edwards  
Nydia Hernandez

*Casa Central*  
Maria Echenique

### **Houston Project Site**

*Houston Area Women's Center*  
Kelly Young  
Jocelyn Enabulele  
Tameka Susberry

*HoustonWorks USA*  
Danyell Pennington  
Maria Mireles

### **Seattle Project Site**

*New Beginnings*  
Lois Loontjens  
Kelly Starr  
Anna Treadway

*TRAC Associates*  
Patty Ahonen

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	4
INTRODUCTION .....	9
METHODOLOGY.....	10
Study Design .....	10
Program Participants.....	11
FINDINGS.....	13
Building the Collaboration .....	13
Program Activities.....	20
IMPACT OF THE COLLABORATION.....	27
RECOMMENDATIONS ON BEST PRACTICES .....	29

# ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A BARRIER TO WORK:

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

LISE MCKEAN, PH.D.  
CENTER FOR IMPACT RESEARCH  
OCTOBER 2004

# 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

---

<sup>1</sup> 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>.

<sup>2</sup> 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>.

<sup>3</sup> 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/>.

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 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.

---

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

## 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 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.

# INTRODUCTION

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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, poverty and lack of adequate income often make it even more difficult for domestic violence survivors to escape from abuse.

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.<sup>7</sup> 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 by public benefits programs to participate in job readiness and placement programs, collaboration between employment services 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 the October 2000 and continued through the end of 2002 at sites in Houston, Chicago, and Seattle.<sup>8</sup> 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 Impact Research (CIR) undertook the project's research component and provided technical assistance to the participating

---

<sup>5</sup> 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>.

<sup>6</sup> 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>.

<sup>7</sup> For further discussion of this topic, see the following reports from the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence: 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/>.

<sup>8</sup> The participating agencies were: Houston Area Women's Center and Houston Works; New Beginnings and TRAC Associates (Seattle); and Casa Central and Strive Employment Services (Chicago). During 2001, the project also included sites in Richmond and Denver and a second partnership in Chicago. However, due to a variety of problems during the first year, these sites did not participate during the second year.

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.<sup>9</sup> 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 is primarily intended for management and staff at public and private agencies that serve low-income women, including domestic violence services providers, employment services agencies, and other social service organizations. The report focuses on the project learnings and best practice recommendations for integrating domestic violence services into employment services agencies. It discusses establishing and maintaining interagency collaborations; training case managers; conducting screening and referrals; providing counseling, safety planning, and support groups; and following up with participants.

A companion report, “Self-Sufficiency and Safety: The Case for Onsite Domestic Violence Services at Employment Services Agencies,” presents materials from the Kraft project that are 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.<sup>10</sup>

# METHODOLOGY

## STUDY DESIGN

---

The information presented in this report was obtained from agency staff and program participants at the project sites. At the outset of the project in October 2000, representatives from the collaborating agencies met to discuss strategies for program implementation and data collection. Two further meetings were convened in April and October of 2001 that enabled project staff from all the sites to discuss their work, with a focus on identifying challenges and developing innovative solutions.

Throughout the course of the project, CIR’s project director was in regular contact with the domestic violence counselor at each of the sites, providing technical assistance as needed. She also made two site

---

<sup>9</sup> The vision and ongoing support for the project were provided by Patricia Garza, the project’s program officer at Kraft Foods, and Jody Raphael, former Director for Research at CIR. The staff and participants at project sites were also key contributors to the research.

<sup>10</sup> Both reports are available at <http://www.impactresearch.org/publication/publicationdate.html>.

visits to each site to troubleshoot problems and interview staff and participants for in-depth information about program implementation, activities, and outcomes from a broad range of perspectives—the domestic violence counselors, management at the collaborating agencies, case managers at the employment services agencies, and project participants. During the course of the site visits, CIR conducted structured interviews with 15 staff members at the employment services agencies and 13 project participants, as well as with the domestic violence counselors and their managers at the domestic violence services agencies.

## PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

---

In order to provide a context for subsequent discussion about the program, this section briefly introduces the women who received domestic violence services at the project sites. The companion policy report provides data and discussion on participants and their outcomes.

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 with the domestic violence counselor and received counseling services (78.7% self-disclosed; 21.3% were identified and referred by staff).

125 women completed the second interview six months after the first one.

47 women completed the third interview six months after the second one.

Approximately 90% of the 243 women who completed the first interview had attended the domestic violence educational session. Therefore, about 12% of those who attended the domestic violence educational presentations became participants in the Kraft program. However, this figure does not include those who disclosed domestic violence, some of whom sought counseling or attended support groups, but chose not to participate in the research interviews.<sup>11</sup> The 12% does not include domestic violence victims who did not self-disclose or those whose most recent experience of abuse was more than one year ago.

Among the 10% of the 243 participants who had not attended the domestic violence educational sessions, some were involved in other activities at the employment services agency and self-referred or were referred to the domestic violence counselor by their case manager; others were already receiving services offsite at a domestic violence agency or shelter and were referred to the employment services agency, where they became participants in the Kraft program.

Survivors in pursuit of self-sufficiency require different levels and types of services. For example, when some survivors end the relationship, they become free of the abuser and make rapid progress towards self-sufficiency. However, because of stalking and continued abuse after having ended the relationship, the safety of many survivors continues to be in jeopardy and they require intensive services—such as legal assistance, counseling, and ongoing safety planning. Therefore, a critical aspect of this research was

---

<sup>11</sup> The number of those who accessed domestic violence services but declined to participate in the research interviews is approximately 125 for the three sites. However, this figure is an estimate as this group was not uniformly tracked at all sites.

to better understand the complexity of survivors' situations and to examine and refine definitions of progress and success in relation to domestic violence and self-sufficiency.

All 243 participants who completed the initial interview were adult women, ranging in age from their twenties to their fifties with a median age of 30.6 years old. Most of the women had children under eighteen years of age (93.0%); the median number of children was two. Four-fifths (80.6%) were single, separated, divorced, or widowed; 16.5% were married or living with a partner; and 2.9% responded that they were in "other" types of relationships or living arrangements. The racial and ethnic composition of the sample was 42.7% African American; 27.0% Latina; 19.1% Caucasian; 4.1% biracial or multiracial; 3.3% Asian; 1.2% Native American; 1.2% Pacific Islander/Hawaiian; and 1.2% other. Nearly 90% of the women were born in the U.S.

## **Education**

Participants had a range of educational attainment: 42.2% had less than a high school degree; 9.9% had a high school degree; 15.5% had a GED; 28.5% had some college or an associate's degree; and 3.9% had a bachelor's degree.

## **Income**

Of the 243 participants who completed the first interview, 24.7% reported having no income at all; 51.0% reported TANF as a source of income; 7.8% reported income from full-time employment; and 4.9% from part-time employment. Public benefits programs such as Food Stamps, child care assistance, and Unemployment Insurance were reported as sources of income by 41.2% of respondents. The median monthly income was \$440. Reporting on family finances over the previous twelve months, 72.1% had to borrow money to pay bills; 63.4% did not have money to pay for food; 31.7% could not afford to pay for medical care; 30.7% had their utilities disconnected; 25.5% had been evicted; and 16.5% had used cash advances or payday loans.

## **Health**

During the first interview, participants were asked to rate their current physical and emotional health. One-tenth reported excellent physical health; 37.8% good; 37.8% fair; and 13.4% poor. When asked to rate their emotional health, 5.1% reported excellent; 17.7% good; 53.6% fair; and 23.2% poor. Respondents were asked the frequency of experience of a range of emotions on a scale from "most days" to "rarely." On most days: 50% of respondents reported being depressed; 46.4% sad; 34.2% fearful; 32.2% hopeful about the future; 51.0% felt "everything I did was an effort;" and 31.6% felt "I could not get going." Respondents were also asked about behaviors: on most days, 42.2% had trouble sleeping; 32.2% had crying spells; and 33.6% reported their appetite was poor.

## **Career Interests and Self-Sufficiency Goals**

In their interviews with CIR, participants were asked about their career interests and aspirations. The women's responses ranged over a wide spectrum of occupations from trades such as electrician, plumbing, painting, and welding to social work, office administration, graphic arts, cooking, teaching, and nursing. When talking about how much she enjoyed literature, one woman said, "I have always wanted to be a lexicographer, I love communication." Several women said that their experience in the program has interested them in becoming a domestic violence counselor.

CIR also asked participants about their self-sufficiency goals. The women spoke of their desire for stable employment—"a good solid career"—where they could earn enough to pay their bills, and in time buy a

car and home. One woman said, “My goal is to keep my job and go to the next level. I would like coaching on the ways I can move up in the workplace.” Another woman, who already had her own apartment and car, said she would like a better car, adding, “everything I have, I’ve worked for.” In addition to their employment and material goals, their children’s well-being figured prominently in the women’s comments. One woman said her goal was “to make sure I raise my kids to be healthy and moral.”

# FINDINGS

## BUILDING THE COLLABORATION

---

### Planning

The Kraft project incorporated an initial three-month planning grant to allow for partner agencies to become familiar with each other, to attend a meeting with colleagues from the other sites and representatives from Kraft and CIR, and to prepare to commence services. During the two later group meetings as well as during their interviews with CIR, staff members at collaborating agencies were asked for suggestions on key elements to address during the planning phase. The following discussion is based on the experience of the sites and covers features of the planning process that were undertaken by partners and “hindsight recommendations” on activities that would have been helpful to have incorporated into the planning process.<sup>12</sup>

Agencies agreed on the importance of involving key management and staff members at the start of the planning phase in discussions about program goals, objectives, activities, and outcomes, and staffing and infrastructure requirements. Many agencies later realized that they were not well informed about their partner and they suggested that each agency in the collaboration should give the proposed partner a systematic overview of the agency’s programs, the anticipated roles in the collaboration, and program goals. During this period of familiarization, the partners should assess the capacity of their own organization and of the partner agency to commit the necessary resources for making the project successful. Features to consider when selecting partners include: size, leadership, facilities and culture of the agency, and indications of their capacity for productive collaboration. Signs of lack of commitment or of uncooperativeness during the planning phase should prompt further consideration about the desirability of collaborating with such a partner.

The manager of an agency that had experienced difficulty implementing the project because of its partner’s shortcomings noted, “It’s important to know more about the collaborator and the staff person being assigned to the project. You need to scrutinize the partners, their approach, credentials, attitudes, and the experience of their staff.” Another agency said, “There is a need for more show and tell. There should have been more emphasis on learning about the internal cultures of the agencies and the benefits

---

<sup>12</sup> The discussion also includes materials from the panel on the Kraft Project that were presented at the 2001 Trapped in Violence/Trapped in Poverty Conference: Jocelyn Enabulele and Tameka Susberry, “Domestic Violence as a Barrier to Job Training and Employment;” Patty Ahonen and Kelly Starr, “Delivering Domestic Violence Services within a Job Training Center;” and Lise McKean, “Preliminary Findings from the Kraft Domestic Violence Self-Sufficiency Grant Program.”

to be accrued from collaboration.” For one of the collaborations, the fact that the employment services agency was a for-profit organization heightened the differences between the partners. The domestic violence services agency in this collaboration observed that its partner’s “bureaucracy was a challenge; its decision-making process was slow. When nonprofits partner with for-profits, they face big challenges and different realities.”

Several agencies noted that it would be best to involve the domestic violence counselors and the project liaisons from the employment services agencies in the planning process. Involving these persons in the planning gives them more time to work with management on implementation before service delivery actually begins. During the planning phase, caseworkers at the employment services agencies should be informed of the project’s development so that they understand its purpose, features, and the ways that it will assist them in their work with clients. Their input should also be sought as their early involvement increases the likelihood that they will consider themselves stakeholders in the project’s success. It also provides a period for staff to adjust to their agency’s new commitment to addressing domestic violence as a barrier to employment. This period of awareness building about the project prepares staff to be more readily engaged in their subsequent trainings on domestic violence and in making referrals to the onsite domestic violence counselor.

In their planning discussions, partners also need to resolve issues of space and scheduling as soon as possible. Most of the agencies noted challenges in meeting infrastructural requirements for the collaboration, namely, ensuring the domestic violence counselor has a private office equipped with a telephone, computer, and Internet access. In some instances scheduling access to larger rooms for support group meetings was also a difficulty.

The experience of one of the collaborations that did not continue into the second year indicates that if an employment services agency is not able to meet these minimum requirements, it cannot develop a robust program. Staff also felt that the failure to provide the promised office sent a message that the agency was not serious about its commitment to the project. Another site noted the need to make special arrangements to enable the domestic violence counselor to meet with clients who needed appointments at the employment services agency in the evening after the office had closed at 5 p.m.

During the initial group planning meeting, project activities and outcomes were discussed and determined. It was agreed that each year the domestic violence counselor at each site would provide services to at least 50 participants who had been identified as having a domestic violence related barrier to employment. In planning outcomes for collaborations, partners needed to review program demographics to determine the appropriate target numbers for services relative to the project’s staffing level and resources. One of the domestic violence services agencies noted that the domestic violence counselor provided longer term and more intensive counseling and case management services to Kraft project participants at the employment services agency than the more typical crisis intervention services provided onsite at the domestic violence services agency.

## **Defining Roles**

Another component of the planning and implementation process involved determining who is responsible for activities and tasks and developing a collaboration protocol that outlines the roles and responsibilities of the partners. In assigning management and staff to this project, partners need to consider a range of variables related to professional expertise, familiarity with the agency, and ability to negotiate differences and work cooperatively. Each of the agencies should assign at least one manager to

the project as well as the staff person who will be providing the services—the domestic violence counselor and the project liaison from the employment services agency.

In addition to developing a collaboration protocol as a guide to roles and responsibilities, partners should agree on a method for identifying and addressing problems as they arise. Questions that need to be periodically raised include: Are both agencies fulfilling their responsibilities? Are the partners and their staff cooperating with the domestic violence counselor and vice versa?

### **Management**

Representatives from agency management were actively involved in all aspects of project planning, implementation, and problem solving. The level of management that took part in these activities was related to the size of the agency. At smaller agencies, the executive director assumed responsibility for project planning and oversight; at larger ones, a program manager or department head represented management. The involvement of management decreased after service delivery began and the domestic violence counselor and project liaison assumed responsibility for the program's daily operations.

### **Domestic Violence Counselor**

The domestic violence counselor is in a pivotal position not only for the program's operations, but also for communicating with management at both agencies and with caseworkers at the employment services agency, and for responding to challenges in program implementation. Thus, the maturity, professional skills, resourcefulness, and adaptability of the domestic violence counselor are of the utmost importance to the success of the collaboration. Being based offsite at the employment services agency, the counselor leaves the familiar environment of her own agency and enters a different and at times seemingly inscrutable workplace.

In the view of staff and clients at the employment services agency, the predominant feature of the domestic violence counselor's role is that she is onsite and available. Staff and clients repeatedly noted the overarching importance of the counselor's accessibility: her presence made it feel safe to broach the issue of domestic violence. Moreover, by making domestic violence services available, the agency itself becomes an environment where domestic violence survivors can feel supported and empowered rather than ignored, fearful, or ashamed. Flexibility further enhanced one counselor's accessibility; if clients preferred, she would meet with them offsite wherever they felt comfortable and safe, e.g., at the doctor's office.

All of the collaborations work with culturally diverse populations. Both the staff and participants noted the importance of bilingual counselors and access to interpreter services for clients with limited English. Some also felt that the availability of African American domestic violence counselors increased the likelihood for some African American women to access services.

In their interviews, staff and management reported a range of concerns related to the domestic violence counselor. Staff members at one employment services site said that the first domestic violence counselor was forceful and seemed too imposing and demanding; they preferred the more gradual and interactive approach of her replacement. Another employment services agency recounted difficulties due to the inexperience of a domestic violence counselor who did not have the skills to negotiate interagency relations. One site lagged behind in program implementation because the domestic violence services agency did not have a stable staff, which resulted in the frequent turnover as well as inexperience of its domestic violence counselors. This instability led the employment services agency to select a different domestic violence services agency for the collaboration.

During the course of the project, all of the sites had turnover in their domestic violence counselors.<sup>13</sup> However, the successful ones were able to retain the first counselor for at least one year. They also carefully planned for the transition and found a skilled and experienced replacement.<sup>14</sup> Turnover can also be disruptive of counseling and other services as it takes time for clients to become comfortable with the new counselor. One site reported a drop in attendance at support groups and individual counseling sessions after the replacement had started. Turnover of the domestic violence counselor also affects caseworkers at the employment services agency as they need time to adjust to the replacement.

During these periods of staff turnover or other occasions when the domestic violence counselor is not available, the domestic violence services agency needs to provide a basic level of interim staffing so that clients can continue to access services at the employment services agency. Another area that may require attention relates to growing caseloads. Over time as more people learned about the domestic violence services and began to access them, the caseload of the domestic violence counselor increased. One site met this increased demand by hiring an additional part-time counselor; another site had its counselor refer clients to the domestic violence agency for more time-consuming services such as legal advocacy instead of continuing to provide them herself.

### **Project Liaison**

The project liaison is the staff person from the employment services agency who works closely with the domestic violence counselor on the implementation and daily operations of the project. It is preferable that the liaison work in direct services rather than management because the liaison acts as a guide for the domestic violence counselor on the everyday activities and needs of case managers and program participants. It is also desirable for the liaison to obtain more intensive training from the domestic violence agency—possibly completing a forty-hour training to become a certified domestic violence advocate—as a means of further building the capacity of the employment services agency. When appropriate, the liaison can participate in outreach efforts and facilitate support groups.

The importance of clearly delineating project roles and responsibilities emerged at one site, where problems arose because the project liaison was overreaching her role. In this situation, an overbearing liaison made it almost impossible for the domestic violence counselor to establish a rapport with clients and to assume the role as project lead. Although attempts were made to address the problem, it was not resolved and the collaboration did not continue into the second year.

### **Developing Policies**

Domestic violence service providers and employment services agencies have different standards and procedures for ensuring confidentiality as well as addressing safety and security issues. The safe provision of domestic violence services requires careful formulation and strict adherence to specific policies. When they enter into the collaboration, employment services agencies need to learn, understand, and adopt policies that conform to the standards for confidentiality, privacy, and security required by domestic violence services programs.

---

<sup>13</sup> The relatively low salaries paid by some domestic violence services agencies can make it difficult to recruit and retain professional staff.

<sup>14</sup> Planning for the transition of the domestic violence counselor is also important to those who are accessing domestic violence services in order to allow the necessary time for the counselor to address the issues of separation and abandonment that may arise.

The first step in this direction is educating management and staff at employment services agencies about the safety needs of domestic violence survivors and the risks facing clients if policies focusing on safety and confidentiality are not observed. One caseworker who felt that these needs and risks were not receiving adequate attention commented, "Our upper levels of management need to take domestic violence more seriously as it affects policy and procedures." The director of one of the employment services agencies noted that the agency was giving more attention to these issues since starting the collaboration, and confidentiality and security were emphasized during the staff training on domestic violence.

Confidentiality is important not only for client safety but also for earning the client's trust. Staff at all sites reported that clients' fear of the abuser makes them acutely concerned about confidentiality. Thus, a major challenge facing the collaborating agencies is to build the comfort level of clients so they feel it is safe to talk with the domestic violence counselor and their caseworker about domestic violence. The domestic violence counselor informs clients about their rights to confidentiality and possible repercussions of sharing information. Clients then complete consent forms, which allow them to designate what information about their case can be released and to whom. These policies protect the right of clients to choose to access domestic violence services confidentially without informing the case manager.

Clients must also be assured that other information related to accessing domestic violence services such as support group sign-in sheets is kept confidential. These measures empower clients by guaranteeing them control over their own information and build trust by assuring them that the abuser will not find out they are accessing services. And of course, the domestic violence counselor and caseworkers also gain the trust of clients by scrupulously keeping case files and other confidential program information under lock and key.

## **Training**

Management and staff from both agencies benefit from formal and informal training in the mission, program, policy, and procedures of the partner agency. Ideally this training is ongoing to keep project stakeholders current about new developments and to ensure that new staff receive training. One employment services agency suggested that the domestic violence counselor attend its staff orientation to become better acquainted with the agency and regularly attend staff meetings to stay abreast of changes in programs and regulations.

Staff members at the employment services agency require training about domestic violence, the needs of domestic violence victims, and service provision. In the group meetings and their interviews with CIR, staff and management at employment services agencies were invited to discuss the strengths, weaknesses, and outcomes of the trainings, and spoke at length on the subject. Staff training in domestic violence was uniformly seen as a crucial element of the project and invaluable for building the agency's capacity to serve its clients.

### **Domestic Violence Training for Staff at Employment Services Agencies**

The domestic violence services agencies tailored their training to the needs of the partner agencies. These trainings were typically a half-day long but could be shortened or lengthened in accordance with the staff's availability. The domestic violence counselor, sometimes accompanied by a training specialist from her agency, conducted a minimum of one training per year to familiarize employment services staff with the issue of domestic violence, its impact on individuals, families, and communities, and key principles

underlying domestic violence services such as empowerment, confidentiality, and safety. In designing her trainings, one domestic violence counselor said that the materials need to be broad so a range of people can understand them, and detailed so that trainings address stereotypes and biases and how they can lead to harmful and dangerous judgments about domestic violence victims. The trainings also inform caseworkers about the services that the domestic violence counselor and her agency are able to provide.

Participants in the training reported being particularly affected by learning how to detect patterns of violence within relationships and coming to understand the dangers victims face when they try to leave the abuser. One caseworker observed, "Learning about the cycle of violence and how it goes round and round made me dizzy." Role-playing exercises also had a powerful impact on participants in the trainings: "Role playing was important. It made me put myself in the victim's shoes." Another commented specifically on the use of "In Her Shoes" at the training she attended: "It was so good, even the men became involved. It was kind of shocking to some of our male co-workers."<sup>15</sup>

Each of the employment services agencies serves a diverse population and has a diverse staff. Accordingly, the domestic violence training addressed the variability among different cultural groups in their attitudes toward domestic violence, confidentiality, and the consequences of revealing personal information. A manager at one of the agencies said that its multicultural staff benefited from the training, although some caseworkers remained reluctant to address issues of domestic violence with their clients and were not inclined to empathize with the domestic violence victim. For example, one male staff member asked during the training, "What if she deserves it?" One of the domestic violence counselors said that besides considering diversity issues as they relate to race, ethnicity, and culture, she also considers age and she offers clients the option of talking with a counselor who is closer to their own age.

In addition to being prepared for the challenges posed by diversity, the trainings also must be prepared to support those staff members who themselves have been abused. One male caseworker told CIR that the training "helped me look at the big picture. It also helped me understand how domestic violence affected me when I was a child." Another caseworker said that although she is a survivor, the training gave her tools she needs to help her clients, adding "some clients never reveal, I never did. I could recognize the signs but I needed to learn more." The director of one of the sites said that some staff members at her agency also need domestic violence services and that the training has "made a complete person for many counselors. It's rounded out the helping part of their job."

After the trainings, the domestic violence counselors arranged to meet individually with each of the participants to discuss issues that may have arisen as a result of the training or other concerns about working with clients on domestic violence. These meetings also provided an opportunity to review the referral process and address issues related to staff members' own experiences of abuse. The counselors also made themselves available for ongoing consultation with staff at the partner agency.

### **Effects of Training about Domestic Violence**

The impacts of the training were widely commented upon during CIR's interviews with management and caseworkers at employment services agencies. The project liaison at one of the sites, who herself is a certified domestic violence counselor was enthusiastic about the positive effects for her agency of

---

<sup>15</sup> "In Her Shoes" is an educational game that fosters empathy with victims of domestic violence. This simulation is based on the lives of women and their children of different cultures who have been abused and takes each player through the systems and prejudices that victims of domestic abuse encounter as well as their successes. More information about "In Her Shoes" is available at [http://www.wscadv.org/Resources/order\\_form.htm](http://www.wscadv.org/Resources/order_form.htm).

domestic violence training. She said that recognizing the role of domestic violence in their clients' lives allows caseworkers to begin to address the emotional barriers that prevent clients from finding and keeping jobs. In her view, the training "took the staff to another level in relation to barriers. It has changed the whole way they define clients and their challenges. It makes them more sensitive to domestic violence and to other issues. They are better able to identify barriers and more aware of how domestic violence is a social issue affecting men, women, and employers."

A number of caseworkers observed that the training informed them of the multifaceted nature and complexity of domestic violence. One caseworker said, "Before training I knew it was a barrier but now I know how. I learned that domestic violence is also an economic, emotional, spiritual, and financial barrier. The things you can't see made me more aware of these effects." Another caseworker reported, "The training has taught me how complex the domestic violence situation is and the solution isn't always leaving the abuser. It has taught me to be more understanding." She added that it is important for her to learn about the wide range of domestic violence resources and to understand the full scope of abuse and control as well as learn how to recognize the signs of domestic violence in her clients.

Several of the participants in the training emphasized that the knowing more about domestic violence has equipped them for addressing it. For example, one caseworker said, "Now I know how to talk about it and to be safe about it." She added that the training also showed her the ways to create a domestic violence aware environment, such as posting signs in her office and distributing domestic violence hotline cards. Another caseworker said that the training has helped her know what to say and do, especially regarding children. She also noted that it was enlightening to learn that "abuse is about control and not an anger management problem." The training also taught her "not to push the job search with domestic violence survivors who are not ready."

### **Ongoing Staff Training**

Ongoing training was uniformly acknowledged to be desirable by domestic violence counselors, management, and caseworkers. However, not all the agencies chose to allocate time for further training. It was felt that follow-up trainings were needed to support staff in their own domestic violence issues and to provide a forum for discussing the problems that arise when working with clients on domestic violence. A caseworker stressed the "need for refresher training to sharpen skills because over time with all the demands of the job, the attention to domestic violence can diminish. Training is a way to remind caseworkers that it needs attention." Others thought that monthly or quarterly trainings would be ideal for improving skills in working with domestic violence situations. Suggestions about areas to cover in further domestic violence training include: legal terms and processes; immigration issues and domestic violence; services for children; and counseling skills.

Project liaisons and other staff members who request more intensive training can be referred to the 40-hour training at the domestic violence services agency. Such certificate training programs are recommended as an efficient means for building staff capacity in domestic violence at the employment services agency.

### **Communicating**

Successful collaborations require that partners establish channels for efficient communication and decision-making. The planning process should include establishing the means for effective and timely communication, which are assessed periodically to ensure they are responsive to the needs of each

partner and the collaboration. Communication is particularly important given the different organizational cultures of domestic violence service providers and employment services agencies.

Project sites met this need in a number of ways: by scheduling regular meetings between domestic violence counselors and caseworkers; by having the domestic violence counselor attend staff or other project committee meetings at the partner agency; and by monthly or quarterly meetings of agency management, the counselor, and the liaison. Sites also noted the importance of informal communication and one-on-one interaction between the counselor and case managers. These formal and informal modes of communication enable project stakeholders to share vital information relevant to the project and to troubleshoot problems.

## **PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

---

Each of the project sites was responsible for the following set of core activities: outreach; domestic violence educational sessions; screening, disclosure, and referrals; individual counseling; support groups; and follow-up. 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**

The domestic violence counselor was responsible for providing leadership on outreach to publicize the availability of domestic violence services. The target audiences were not only participants at the employment services agency but also outside audiences such as other human services providers who might make referrals to the employment services agency. Internal outreach included hanging posters and making brochures available throughout the agency with information about accessing domestic violence services both onsite and offsite. As one caseworker said, the availability of domestic violence services at her agency is “visible to just about everyone who comes through the door.”

Another more personalized approach is for the domestic violence counselor to attend classes and sessions at the employment services agency, which increases participants’ familiarity and comfort with her. One counselor who attended relevant classes, such as those on self-esteem, personal change, and journaling would then reinforce the messages of these classes in her counseling and other presentations. Domestic violence counselors agreed that the most effective approach in the employment services setting is to make oneself as assessable as possible and to allow women to seek out services themselves rather than to pressure or pursue them. The importance of inspiring trust and building a reputation for respecting the clients’ right to make their own decisions cannot be overstated. For example, one of the sites that did not continue in the second year of the program had a caseworker who was both insistent and directive with clients. This caseworker’s approach undermined the efforts of the domestic violence counselor to engage others in services because they were afraid of being told to leave the abuser and go to a shelter.

The domestic violence counselors conducted external outreach to inform area agencies about the program. They developed brochures to distribute to other social service agencies, public aid offices, and other public agencies, which described the collaboration and the availability of domestic violence and employment services together at a single location. In addition to outreach to social service agencies, one of the sites also distributed brochures to area healthcare professionals and beauty salons.

Outreach was also conducted at domestic violence agencies and area shelters to reach women who were already accessing domestic violence services and wanted assistance seeking employment. However, for many shelter residents, domestic violence is part of a larger picture of instability that includes unemployment, homelessness, mental health problems, and lack of financial resources. Shelter residents generally need time to stabilize their situation before enrolling in an employment services program, particularly if they are addressing legal, custody, and child care issues. Employment services for shelter residents are more appropriate as they prepare for transitional living, e.g., after about three months at the shelter.

### **Domestic Violence Educational Sessions**

The domestic violence educational sessions for participants at the employment services sites were a key feature of the project, which introduced the class to the ways that domestic violence acts as a barrier to self-sufficiency and informed them about available services. The domestic violence counselors tailored these sessions to the size and structure of the employment services agencies. The presentations made it clear that it is not necessary to leave the abuser in order to obtain services. One counselor said this information is vital since participants may be fearful of disclosing because they think they will be pressured to leave a relationship before they are ready.

At the largest of the employment services agencies, the session was held at its weekly orientation for newcomers. The one-hour presentation provided a basic overview of domestic violence issues and services. Participants who were interested in learning more about services were encouraged to make an appointment or fill out a post-it with their name and telephone number so the counselor could follow up with a phone call. About 50% of the class typically disclosed past or current experiences of abuse. Some did not disclose during this session but rather came privately to see the counselor or attend the support group.

At a smaller agency, the domestic violence educational sessions were integrated into the four-week curriculum, with weekly two-hour sessions during the first three weeks of the four-week job readiness course. In addition to screening during agency intake, participants also had the opportunity to disclose when completing the self-inventory during the first domestic violence educational session. These sessions evolved during the two-year project in response to feedback and written evaluations from participants. Topics raised during the sessions were examined further when the men and women separated into their weekly discussion groups. With a substantial number of men in its program, this agency developed a curriculum that framed domestic violence as a broader social problem as well as one facing specific individuals and families. A male case worker at another agency noted that in the domestic violence sessions, “men tend to be on the defensive; they have a different point of view.” Hence the sessions require a skilled presenter who is able to manage the range of attitudes and responses from men and women.

At agencies that do not have a centralized orientation session, the counselors made presentations to different groups or classes within the agency, e.g., a job readiness class, a program for teen mothers, a GED class, a welfare-to-work group, a youth group, and at evening and Saturday classes for agency alumni. One counselor also participated in the agency’s weekly job fairs, where she made contact with both agency participants and employers. Some of the agencies had offsite classes and training programs, where the domestic violence counselor also made presentations.

## **Screening, Disclosure, and Referrals**

The domestic violence counselors worked with the staff at the employment services agency to establish a process for screening and referrals. Case workers at all of the agencies were trained and encouraged to look for signs of domestic violence and make referrals to the counselor. However, most of the referrals were made by a small subset of the caseworkers at each of the agencies. Despite training and ongoing support from the domestic violence counselor, some caseworkers did not become comfortable addressing the issue of abuse with their clients.

A caseworker at one agency said that her male colleague did not want to work with clients who have problems with domestic violence and would refer them to another caseworker. One male caseworker stated that some clients do not want to talk about domestic violence with a man because of shame and fear. He said that he asks clients during intake about issues that may interfere with participation and if they disclose, he refers them to the domestic violence counselor. Another caseworker reported that when a client had disclosed to her, she referred the client to the counselor because she herself is a survivor and did not want to go further into the issue with clients. However, she feels her own experience helps her during intake to recognize signs of domestic violence.

The cultural and linguistic diversity at the agencies gives rise to specific challenges in the areas of screening, disclosure, and referral. At one agency that is served by caseworkers working in 26 languages, when clients who are not native English speakers disclose during their initial screening and say they wish to receive services, the caseworker explains they have the option to meet onsite with the domestic violence counselor assisted by an interpreter, or they can be referred offsite to an agency that offers services in their language. The issue of cultural attitudes repeatedly came up during interviews with caseworkers. One caseworker stressed that cultural norms may prevent participants from disclosing. In some instances, cultural convention considers abuse an “acceptable” behavior but talking about it is taboo. In her view, “It’s important to recognize that cultural attitudes such as keeping personal business private is a barrier to disclosure, but it serves as a survival strategy in other contexts.” Furthermore, African American and Latina clients may experience fear and suspicion when the caseworker and counselor are white.

One of the African American counselors found that as a rule, minority clients were more open with her than with her white colleagues. Another counselor concurred, saying “the attitudes of minorities are in part a response to the obstacles and ill treatment they experience in the social service system.” Thus the key factor in creating an environment that feels safe for disclosure is the ability of the counselor and caseworkers to engender the trust of clients. As a caseworker noted, many participants who are receiving public benefits do not want to be at the agency but they have to come. It can take longer with these clients to gain their trust and convince them that the caseworkers are really there to help.

When asked about the process of a client moving from disclosure to obtaining services, one project liaison, who is also a trained domestic violence advocate answered, “Comfort levels are very important. We allow women to come to staff. Our approach is self-empowerment. We let women feel in control of the process. We take the time to gain their trust by allowing them to give information at their own pace.” At this site, partly because of the high turnover of domestic violence counselors but largely because the skill and professionalism of the liaison, clients readily seek her out for assistance with domestic violence. She considers her availability the key to her success: “They feel this way because I’m here and available. I see them every day. It is less threatening because they know me. Also, everyone knows that people don’t come to me only to talk about domestic violence.” She said that because she is Latina herself and speaks

Spanish, the Latina women are especially comfortable with her. They also prefer to continue with her rather than go to the domestic violence counselor because they only want to disclose to one person: “They are embarrassed and don’t want others to know their story.”

The domestic violence counselors noted that if their client had a substance abuse problem, criminal record, or undocumented immigration status, they were less likely to seek police or legal protections against the abuser. Furthermore, when the police intervene, victims sometimes find themselves being charged with assaulting the abuser. In referring to the fact that a number of clients have criminal records, one caseworker commented, “Our clients go to jail for traffic tickets they can’t afford to pay and for fights with their boyfriends.”

### **Referrals for Other Barriers**

Domestic violence is frequently one of a number of barriers to employment and self-sufficiency facing program participants. Some may identify themselves as victims of other forms of family or sexual violence and be referred to the appropriate services. Caseworkers and the domestic violence counselor assist with referrals for other services such as healthcare, financial assistance, child care, and housing. Other barriers include mental health problems, alcohol and substance abuse, and child care for children with special needs. Several of the sites reported that the domestic violence counselor was an invaluable resource for referrals, introducing the employment services agency to a broad range of local service providers. However, for many clients the lack of transportation makes it difficult for clients to obtain offsite services.

### **Individual Counseling**

Project brochures and posters as well as agency presentations inform clients about the availability of individual counseling for those with current or past experiences of abuse.<sup>16</sup> Participants are encouraged to choose their own level and type of services; some prefer to first come in for individual counseling, others prefer to start with attending the support group. The counselor informs clients of their options and encourages them to access services at their own pace.

Project staff noted the importance of offering counseling onsite at the employment services agencies as in the past women needing such services seldom followed up on offsite referrals. In some cases the women did not seek offsite services for fear the abuser might follow them to the domestic violence services agency and punish them for going. One manager said at her agency, the counselor is available in the early evening hours when the computer lab is open so that clients can schedule counseling appointments after class. Although caseworkers were generally satisfied with the accessibility of the domestic violence counselor, one noted that the agency needed to be vigilant about ensuring access because “you never know when the situation will arise that a person comes today and wants help but the counselor isn’t here, and they might not come tomorrow.”

The domestic violence counselors emphasized the need to create a welcoming and therapeutic physical environment in their office, one that would help put a client at ease and make it conducive to therapy and counseling, e.g., comfortable chairs, toys for children, soft lighting, and plants. In addition to informing

---

<sup>16</sup> Given the parameters of the project, only those clients who had been abused by an intimate partner within the past year were given the option of participating in the research part of the Kraft project. However, domestic violence services were available to all clients regardless of when they had been abused. Clients at the employment services agency also reported experiences of abuse from other family members and of sexual violence, and were referred to other agencies specializing in these services.

the clients that they are not required or expected to leave the abuser and that the police do not have to be involved, like caseworkers, the counselors also tell clients if there is a partner agency with expertise in their cultural or language groups where they could obtain services. In general, the need for counseling services in Spanish and other languages exceeds their availability. During individual sessions, the counselor also assists clients in coordinating services for their children.

In their interviews, participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to receive counseling and discussed the benefits they derived from it. One woman said that after she learned about the onsite domestic violence services, she told the counselor about being harassed by abusive phone calls from her ex-husband two years after their separation. The counselor helped her obtain an unlisted telephone number and install caller ID and privacy manager so she could screen her calls. Another participant said that she prefers individual counseling and no longer attends the support group. She added, "I've always felt like I have no one to talk to. I have gotten a lot of positive feedback from the services. I can handle situations. I've built up my self esteem and I've learned not to blame myself."

Through individual sessions, the counselor can address the specific and changing circumstances of the client, helping her develop and maintain a safety plan for herself and her children. One participant said the counselor helped her prepare for the abuser's release from jail. "He's so obsessive. The counseling helped me think things through and gave me support." In her interview, another woman enthused, "I loved counseling. At first I didn't want to go. I was embarrassed. Most girls would just say 'leave.' But the counselor didn't."

Furthermore, counseling assists survivors of abuse prepare themselves for the workplace. Some domestic violence victims require specific types of counseling and support for job placement and retention. Often victims of recent and severe abuse suffer from post-traumatic stress and may find certain types of work environments threatening and may not be ready for jobs with higher levels of responsibility and stress. For example, one participant told CIR, "I want to work but I need to heal. I still get nightmares. The abuser is still around and it's very scary." A caseworker suggested that the domestic violence counselor educate caseworkers so they can better understand the steps between disclosing and seeking domestic violence services and becoming employed and self-sufficient.

The counselor's knowledge about resources and ability to help clients access them opens doors for clients and their children. In addition to counseling, safety planning, support groups, and shelter placement, one client enumerated the other services her counselor helped her obtain: parenting classes, housing placement, legal advocacy for filing for divorce, and food and cleaning supplies. She concluded, "In every area of need, they provide resources."

## **Group Sessions**

Depending on the schedule and requirements of the site, some types of group sessions were an integral part of the overall program and attendance was mandatory. However, attendance at group sessions explicitly designated as domestic violence support groups was optional. All of the sites had group sessions, which offered more in-depth information about topics related to domestic violence. In consultation with the domestic violence counselor and in response to the interests and needs of participants, each of the sites developed names and activities for their groups. For example, sites termed group sessions "Healthy Relationships" and "Barriers to Employment" rather than identify it as a

domestic violence support group.<sup>17</sup> In this way domestic violence is brought up as a recurring theme in the context of relationships and employment but is not the exclusive focus.

Allowing participants to name their group and plan special events encourages their sense of ownership in the process. Domestic violence counselors found that this approach provided gradual exposure to domestic violence-related issues, giving group members time to feel more comfortable in addressing them. Another site offered separate men's and women's "focus groups" during which participants discussed parenting and topics related to family relationships and their impact on finding and keeping a job. These focus groups also gave participants the opportunity to further discuss what they were learning during the weekly domestic violence educational sessions. Each of the sites developed a curriculum for the group sessions, incorporating videos, discussion topics, and creative activities such as making a quilt or a group journal.<sup>18</sup> To make the sessions more attractive and accessible, one of the sites provided food and child care and had the participants select a monthly theme for the weekly meetings.<sup>19</sup>

Where the interest was strong, sites also established support groups that were explicitly for survivors of domestic violence. For those who wanted to attend domestic violence support groups at locations other than the employment services agencies, they were referred to offsite support groups. One of the domestic violence counselors observed that some participants preferred offsite community-based support groups as they offered the combination of childcare, confidentiality vis a vis the employment services agency, and exposure to participants who were more diverse in their progress towards self-sufficiency.

In talking about their participation in groups, clients most commonly commented on the importance of learning that others had experiences similar to their own. One participant said that by attending group, "I heard how many suffer from domestic violence. It touched me and I thought I'm one of them." Another woman said that she liked attending the woman's focus group because "each and every one of us got to release the most disturbing part of our lives." In her interview, another woman reported that she had made connections and friends with other women at the group, adding that "at each group I learned something. It helps to see women who have gone through what you've been through."

Also important to the women was the feeling that groups were a safe and respectful place to share one's experiences and learn from those of others. One woman said, "It's my loss if I don't show up. Groups are where we get to share who we are. To be respected and protected for who we are. Many of us didn't have this growing up." Another woman commented, "We all opened up. Some started crying. We felt close and secure together. We naturally volunteer what was inside. We all felt like family." One client noted that although sometimes she prefers individual counseling to attending group, she knows that group is also important because it allows her "to listen and see that people care—learning what's going on in others people's lives and touching each other."

---

<sup>17</sup> Areas addressed in the Relationship Groups included: defining healthy relationships; understanding the effect of relationships on self-esteem, success in job readiness training and school, and finding and keeping a job; identifying what is and is not desirable in a relationship; evaluating character by observing behavior; saying no to an unsuitable person; ending an unhealthy relationship; and asserting oneself.

<sup>18</sup> Some of the videos screened in the groups included *Sleeping with the Enemy*, *The Burning Bed*, *The Gift*, *Battered*, *Dating in the Hood*, *Hostages at Home*, and *Tough Guise*.

<sup>19</sup> Group members selected seasonal themes and activities for their meetings such as an Out of School Safety Program (safety planning for children during summer vacation); Back to School Relief (school supply drive); and a Valentine Celebration, Easter Egg Hunt, and Halloween Party.

## Follow-up

The employment services agencies all seek follow-up with clients and built this into their program requirements and operations.<sup>20</sup> Domestic violence agencies typically allow clients to exercise their own discretion in determining whether to seek follow-up services.<sup>21</sup> However, the design of the Kraft program required that the domestic violence counselor be proactive in keeping women engaged in services as well as in arranging for periodic follow-up interviews. The counselors were assisted in their efforts not only by caseworkers whose responsibilities included follow-up with clients on job retention, but also by the fact that when contacting clients, they could identify themselves in a neutral manner as calling from the employment services agency. One of the caseworkers said that she attempts to contact program graduates at least once a month. During these calls she checks on employment status and asks about the client's personal life, reminding them of the onsite counselor.

Follow-up is complicated by the specific conditions of many participants' lives that make staying in contact with them difficult, for example, unstable residence with frequent changes of address and no telephone. During their intake interviews, both caseworkers and the domestic violence counselor asked clients for the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of additional contacts where they could be reached if the client moved. Despite these additional contacts, many clients could not be located for follow-up. Sites also introduced other measures to assist clients with maintaining contact such as using a service with a toll-free number to provide voicemail accounts for clients. In some circumstances, caseworkers made home visits if they had been unable to reach clients by other means.

One of the sites has monthly meetings for clients after they have started working. The domestic violence counselor attends these meetings and is available afterwards or by appointment for counseling and safety planning. Both caseworkers and domestic violence counselors noted that clients frequently cancel or do not show up for appointments with the domestic violence counselor. Reasons for this include the instability of women's lives, difficulties obtaining child care and transportation, and fear that the abuser may find out. In the opinion of one of the caseworkers, if more than a month passes without the client coming in for domestic violence services, the client usually does not access them again.

One of the domestic violence counselors developed a newsletter called *All Worked Up!* Focusing on strategies for working one's way to self-sufficiency, the newsletter was mailed to current and former participants at the employment services agency to update them on programs, services, and activities. The counselor said that the newsletter was a useful tool for encouraging women to establish or remain in contact with her. The monthly newsletter of another site does not specify the availability of domestic violence services, but encourages current and former participants to come to the agency to use the computer lab and access other services.

---

<sup>20</sup> Many of the employment services agencies have contracts that require up to two years of follow-up with clients. One of the agencies makes a "lifetime agreement" to support clients, and some clients initiate contact after months or years. Most agencies have specialists who focus on follow-up and job retention. For example, one has job retention caseworkers who typically call clients once a month for an update on their situation and their contact information. At another site, TANF clients have a service plan that requires them to contact the caseworker every week. It is the client's responsibility to call and they are sanctioned after one month of no contact.

<sup>21</sup> When asked about this lack of follow-up, domestic violence counselors said it related to considerations of client safety and self-empowerment.

# IMPACT OF THE COLLABORATION

This section discusses the observations of staff at the collaborating agencies on the ways that this project has affected the work of their agency and their capacity to serve clients. 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 and self-sufficiency.

## **Domestic Violence Services Agencies on Impact**

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. Through the Kraft project, it increased its ability to assist domestic violence victims who have little formal work experience and face multiple barriers to employment. After learning about the benefits of the collaboration, other employment services agencies have started to seek this agency's assistance in addressing domestic violence issues. Furthermore, according to a senior manager at this domestic violence services provider, its participation in the Kraft project has greatly expanded awareness about and access to their services among low-income and minority communities. The executive director of another domestic violence services agency found that the project 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.

## **Employment Services Agencies on Impact**

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 the lack of knowledge and capacity to address it. A supervisor at one of the employment services agencies said that before the Kraft project, almost nothing was being done to assist clients with domestic violence problems. In her view, caseworkers had misconceptions about the effects of domestic violence and were skeptical or did not believe it could be a serious barrier to employment. According to the director of the agency, the collaboration's benefits to the agency 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."

The director of another employment services agency commented that in the past the agency primarily served veterans and injured workers, focusing on vocational skills. Although domestic violence issues were present all along, case managers were not trained to address them and resisted doing so. The agency now serves a larger number of TANF clients and the Kraft project has been important for building its capacity to assist clients who have a greater need for support services for domestic violence, housing, substance abuse, and other health problems.

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.”

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.”

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.” She said that by raising issues related to domestic violence, caseworkers were able to address complex emotional barriers that keep clients from finding and keeping jobs. Caseworkers and clients alike became better informed about domestic violence as a social issue that affects women, children, men, and communities as well as employers.

Moreover, since the agency’s curriculum covered domestic violence along with other barriers to employment, caseworkers came to better understand the need for supportive services. 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. I’m really content with what Kraft has brought to the agency.” Like others interviewed by CIR, this caseworker also referred to the impact of the program on retention: “It made it clearer why we weren’t holding people and motivated us to deal with the issue of retention. Before we had about 40 percent placement with low job retention; our placements are 78 percent now with higher retention rates.”

Agency staff and clients were also asked for their suggestions on ways to improve the collaboration and the domestic violence services provided at the employment services agency. Several felt there was a need for more attention to the needs of specific groups, including older workers and undocumented immigrants. One participant suggested that onsite meetings for people in recovery would be helpful.<sup>22</sup> Another participant felt there was a need for self-sufficiency planning, which would help calculate the effects of wage increases on other family resources. In her case, small increases in her income were undercut by much larger reductions in vital work supports such as housing and child care assistance.

## **Post-project Plans**

Each site had developed specific plans for continuing to provide some level of domestic violence services after completion of the Kraft project. These plans included encouraging staff at the employment services agency to make referrals directly to the domestic violence services agency, and having one or more staff members become the agency’s domestic violence specialist by completing the 40-hour domestic violence training. Some of the domestic violence services providers agreed to continue to offer periodic training to caseworkers. One of the employment services agencies noted that they planned to incorporate domestic

---

<sup>22</sup> This person specifically suggested meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA).

violence issues into planning and evaluation of new programs. One of the sites arranged for a social worker to facilitate its domestic violence educational sessions so that clients continue to receive information about the issue and referrals to services. The agency also was investigating the possibility of a clinical social work intern to offer onsite counseling to clients.

In addition to the project impacts discussed by staff members at project sites, one of the desired project outcomes was to assist the agencies in making the case to attract continued funding for the collaboration after the Kraft grant was completed. Due to an increasingly difficult grant-seeking environment in 2002 and 2003, only one of the sites was successful in obtaining the private funding necessary to continue the collaboration through mid-2004. The other sites expressed disappointment that funding was unavailable and staff and clients regretted the loss of the onsite domestic violence counselor. For example, one client told CIR, "There really should be an advocate here. The support services are so needed. It will be a real loss when the counselor leaves."

## 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.

# CENTER FOR IMPACT RESEARCH

Founded in 1975, the Center for Impact Research (CIR) focuses its work on issues of economic and social justice. CIR uses community-based research to advocate for and achieve changes in public policy and programs. The Center works collaboratively with diverse partners, who are all striving to eliminate the fundamental causes of poverty and injustice. CIR is focusing its current work in four project areas: Working Families; Children and Adolescents; Seniors; and Alternatives to Incarceration.

CENTER FOR IMPACT RESEARCH  
926 N. WOLCOTT  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60622  
773.342.0630  
[WWW.IMPACTRESEARCH.ORG](http://WWW.IMPACTRESEARCH.ORG)