

ACTIVIST DIALOGUES

HOW DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS IMPACT
WOMEN OF COLOR AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

ASIAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER INSTITUTE
AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, INCITE!
WOMEN OF COLOR AGAINST VIOLENCE,
INSTITUTE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN
THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY,
NATIONAL LATINO ALLIANCE FOR THE
ELIMINATION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE,
NATIONAL NETWORK TO END VIOLENCE
AGAINST IMMIGRANT WOMEN, AND WOMEN
OF COLOR NETWORK

**Family Violence
Prevention Fund**

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Foundation

**Activist Dialogues:
How domestic violence and child welfare systems impact women of
color and their communities**

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Activist Dialogues:
How Domestic Violence and Child Welfare Systems Impact Women of Color and their Communities."

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**Family Violence
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ACTIVIST DIALOGUES:
**HOW DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS IMPACT
WOMEN OF COLOR AND THEIR COMMUNITIES**

Produced by:

Family Violence Prevention Fund in collaboration with:

Asian and Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence

Incite! Women of Color Against Violence

Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community

National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence (Alianza)

National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women

Women of Color Network

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The Family Violence Prevention Fund is extremely grateful to the many individuals who helped make the Activist Dialogues possible. Over 500 people contributed to the content of this document and moreover, created the spirit that brought the name to life. The Activist Dialogues were more than meetings to discuss the issues; they evolved into safe spaces to share experiences, research, ideas and feelings of sadness, outrage and hope.

Special thanks go to Beckie Masaki for inviting the Family Violence Prevention Fund to help facilitate the project and for her leadership in building bridges between the Greenbook Initiative and the Activist Dialogues. Thanks to P. Catlin Fullwood for her thoughtful yet tenacious approach to the issues at hand and for keeping the process real.

We are indebted to the following individuals for taking a chance and initiating the project in their organizations: Beth Richie, Kata Issari, Oliver Williams, Shelia Hankins, Chic Dabby, Pualani Enos, Gail Pendleton, Adelita Medina, Jessica Vasquez and Nita Carter.

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Lonna Davis
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PROJECT ORIGINS & DESCRIPTION

The *Activist Dialogues* originated from the Greenbook and its Policy Advisory Committee, projects of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. The Greenbook was published in 1999 under its original title, *Effective Intervention in Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment Cases: Guidelines for Policy and Practice*.¹ The document offers recommendations designed to address the co-occurrence of child abuse and domestic violence. It also aims to strengthen the understanding and capacity of primary systems -- dependency courts, child protective services and domestic violence service providers. In 2001, federal agencies collaborated to establish six demonstration sites designed to implement these recommendations.²

In 2000, the Greenbook Policy Advisory Committee asked Beckie Masaki to find a means of engaging the network of domestic violence organizations and individuals on a national level.³ Ms. Masaki and Lonna Davis of the Family Violence Prevention Fund collaborated to facilitate an opportunity for a wide array of voices to contribute to this dialogue. The David and Lucille Packard Foundation generously funded the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF) for the *Activist Dialogues*. In early 2002, the FVPF invited a group of organizations to formulate their own projects, re-granting these monies to them.⁴

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The FVPF had two goals for the *Activist Dialogues*:

- To facilitate the exchange of experiences and ideas** between women, activists and practitioners; and
- To help articulate the ways race and culture influence** women's and children's interactions with the domestic violence and child protection systems.

The FVPF had five objectives for the project:

- To broaden the national conversation on the co-occurrence** of domestic violence and child welfare;
- To share resources with new partners and to increase** the number of people working on these issues;
- To support culture-specific organizations' capacity** to address these issues and to emphasize the relevance of these organizations' perspectives;
- To highlight the need to build leadership in the domestic** violence field concerning child welfare; and

To underscore the need to engage and sustain the involvement of communities in solutions to violence.

As its name implies, the *Activist Dialogues* focus on stimulating, informing and transforming conversations in order to create positive social change, respond to and prevent family violence. At the heart of this project is a desire to give people courage to engage in difficult conversations and to motivate people to cross barriers of professional disciplines, culture, race and language in order to form new partnerships and supportive relationships. This is done with a hope that innovation and fresh thinking about solutions and strategies from diverse groups of people will help us all improve the lives of women and families who experience violence.

The *Activist Dialogues* recognizes the necessity for forming partnerships with a dynamic circle of people concerned with ending violence. As Erwin and Vidales

¹ Family Violence Department of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, *Effective Intervention in Domestic Violence & Child Maltreatment Cases: Guidelines for Policy and Practice*. Reno, NV: Author. 1999. www.thegreenbook.info

² The Greenbook Initiative is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Justice.

³ Ms. Masaki is the Executive Director of Asian Women's Shelter in San Francisco and a member of GPAC.

⁴ Supplemental funding from the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence and the Race and Justice Institute contributed to the joint project of the API Institute and the National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women.

PARTNER ORGANIZATION PROFILES

note, “The civil rights movement, the battered women’s movement and other grassroots initiatives have made great strides in the last several years in recognizing that a single-axis approach to social change leaves many multiply-oppressed or highly marginalized peoples further outside the reaches of community intervention and prevention.”⁵ In the spirit of creating a multi-dimensional analysis with a variety of partners, the FVPF approached six culture-specific national organizations that focus on ending violence. The culture-specific organizations were chosen for their expertise in family violence and the diversity of constituents they engage on these issues. We intended to involve people from various geographic regions. These six partner organizations are:

- Asian & Pacific Islander Institute Against Domestic Violence;
- INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence;
- Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community;
- National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence;
- National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women; and
- Women of Color Network.

P. Catlin Fullwood, a noted community organizer, provided leadership and consultation on this project to identify practices, principles, and strategies that transcend individual projects, organizations and institutes. The FVPF supported each organization’s respective agenda by sharing resources, facilitating networking and relinquishing some authority over the process and content. Additional detail regarding the six partner organizations follows.

PARTNER ORGANIZATION PROFILES

*Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence*⁶

450 Sutter Street, Suite 600, San Francisco, CA 94108

E-mail: apidvinstitute@apiahf.org

Website: <http://www.apiahf.org/apidvinstitute>

The Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence (API Institute) is a national network of advocates, community members, agencies, professionals, researchers, policy advocates, and activists from community and social justice organizations working to eliminate domestic violence in Asian and Pacific Islander communities. The Institute functions as a national resource center and a network of organizations committed to sharing resources; developing and promoting Pan-Asian and culturally-specific community models of prevention and intervention; conducting and disseminating research; and influencing public policy.

Report: *Learning from the Experiences of Battered Immigrant, Refugee and Indigenous Women Involved with Child Protective Services to Inform a Dialogue among Domestic Violence Activists and Advocates*. The API Institute collaborated with the National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women, and received supplemental funding from the Institute on Race and Justice at Northeastern University.

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence

P.O. Box 6861, Minneapolis, MN 55406

Email: incite_national@yahoo.com

Website: <http://www.incite-national.org/>

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (INCITE!) is a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and their communities through direct action, critical dialogue and grassroots organizing.

Report: *A Dialogue: Organizing to Address Child Welfare and Domestic Violence*.

⁵ Patricia E. Erwin and Guadalupe Vidales, “Domestic Violence, People of Color and the Criminal Justice System: A Case for Prevention.” Racial Justice Papers (Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2001).

⁶ The Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence is part of the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum.

Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community

University of Minnesota, School of Social Work, 290
Peters Hall, 1404 Gortner Avenue, St. Paul, MN
55108-6142.

Email: nidvaac@che.umn.edu

Website: <http://www.dvinstitute.org/>

The primary goals of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC) are raising public awareness of domestic violence and creating a community of African American practitioners and scholars seeking to address the impact of violence across the lifespan in the African American community.

Report: *Co-Parenting Concerns of African American Battered Women.*

National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence (Alianza)

P.O. Box 672, Triborough Station, New York, NY 10035

Email: information@dvalianza.org

Website <http://www.dvalianza.org/>

The National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence (Alianza) is a national network of Latina and Latino advocates, community activists, practitioners, researchers, and survivors of domestic violence working together to promote understanding, sustain dialogue, and generate solutions to move toward the elimination of domestic violence affecting Latino communities.

Report: *Domestic Violence and Child Welfare in Latino Communities.*

National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women

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The National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women (National Network) is a broad-based coalition of more than four hundred organizations and individuals that advocate and provide services for immigrant victims of domestic violence. The National Network is co-chaired by the Family Violence Prevention Fund, Legal Momentum (formerly known as the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund), and the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers' Guild.

Report: *Learning from the Experiences of Battered Immigrant, Refugee and Indigenous Women Involved with Child Protective Services to Inform a Dialogue among Domestic Violence Activists and Advocates.* A joint project with the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence, with supplemental funding from the Institute on Race & Justice at Northeastern University.

Women of Color Network

6400 Flank Drive, Suite 1300, Harrisburg, PA 17112

Website: <http://www.nrcdv.org/>

The Women of Color Network (WOCN) is a project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. WOCN supports and promotes the leadership of women of color domestic violence and sexual assault activists as well as the development of culturally specific programs addressing domestic and sexual violence.

Report: *Forging New Collaborations Between Domestic Violence, Child Welfare And Community.*

PROJECT METHODOLOGY & LIMITATIONS

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The FVPPF collaborated with the six partner organizations to conduct research, discuss findings, share knowledge and present information. Each partner organization received a modest sum to explore the following two research questions:

How can we better help battered women and their children who are involved with the child welfare system?

What can be done to prevent more battered women and their children from becoming involved in the child welfare system?

These broad questions allowed each organization to investigate the intersection of domestic violence and child welfare within the context of the organization's own work. Each project developed specific goals and selected methods appropriate for those goals.⁷ The partner organizations' expertise, unique perspectives and credibility among their respective constituencies were instrumental to this project: the overall findings build on the individual organization's work. The FVPPF's commitment to greater inclusion of and resource sharing with communities of color influenced its collaborative approach. The FVPPF built an agenda *with* its partners, not *for* them. Moreover, partners concurred that in addition to providing a forum for the articulation and exchange of ideas and experiences, the *Activist Dialogues* created healing spaces for women, both domestic violence survivors and practitioners.

“I had lots of held in resentments and feelings that I shut down and never expressed. Fear of CPS is always haunting me. I have so many feelings of hopelessness, no control. I feel good about getting it out. It's good for me to remember where I came from... I needed this. It reminds me how precious my life and my kids are to me.”⁸

Overall, the *Activist Dialogues* reflect the contributions of more than 500 women of color: battered women involved with the child welfare and domestic violence systems, advocates, child welfare practitioners, academics, service providers and community organizers. Participants were

women of color from a variety of cultures including, but not limited to, African, African American, Brazilian, Cambodian, Caribbean, Hawaiian, (East) Indian, Latina, Native American and Vietnamese. Methods included interviews, focus groups, surveys, meetings and informal discussion groups.

This report is based on two data sources: (1) the findings from the six partner organizations, and (2) a meeting between these project teams. The meeting was convened by the Family Violence Prevention Fund, in San Francisco, in February 2003. This report describes the dialogues and ensuing recommendations made at this meeting – discussions informed by the projects that each organization had conducted. The appendices contain the summaries of each partner organization's project. Participating in the February 2003 meeting were: Lindsey Anderson (FVPPF), Angela Autry (FVPPF), Nita Carter (WOCN), Lonna Davis (FVPPF), Pualani Enos (API Institute and National Network), Catlin Fullwood (consultant), Shelia Hankins (IDVAAC), Leni Marin (National Network and FVPPF), Beckie Masaki, (Greenbook Initiative), Kelly Mitchell-Clark (FVPPF), Sherry Riley (INCITE!), Proshat Shekarloo (API Institute), and Jessica Vasquez (Alianza).

PROJECT LIMITATIONS

As noted, each partner's project had its own goals and experience. Nonetheless, many of their insights intersected. This report synthesizes the partner organizations' most critical recommendations regarding improving support for battered women involved with child welfare services and preventing these women from unnecessarily becoming involved with this system.

Certain limitations, however, must be noted. The insights documented in these projects cannot represent adequately entire ethnic or cultural groups. We understand that not all women's experiences will be included in this report.

⁷ Details on each project's methods are described in the Individual Project Summaries section of this paper.

⁸ Comments from participant of the API Institute and the National Network component of the *Activist Dialogues*.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Thus, one risk of this project is that the information offered can be misused to further stigmatize people of color. This is contrary to the spirit of this project. Instead, this report should be understood as one way to tell the stories of the often-ignored experiences of battered women of color involved with child welfare and domestic violence systems.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Communities of color, the child welfare system and the domestic violence service system are at odds with each other.⁹ Racial inequities and cultural biases result in the over-representation of families of color in the child welfare system, and deepen tensions between communities of color and the child welfare system. Mothers entrapped by domestic violence can lose temporary or permanent custody of their children because of policies that define their failure to leave as a “failure to protect.” How can these issues be addressed? How can domestic violence and child welfare systems be sensitive to the impact of race, culture and poverty on families and communities?

Culture, language and ethnic identity forge powerful bonds between family and community members. Many of these bonds thrive within – and despite – the contexts of social oppression and marginalization. Legacies of colonization, racism, sexism and discrimination, often sanctioned and perpetuated by social institutions, have circumscribed the lives of people of color. Furthermore, linguistic and cultural differences exacerbate the barriers abused mothers and their children face when they interact with domestic violence service providers and child welfare workers.

The extent and severity of the problem of child abuse have to be acknowledged, and abusive parents and family members have to be held responsible. Focusing on how race, culture and poverty are intertwined with the problem and how institutional responses view these factors is not an attempt to excuse child abuse, nor blame it on

these factors. Rather, the intent is to show that addressing the root causes of intra-familial violence must include an analysis about the effects of disenfranchisement wrought by structural problems such as racism, and to make vivid the struggles of marginalized communities so that single-system approaches are replaced by more holistic ones.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The battered women’s movement, at its inception, made significant public policy gains, identified domestic violence as a crime, established social and legal services for battered women, and raised public awareness about the problem. These agendas brought backlash and unintended consequences; the former fueled by opposition to notions of gender equity, the latter by institutional racism. Some activists assert that the successes associated with criminalizing domestic violence may have contributed to the over-representation of people of color in the child welfare, juvenile justice, and criminal legal systems.^{10,11} In addition, poor, culturally and racially marginalized women did not benefit equally from reformed systems. The movement’s focus now extends beyond the criminal legal system and involves the healthcare system, the educational system, immigrant and refugee programs and the child welfare system, to name a few. Connections to other social problems such as moving battered women out of poverty have led to battered women’s advocacy in areas such as housing and welfare law.

Advocates and activists of color and their allies have drawn attention to issues affecting immigrants, ethnic and cultural minorities, and refugees. By naming the institutional and cultural barriers that these battered women face, advocates have pushed for mitigating policies that lowered such barriers. These mitigating policies include; the right of immigrant battered women to self-petition for change of status, and sovereignty for Native women.

⁹ The term “of color” will be used throughout this paper to refer to immigrants, Native Americans, and U.S. born, non-white cultural or racial group members.

¹⁰ Ms. Foundation for Women, Safety & Justice For All: *Examining the Relationship Between the Women’s Anti-Violence Movement and the Criminal Legal System* (New York, Author, 2003).

¹¹ Anannya Bhattacharjee, *Whose Safety? Women of Color and the Violence of Law Enforcement* (Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee and Committee on Women, Population and the Environment, 2001).

Similarly, battered women’s advocacy for lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) populations, women with disabilities, deaf women, elders, youth, women in rural locations, trafficked women, etc., has raised awareness about the need for a tailored, multi-system response that can address the variety of unique issues these women face. Each of these efforts attempted to demonstrate a deeper analysis of gender violence with an emphasis on the intersectionality among race, culture, sexual orientation, citizenship status, disability, and social class with the root causes of domestic violence.

Conflicts can be found in any movement, the movement against domestic violence is not immune to them. The institutionalization of the domestic violence movement in recent years has blunted its grassroots base and deflected its power, as preoccupations about funding and the perpetual improvement of systems dominate its creative energies. So, for this project, when women of color came together to challenge institutionalized responses to the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse, they injected grassroots activism into the dialogues.

CHILD WELFARE

Families of color are over-represented in the child protection system compared to white families. The over-representation of children of color in foster care is interpreted as an indicator of cultural and racial bias. Statistics on child abuse support this interpretation because they show that incidences of child abuse are prevalent in all ethnicities and classes. Dorothy Roberts presents compelling evidence in the following statement, “[o]ne telling sets of figures is the ratio between the percentage of African American children with substantiated allegations of maltreatment compared to their representation in the state population. Because the incidence of maltreatment is equivalent across racial groups, we would expect this ratio to be 1.0. ... [T]he ratios for Black children range from 1.22 in Alabama ... to 6.94 in Minnesota.”¹²

Children’s Bureau statistics for 1999 indicate that: “Children of color are greatly over-represented among children entering the foster care system.... The largest disproportion was in African American children, accounting for just 15% of the total child population, but 27% of the children entering foster care during FY 1999.”¹³

According to a report published in 2003 by Casey Family Programs on over-representation in the foster care system:

- African American children are over-represented in the foster care population in all states except Hawai’i and Indiana;
- Native American/Alaskan Native children are over-represented in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawai’i, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin;
- Asian/Pacific Islander children are over-represented in Hawai’i; and
- Hispanic children are over-represented in Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming.¹⁴

Finally, children of color are disproportionately over-represented in the child protection system across rates of reporting and substantiations, length of time protective cases stay open, rates of removal, and length of time spent in foster care.^{15,16}

¹² Dorothy Roberts, *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare*. New York: Basic Civitas Books (2002) p. 53.

¹³ Oronde A. Miller and Rebecca Jones Gaston, “A Model of Culture Centered Child Welfare Practice,” *Child Welfare Journal* 82.2 (2003) p. 236.

¹⁴ Susan Dougherty, *Practices that Mitigate the Effects of Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality in the Child Welfare System*, Seattle: Casey Family Programs (2003) pp. 1-2. http://www.caseyfamilyprograms.org/cnc/documents/Mitigating_Disproportionality.pdf.

¹⁵ Dorothy Roberts, *Shattered Bonds*, New York: Basic Civitas Books (2002).

¹⁶ Denette M. Derezotes, “Examining Child Maltreatment and the Impact of Race in Receipt of Child Welfare Services in the United States.” *Racial Justice Papers* (2001) (Family Violence Prevention Fund).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

OVERLAPPING PROBLEMS AND SYSTEMS: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD ABUSE

In about half of all child maltreatment cases, a mother is also battered.¹⁷ In order to address the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse, policies and procedures were formulated to ensure that battered, non-offending mothers were not blamed for their children's abuse. These are set out in *Effective Intervention in Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment Cases: Guidelines for Policy and Practice*, better known as the “Greenbook.”¹⁸

In the child welfare system, domestic violence is viewed as one problem in addition to other problems, such as parental drug use; or as the direct causation, such as a child fatality caused by the mother's violent partner. The entrenched gender bias in the child welfare system, however, causes the agency to focus solely on the mother. The focus sets a standard of motherhood that should she fail to live-up to, labels her as a bad mother who failed to protect her children. Institutional racism compounds this gender bias resulting in a standard of motherhood that does not represent the experiences of the non-dominant culture. This leaves women of color, involved with the child welfare system, even more likely to be seen as failing to protect their children from violence.

Service planning also focuses on the mother. In this context, mothers are expected to take care of the problem by getting her abuser out of the home, going to a shelter, getting a restraining order, or attending a support group.¹⁹ The contradiction within the child welfare system is that although the investigation and assessment would conclude neglect, the service-plan proceeds as if it were abuse.

When domestic violence advocates started arguing for the recognition that witnessing domestic violence, essentially maternal abuse, was harmful to children, they did not anticipate that battered mothers, rather than battering fathers, would be held responsible for their children's

safety. Ironically, such unintended consequences grew out of this multi-system involvement, in which gender and race-based discrimination in separate systems converged.

“Racism is a major issue for people in our community. Because of the mistrust of systems, many people will not access services outside of the community.”²⁰

Many communities of color mistrust systems authorities, including domestic violence service organizations, criminal justice and child welfare systems, due to a history of racially and culturally biased treatment. This uneasy relationship can perpetuate violence, and make women of color reluctant to report domestic violence for fear of getting trapped “in the system” where they risk losing either their children to child protective services, their immigration status, or their husbands, fathers and brothers to the prison industrial complex.²¹ Neighbors are reluctant to intervene because they do not know what to do and/or because they do not want to be responsible for getting “in people's business,” particularly when the result is likely to be state intervention.

Ending violence requires more than responsive service systems. As Fullwood notes, “[w]hile appropriate services and responsive institutions are important components in the effort to counter family violence, it takes more than that to generate and sustain real change.”²² While services like shelters or support groups increase women's and children's safety, they do not stop men's violence. Similarly, incarceration or the removal of children cannot alone deter violence.

Systems become invested in their procedures: they often have a circumscribed view of the “help” they can provide and risk becoming inflexible in the face of insufficient resources. Systems alone cannot address social problems. What is also needed is political will, access to plentiful resources, community engagement and the development of social capital to effect social change. Investing in com-

17 Family Violence Department of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, *Effective Intervention in Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment Cases: Guidelines for Policy and Practice*, Reno, NV (1999).

18 Ibid.

19 Fernando Mederos, *Accountability and Connection with Abusive Men in the Child Welfare System*, San Francisco: Family Violence Prevention Fund (2004).

20 Comment from participant of the WOCN component of the *Activist Dialogues*.

DIALOGUES & RECOMMENDATIONS

munities is an essential component for sustainable social change. These are the pivotal points we now turn to in the Dialogues and Recommendations section.

DIALOGUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The most striking feature of the *Activist Dialogues* is that every partner organization went into its community without hesitation to learn directly from members of the community about their experiences with systems, including survivors of domestic violence. Wherever possible, participatory action research models were used. Recommendations were informed by these investigations and made with the aim of improving interventions in the child welfare and domestic violence systems. Ultimately these works are anchored in a passionate conviction to strengthen families and communities.

At the meeting in February 2003, the dialogues and ensuing recommendations were rich and provocative, with overlapping and recurring themes. These are grouped as follows:

**Addressing Discrimination, Improving Systems
Contextualizing Culture, Increasing Competency
Engaging Communities
Enhancing Leadership of Women of Color, and
Holistic Approaches to Helping Families.**

Although these topics were separated for the purpose of keeping the discussions focused, they are interrelated and intersect repeatedly. The *Dialogues* sections offer analysis and describes some of the common findings and issues, while the *Recommendations* section addresses these issues. Thus, critiques and system changes go hand in hand, and are offered in the spirit of constructive engagement and strengthening communities.

ADDRESSING DISCRIMINATION, IMPROVING SYSTEMS

Dialogues

Mothers and children in domestic violence and child welfare systems can experience discrimination based on race, gender, economic status, English language skills, immigrant status and culture. They are also confronted by confusing, often inscrutable systems. Clearly, poor women of color encounter multiple barriers: the lack of access to services, authorities withholding information about available services or not offering them as an option, language barriers, lack of care and professionalism of caseworkers or advocates, and a lack of cultural understanding. Furthermore, mothers involved with the child welfare system were often uninformed of their rights to legal representation or language interpretation, and thus were unable to assert them. These issues were particularly true for monolingual (most often Spanish-speaking) women.

The juvenile and family court system is difficult to understand. This lack of understanding is compounded by discrimination based on gender, language, class and race.²³ Activists described many battered women involved in the child welfare and judicial system who did not realize, sometimes until a year into the legal process, why they were in court. Battered women at risk of losing temporary or permanent custody of their children felt bewildered, angry and dismayed by their double victimization.

In addition, gender bias can mean that the child welfare system does not adequately grasp the complicated dynamics of domestic violence. The system bias results in blaming abused mothers for “failing to protect” their children and believes batterers more often than battered women. All of this shows antipathy to battered mothers, which may them feel ignorant or resentful and angry with the system.

²¹ Note that some people prefer not to use this term, as it implies that the incarceration system generates economic development when, in fact, there is little evidence to indicate that there is an economic development value to the incarceration system/prison industrial complex.

²² Catlin Fullwood, Preventing Family Violence: Community Engagement Makes the Difference, San Francisco: Family Violence Prevention Fund (2002) p. 2.

²³ Child protection removals are done by these two courts.

DIALOGUES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

Recommendations centered around system improvements as a means of addressing racial and gender discrimination:

Deepen understanding about multiple oppressions.

This includes raising awareness among child welfare and domestic violence staff about the connections between the multiple forms of oppression that limit the options for marginalized women. For example, advocates should understand that systematic oppression manifests itself when African American women are reluctant to call the police because of their experiences with institutional racism or when lesbian mothers remain silent fearing outing or ostracism.

Provide learning opportunities about gender issues, and how they intersect with socio-economic status, structural poverty, and racial discrimination. For example, systems should understand the discriminatory impact of when poor, stay-at-home mothers are perceived as lazy and their wealthier counterparts are seen as nobly sacrificing career for family.

Know the community and the county's demographics to understand the contexts of people's lives and how systems interventions will affect them. For example, it is important to distinguish health disparities arising out of poverty as opposed to neglect, or how the lack of, or access to transportation affects a mother's ability to visit her children.

Inform community members about child abuse, the laws against it, the policies and procedures of the child protective system, the intent behind them, and the resources available to strengthen families. Information can be distributed in public service announcements, community meetings, schools, places of worship, child care centers, stores, refugee resettlement organizations, etc.

Launch a *Know Your Rights* campaign for parents

and children involved with the child welfare system. In these research projects, mothers repeatedly report not being informed of their rights, and out of confusion and fear, being unwilling to ask about them. This information will empower them to advocate for themselves and for their children. Hence, Child Protective Services (CPS) should advise parents of their legal rights, provide paperwork and explanations of what is going on in their case, and above all treat parents with respect.

Promote joint advocacy and collaboration: develop mechanisms for dialogues and case-sharing between child welfare workers and domestic violence service providers that promote advocacy for families where domestic violence is present.

Conduct better investigations on child abuse/neglect reports, particularly when the report comes from batterers, who have been using systems to further harm their partners.

Improve assessment and intake procedures to guide CPS workers to determine more clearly if a mother's experience of domestic violence is enough to prompt child removal from the home and to consider other child protection responses.

Review and revise existing policies and current standards for defining child abuse when there is a co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse in order to prevent penalizing battered mothers by separating them from their children.

Define removal policies and practices so families, attorneys, practitioners and domestic violence or other advocates can be clear about how to prevent child removal that harms families and penalizes abused mothers.

Provide more preventative services before violence escalates, such as offering more parenting education, helping people who are in trouble rather than punishing them, and assisting them in meeting their basic needs.

Enhance the child welfare system’s practices to work more closely with men and fathers. Participants described how the onus on, and compliance required of, mothers means that there is very little or no focus on men who use domestic violence.

Develop instruments that allow workers and advocates to screen for their own racial and gender bias in their interventions and enable these issues to be covered in supervision.

Improve caseworker training and provide them with support and resources. Ensure through supervision that they are doing the right thing for families and not making decisions in isolation. In their training on domestic violence, teach them to recognize the tactics used by batterers to avoid falling for their tricks.

Develop mechanisms that help communities hold systems accountable. These mechanisms may include:

- Parent Advisory Councils that advise the Commissioner of Child Protection or the Executive Director of its domestic violence program;
- Racial Justice Advisory Councils;
- a Women of Color Committee to review reports and address racial bias in the matter of child removals;
- and a Foster Care Watch, similar to the Court Watch program.

2. CONTEXTUALIZING CULTURE, INCREASING COMPETENCY

Dialogues

The importance of being aware of women’s and children’s cultural contexts was central to the discussions throughout the *Activist Dialogues*. All participating organizations did their work with cultural minorities --African Americans, Asians, Hawaiians, Latinas and pan-ethnic groupings. These ethnic groups included immigrants, refugees, indigenous and American-born women. Themes of cultural misunderstanding, isolation, clash,

and marginalization permeated their narratives; sometimes cultural pride had a strong presence, sometimes an elusive one.

Discrimination based on culture included assumptions about gender roles, English proficiency, immigrant status, acceptable child rearing practices, and narrow definitions of family. For example, a lack of English proficiency in immigrant women was equated with being uneducated or dumb. Assumptions about gender roles based on stereotypical notions of culture influence caseworker-client interactions and expectations of how well mothers will utilize resources. Family structures that do not fit the conventional norm of the nuclear family can be dismissed or devalued. The most frequent issue discussed was how child-rearing practices outside of mainstream culture are, at best, misunderstood and at worst, pathologized. Mothers described how child welfare workers did not seek explanations from them about their cultural values or how their child-rearing practices are rooted in them.

“The field is filled with stereotypes based on race and culture. How can they serve women who they have no respect for?”²⁴

The importance of bi-lingual, bi-cultural advocates and workers that reflect the cultural and linguistic demographics of the families being served was reiterated by all the partner organizations. They were, however, wary that merely increasing the numbers of people of color working in these systems without granting them the authority and power to make systemic changes indulges tokenism.

Women of color were not uncritical of their culture, nor oblivious to how it contributed to their internalized devaluations. They noted the oppressive gender denigrations from their own families, as well as their struggles to cope with American culture, to understand their acculturated children, and to deal with changing gender roles.

²⁴ Comment from participant in the WOCN component of the *Activist Dialogues*.

DIALOGUES & RECOMMENDATIONS

But, because of the discrimination they face, women of color feel that the beauty and strengths of their culture are invisible to systems and they are too powerless or defeated to render them visible.

Recommendations

Analyze and address cultural needs in advocacy and service design, utilizing staff knowledge and input. Incorporate staff knowledge about cultural competency and the communities of color they represent into the development of in-service trainings and curricula designed by consultants.

Develop Report Card benchmarks on cultural relevancy and competency of services and systems. Given that both systems and their leadership have been grappling with cultural competency for years, such public scrutiny can spur changes and insist on system accountability.

Develop cultural competency curricula that is relevant to the casework that child welfare and domestic violence workers do and allows practitioners from dominant cultures to reflect on and acknowledge their own privilege to mitigate cultural, racial and gender bias.

Establish innovative teaching strategies for staff to learn about immigrants, including their culture, immigration histories, experiences in socio-political upheavals, gender roles, and parenting philosophies. Such knowledge enhances rapport with clients and informs workers about their special situations. For example, staff may learn that removing a child from a family that came from a war zone or refugee camp may evoke flashbacks and trauma associated with war-time experiences.

Match child welfare caseworkers to families of color and immigrant families according to their language abilities and cultural frames of reference.

Decrease the burden on people of color working in systems. All too often they are expected to defend the value of their work and their analysis of their community's best interests, in addition to being over-utilized and under-resourced.

Provide services and translated materials, including reports, Know Your Rights brochures, plans, instructions, etc., in the language of the family through either bi-lingual, bi-cultural staff or trained interpreters.

Observe federal mandates to provide interpretation and translation. Social service and public agencies receiving federal funds are legally obligated to serve all ethnic groups and people who speak limited or no English.²⁵

Improve or create mechanisms to hold agencies ac-countable for providing culturally relevant programming and services.

Develop partnerships between child welfare systems and domestic violence community-based organizations that serve ethnic/culturally-specific groups, and provide ways to fund such partnerships. It is important to recognize and utilize the expertise that resides in community-based and culture-specific organizations.

Establish more access to bi-lingual lawyers to repre-sent mothers in court, and provide better orientation to the legal system for clients.

3. ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

Dialogues

The starting point for every project in the *Activist Dialogues* was the community: be it ethnic communities served by these systems, or the community of professionals who work in them. This is an exemplary stance because, generally, practitioners do not turn to the communities they serve for guidance. Their methodologies also reflected this commitment. For example, the report on immigrant and indigenous women conducted focus

²⁵ Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

groups with battered women involved in the child welfare system.²⁶ However, community researchers were recruited well before focus group members. They received a two-day training that developed their knowledge of the issues and their skills, and stimulated them to contribute to other aspects of the research design. The activity deepened their connections to the community from which they later recruited focus group members. Researchers began to recognize the reluctance, trepidation and pain focus group participants might experience, so attention was lavished on them to foster safety and healing. These steps were all crucial to getting true community engagement and a willingness to trust the researchers.

In many communities of color, people distrust the child welfare and domestic violence systems and do not believe these systems represent their best interests. There are problems with system accountability and sensitivity. For example, case workers inexplicably change reunification plans and children get little explanation at the time of removal. These actions can traumatize both mothers and children further. In regards to domestic violence service providers, confidentiality protects the safety of women, but it shrouds the problem in secrecy and keeps battered women unaware of the existence of services. What if, as one participant asked, domestic violence shelters proclaimed “in neon lights” their presence as safe spaces for women and children? Would that increase a community’s ownership of the problem and protectiveness of its safe spaces?

Communities organize against crime and drug dealers, but they have done so less vigorously against domestic violence and child abuse. Discussions at the *Activist Dialogues* emphasized the importance of community-based responses to help families of color. Listening and responding to community members’ needs, providing opportunities for them to inform and lead efforts to prevent and respond to violence, and developing community leadership are some of the steps towards remov-

ing the barriers between communities and systems. Supporting such efforts will lead communities to define new and alternative strategies for organizing against domestic violence and child abuse. One woman in a focus group in Hawai’i commented, “If different ladies from your church each took one or two of the kids for a week, it gives you a chance to figure out what you’re going to do and how without having to worry about taking care of the kids because you know they are safe.”²⁷ This idea could be taken further, by organizing parents to ask the church to provide such care for children and teens.

A note of caution about romanticizing communities is warranted, because they can, and have, failed women and children. Protective cultural buffers often become eroded, even destroyed in disenfranchised communities. Individual community members, who lack supportive traditions and a dependable safety net, are not liable if they fail to take action. Furthermore, the relationships community members have to systems and to each other are inextricably linked, and social conditions of racism and poverty influence these relationships. These relationships need to be better understood.

Hence, making long-term investments in improving the social and economic conditions in communities are indicators of meaningful community engagement. Time, effort and resources must be invested into community building, while simultaneously recognizing racial and cultural differences and divisions. The goal should be to help communities develop strategies for greater control over the quality of life of its members and to enhance their own power to create change.

Recommendations

In this section, we offer recommendations on engaging in community building as a means of raising awareness about and preventing family violence, galvanizing survivors, building support for nonviolence, establishing system accountability, and strengthening individuals,

²⁷ Comment from participant of the API Institute and the National Network component of the *Activist Dialogues*.

DIALOGUES & RECOMMENDATIONS

families and communities.

Focus on and invest in community-based, community-driven responses to violence. For example,

- fund and implement community-based research (defined, evaluated and controlled by the community),
- select a community and implement a pilot project to dialogue about these issues for a minimum of two years,
- document stories of battered women of color and their children,
- document what has worked in communities to end violence against women while addressing the needs of children, and
- document 1000 community actions to end violence against women.

Provide opportunities and resources for community members to develop solutions. People need safe places to gather and talk about the complex issues that face them. These meetings could help break through isolation in communities, offer hope and serve as a clearinghouse for information.

Build community interest in women's and children's physical and emotional safety. Create strategies that reduce battered women's isolation and increase support in order to prevent domestic violence, child abuse and child removal. Foster networks between communities grappling with similar issues, such networks can help with problem-solving and sharing solutions and strategies.

Build critical thinking and analytical skills among community members; contextualizing the experiences of people of color by providing information about the various connections between social institutions, social issues and legacies of discrimination. Address divisions within communities including multi-racial and multi-cultural identities, sexual orientation, and class differences.

Support the leadership of survivors without tokeniz-

ing them. Compensating them for their participation can avoid tokenization. These women could become powerful mentors by connecting up with new cases in the system, accompanying mothers in the child welfare system to meetings, working with them to understand and negotiate with caseworkers.

Identify community leaders to talk about child maltreatment and domestic violence, and support them in speaking to the media and at community forums, etc.

Include a broader cross-section of people in the analysis of and generation of alternative responses to family violence. Reach out to others who focus on related issues (e.g., union organizers, immigrant rights workers, guardians ad litem, formerly battered women of color).

Find new ways to deal with family abuse that involves parents and community. Hold workshops for different ethnic groups to talk with them about domestic violence and child abuse/neglect in their community. Develop child abuse and domestic violence prevention and intervention strategies based on community input and discussion, so families and community members have access to resources and support.

Funding agencies should require that service providers work with community members to build community driven intervention and prevention strategies that people believe will work in their area. People from within communities should be hired to implement these strategies rather than hiring people who may have higher educational degrees but have no knowledge about, or investment in, the community.

Create accountability and effective sanctions against abusers, while at the same time find ways to support changing batterer behavior. Hold fathers accountable for their actions. Many mothers said that when their cases went to court they were accused and the fathers were nowhere to be found.

Make child welfare and domestic violence service providers visible and working in community settings to mitigate distrust of these systems. For example, locate child welfare workers in schools, rather than in government office buildings, foster relationships to increase trust, and adapt the functions of caseworkers to correspond to realistic needs of community members.

Develop economic resources such as jobs, education and housing that contribute to economic hope, through community partnerships.

Provide resources for community-based research that builds long-term community capacity.

Help people realize that community organizing around a single issue like domestic violence or child maltreatment is not simply about the issue at hand. The roots of these problems and their implications span out to include broader issues of racial and gender oppression.

4. ENHANCING LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN OF COLOR

Dialogues

The importance of developing and supporting the leadership of women of color working within communities, domestic violence service organizations and the child welfare system surfaced throughout the *Activist Dialogues*. People of color occupy few leadership positions in the child welfare system and domestic violence service organizations, although many people of color work in them. Furthermore, the lack of meaningful support, mentoring, and skill building opportunities for women of color who work within these systems leads to internalized oppression, burn-out, attrition and demoralization.

“Many similarities exist between women of color practitioners and the women they serve. They are also different in many ways, including access to resources and power. What they share is a core sense of isolation and

inability to be heard as women and as women of color in the child welfare system.”²⁸

Similarities between client and caseworker based on shared racial histories or experiences of racism are not dealt with explicitly. This adds to the existing tension that arises from power differentials between caseworkers and clients.

In addition to the gap between the number of white leaders and women of color leaders (although there are more people of color in management in the child welfare system), there is a lack of support for women of color who are expected to work with their ethnic communities. The issue of cultural competency is a telling one. Experts are brought in with their cultural competency curriculum, but staff from the very communities on which the training is about find their knowledge and understanding disregarded. As a result, broader analyses of racial and gender oppression are not encouraged, nor are the tools necessary to address these issues present in their communities. Even among staff, there is a lack of exchange about how systemic racism affects communities. This has the effect of silencing advocates and workers of color. Instead, meaningful dialogue and mentoring about these difficult issues can reduce tokenism and isolation. Participants agreed that having more women of color in leadership roles would be a catalyst for different services, or services being delivered in a different way. As one participant stated, “[a] lack of diversity in administrative staff...leads to traditional core services never changing.”²⁹

Given the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse, workers from both systems interact with each other. These relationships are often adversarial, but participants in *the Activist Dialogues* preferred to discuss the similarities of their perspectives and the commonalities between the experiences and needs of the families they serve. Tensions could be diffused by women of color working together collectively and supporting each other;

²⁸ Isa M. Woldegiorgis, “Racism and Sexism in Child Welfare: Effects on Women of Color as Mothers and Practitioners,” *Child Welfare Journal* 82.2 (2003) p. 284.

²⁹ Comment from participant in the WOCN component of the *Activist Dialogues*.

DIALOGUES & RECOMMENDATIONS

by creating a sense of community; and by mentoring each other on different levels inside and outside of both systems.

Leadership development at the community level was discussed in the previous section, Engaging Communities. But because of the discrimination they face, women of color feel that the beauty and strength of their cultures are invisible to systems and they are too powerless or defeated to render them visible.

Recommendations

Increase the number of women of color in leadership roles at domestic violence and child welfare agencies to reflect the populations they serve. Participants stated that this would act as a catalyst for different services and services being provided in a different way.

Enhance the leadership of women of color already in such positions by developing their negotiating, grant-writing, supervisory and training skills; and decreasing their isolation through increased networking and peer-mentoring opportunities.

Build the emerging leadership of women of color with trainings provided by people of color who have a track record of working with communities.

Identify new leadership in bi-lingual staff, under-represented minorities, and practitioners who have been clients of the system. Then, develop their leadership potential through mentoring and skills-building.

Provide peer-mentoring for people of color working in domestic violence and child welfare organizations that builds their capacity to work more effectively with communities of color and assume leadership roles.

Create women of color defined spaces for critical thought, ideas and dialogues.

Connect women of color in leadership to communities to engage in meaningful dialogues, address community concerns and become catalysts for systems change.

Increase knowledge and skills regarding grant writing, budget management, supervision, etc., so people of color are more competitive in the job market or for promotions in their agencies or organizations.

Establish forums for child welfare system and domestic violence service providers to reduce existing tensions, learn from each other, and to collaborate on changing the policies and procedures that do not serve communities of color well.

Work with allies within the system to establish better mechanisms for sharing resources and power. Consider unconventional mechanisms such as relinquishing managerial roles, establishing co-directorships, or creating more fluidity within hierarchical structures.

Identify and support women of color practitioners who are working to reform policies and practices.

Create an organized legislative agenda and decision-making apparatus focused on and led by people of color working to implement community based initiatives and solutions to family violence to gain access to and influence public policy decisions on a federal level.

5. HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO HELPING FAMILIES

Dialogue

Holistic approaches to problem-solving and healing offer a wide lens to analyze and respond to an array of contributing factors and root causes of family violence. Families involved with child welfare and domestic violence systems often deal with a broad spectrum of challenges such as poverty, poor housing, lack of medical care, run-down schools and neighborhoods, depression, substance abuse and mental health issues, all of which further compromise their well-being. The *Activist Dialogues* emphasize holistic interventions and the analyses that support them.

Holistic responses are predicated on understanding the interconnections between an array of problems, and the structural barriers that poor and marginalized families face. It also means desisting from victim-blaming or giving up on families once we realize the overwhelming nature of these intersecting problems. It means seeing women and children in the contexts of extended family systems and communities. Child welfare and domestic violence service providers do not adequately help poor women deal with related problems like substance abuse and mental health issues. Financial and employment needs are too often ignored and labeled as secondary to the violence when these issues are actually intertwined for many families. Holistic responses, therefore, could include increasing safety for women and children, decreasing the trauma related to child removal, promoting healing, moving towards economic stability, and meeting emotional needs.

“Provide support services if moms need help with cooking or shopping. Don’t take the kids away because mom needs help.”³⁰

It is clear that since many families are involved with multiple systems, cross agency collaboration has proliferated. State agencies that address child protection, domestic violence, child support, and welfare, among others, have begun to share information on the families they mutually serve. Whether information-sharing increases safety and is beneficial to families remains to be determined.

“Our approach is to have a woman leave her [abusive] relationship...[but] families are struggling to survive and stay together...”³¹

Participants reported that women of color with multiple issues are not guided adequately through these confusing systems. Furthermore, because of multi-system involvement, women are faced with contradictory demands that make it more likely that they will fail to meet their

requirements. There is also insufficient help in anticipating and preventing crises, and with post-crisis follow-up.

Another holistic approach would address the increasing need mothers have for co-parenting guidance and support. They struggle to both co-parent with a former abuser and to keep themselves and their children safe. They are looking for ways to facilitate healthy, non-abusive relationships between their children and a father who had used violence in the home. Many mothers are afraid of encountering violence during custody and visitation transfers; fearful that being in the abusive man’s presence again could spark their own unresolved negative feelings and/or allow abusive relationship dynamics to re-emerge.³²

In discussing holistic approaches, this report focuses on mothers, not on their children. This is not an oversight, but addressing children’s issues is a whole other project and lies outside the scope of this report. Similarly, we have also not explored matters affecting other family members such as grandmothers, adult siblings, etc., and friends.

Recommendations

Develop responses that make connections between domestic violence and child abuse as they are affected by structural problems linked to poverty and by personal difficulties related to mental health needs, substance abuse, etc.

Provide more financial support during crises and for long-term stability to meet needs for housing, child care, transportation, and jobs.

Define clear procedures for inter-system information sharing to promote holistic approaches, but that do not compromise confidentiality and safety.

Provide more supports and incentives for intact families and kin.

³⁰ Comment from participant in the API Institute’s component of the *Activist Dialogues*.

³¹ Comment from participant in the Women of Color Network’s component of the *Activist Dialogues*.

³² This set of concerns is from the report prepared by the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community.

DIALOGUES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Fit intervention strategies into the broader context of abused women's lives. For example, leaving a partner may be an unthinkable option for reasons that may have to do with culture, economics, housing, safety, family pressure, etc. Women in such situations still need support. Most importantly, support cannot be predicated on conditions (e.g., leaving the batterer) they cannot fulfill.

Acknowledge that formerly battered women who chose to work on healing their families in conjunction with their former abusers may still need support and resources from domestic violence programs. Women's reasons for their decisions can be economic and/or cultural and may be affected by a desire to maintain their children's attachment to their father.

Provide better services to children that include bi-lingual children's counselors. It is important to explain to them why Child Protective Services may have removed them from their home and when they will see their mother again. Mothers described how their kids were offered no explanation, no opportunity even to say good-bye and how confusing and traumatic this was for the children. Children need services that address their trauma, their sense of loss and fears around separation from parents and/or siblings.

Develop integrated programs that promote independence, such as job training, job skills, housing and English.

Involve families and key community members in decision-making and safety planning. Create structures that permit mothers, and even their teenage children, to select supportive family or community members, or other service providers to accompany and advocate for them.

Broaden the scope of services and support to include informal networks.

Develop strength-based assessments and apply them

to holistic interventions and case-management plans.

Train staff on new approaches, critical issues and trends, new developments in the field, and innovative strategies to encourage fresh approaches.

Use the arts and recreational activities to address the needs of families experiencing domestic violence because healing occurs in many forms.

INDIVIDUAL PROJECT SUMMARIES

“Learning from the Experiences of Battered Immigrant, Refugee and Indigenous Women Involved with Child Protective Services to Inform a Dialogue among Domestic Violence Activists and Advocates”

REPORT SUMMARY: JULY 2003

Project Director: V. Pualani Enos
pualanienos@hawaii.rr.com

*National Network to End Violence
Against Immigrant Women*
www.endabuse.org/programs/immigrant

*Asian & Pacific Islander Institute
on Domestic Violence*
www.apiahf.org/apidvinstitute

*Institute on Race and Justice
at Northeastern University*
www.irj.neu.edu

GOALS

- To share the voices of immigrant, refugee and indigenous women survivors of intimate partner abuse who have been involved with child protective services;
- To inform the development of policies, practices and interventions that will more effectively address the physical, emotional and spiritual health of individuals, families and communities;
- To learn how CPS and DV can be more responsive to the needs of families where DV and child abuse and neglect are present;
- To explore how community (family, friends, neighbors, church, civic organizations) can be more responsive to partner abuse and child abuse and neglect and provide support to survivors involved with CPS; and
- To experiment with a research design that accomplishes the first step of participatory research and at the same time empowers advocates and survivors.

CONSTITUENCY

30 immigrant and indigenous women – Brazilian, Latin American, Vietnamese, Hawaiian and Native American – currently or previously involved with the child protection system participated in focus groups in Hawai’i and Massachusetts.

18 community researchers recruited participants and conducted focus groups and translated findings. A special effort was made to recruit researchers from the same ethnic communities as the participants were from; some had been involved with CPS as clients themselves.

Massachusetts

Three groups conducted in participants’ native languages; one group conducted in English.

Most participants resided in the greater Boston area; some were from central and southern Massachusetts.

Hawai’i

Five focus groups of Hawaiian women, including one Native American, from five of the islands.

Groups were conducted in native language and English.

DIALOGUES & RECOMMENDATIONS

PROJECT DESIGN

This social action research project included three separate methods of information gathering.

9 Focus Groups

The majority of effort and time was devoted to this component of the project. 30 mothers women participated in nine groups.

18 Community Researchers facilitated and translated the groups.

Surveying Advocates

74 advocates and service providers who work with battered immigrant, refugee and indigenous women completed a written survey to provide context to the focus group findings.

Key Informant Interviews

Key informants worked for systems related to child protection interventions including CPS staff and supervisors, shelter workers, attorneys, domestic violence advocates, and family law attorneys.

KEY INSIGHTS

■ Defining Culture and Community:

Many participants did not have a framework for analyzing identity and place within community unlike those of us who are accustomed to working cross-culturally and studying cultural competence. Despite living in richly diverse environments and surrounded by distinct cultural affiliations, many did not immediately identify as part of a particular ethnic group.

More than a few of the women identified as having no affiliation with any community presently or in the past, stating they felt completely isolated and alone. This they attributed to growing up in an abusive family, to the isolation resulting from living with an abusive partner or the stigma associated with CPS interventions or public assistance programs.

■ Child Welfare System is Overwhelming & Confusing:

Participants described feeling hopeless and overwhelmed because they reported that:

- Caseworkers are always changing the rules and adding more conditions to their promises;
- They are required to complete an impossible amount of tasks for their service plans;
- Many of the services are irrelevant to them;CPS threatens to take away their children if they do not file for a restraining order against their abuser.
- CPS threatens to take away their children if they do not file for a restraining order against their abuser.

“Get an advocate and have them help you go to supervisors to get services and to be treated right.”

■ Speaking Up:

Providing women with a safe place and time to share their experiences around CPS served two important purposes. First, many women stated that sharing in this context was a healing experience. Also, freedom to talk about these about abuse and their involvement with CPS amongst others who were similarly situated allowed participants to critically analyze their experiences and their effects.

“I had lots of held in resentments and feelings that I shut down and never expressed. Fear of CPS is always haunting me. I have so many feelings of hopelessness, no control. I feel good about getting it out. It’s good for me to remember where I came from...I needed this. It reminds me how precious my life and my kids are to me.”

■ What Family, Friends and Neighbors Can Do:

Trust in communities and neighborhoods needs to be restored in order for people to reach out in a domestic violence or child abuse situation. Participants were reluctant to rely on community and neighbors and unsure of what they would or could do to help. More attention needs to be given to help community members identify ways that they can be helpful. Some ideas shared by women in the groups include:

INDIVIDUAL PROJECT SUMMARIES

- Neighbors could provide respite and care for children.
- Family and friends can help women complete different parts of their service plans.

“I’d hold rallies and have women who’ve been through it share what they went through and how they got through it. I’d have more women who understand or know about family background, and how we were raised, working with families. People have to realize it’s generational. I’d help the kids deal with the affects of taking them away. Make sure that if women complete service plan caseworkers cannot add more stuff for them to do.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants had several suggestions for the child welfare system:

Treat parents with respect.

- a. CPS should advise all parents of their legal rights. CPS should provide paperwork that explains what is going on.

Improve training of caseworkers and provide them with support and resources.

- a. Supervise caseworkers to ensure they are doing the right things for families. Make sure that caseworkers do not make big decisions in isolation.
- b. Provide emotional support for caseworkers.

Hire people who have been through the system or who have had relevant life experiences.

- a. Conduct focus groups with women who have been through CPS so the agency knows what is really needed from the client’s point of view.
- b. Ensure that workers who are making decisions about families respect cultural values.

Do more thorough investigations BEFORE taking action.

- a. Take the time to learn about each situation and don’t make assumptions; don’t take kids away unless there are no other choices.

Care and learn about domestic violence.

- a. Workers should be able to recognize the tactics used by abusive partners instead of falling for their tricks

Provide more preventative services before violence escalates.

- a. Provide more parenting education, especially in the home, help people to find ways to meet their basic needs for food, clothing etc.

Help people who are in trouble rather than punishing them.

“Provide support services if moms need help with cooking or shopping. Don’t take the kids away because mom needs help.”

Provide language services for all clients in all situations where people do not speak English as a first language.

- a. Be sure that services are offered in the client’s language.

Take the time to learn about cultural contexts and values.

- a. Seek out bi-cultural advocates well trained in domestic violence and child abuse/neglect.
- b. CPS should recognize that domestic violence happens in all cultures.

Need to provide better services to children.

- a. It is important to explain to kids what CPS is for. People need more education about what services are available and how to get the services. CPS should provide a child with a counselor who explains why the batterer is doing what he is doing and what mom needs to do to protect kids.

Find new ways to deal with family abuse that involve parents and community.

- a. Have workshops/seminars for the particular ethnic groups to talk with them about domestic violence and child abuse/neglect in their community.
- b. Funding agencies should require that service providers work with community members to build community driven intervention and prevention strategies that people believe will work in their area. People from within communities should be hired to implement these strategies rather than hiring people who may have higher educational degrees but have no knowledge about, or investment in, the community.

“A Dialogue: Organizing to Address Child Welfare and Domestic Violence”

Project Director: Kata Issari

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence

www.incite-national.org

GOALS

- To promote a national dialogue of radical feminists of color about child welfare and intimate partner violence;
- To promote networking and further collaboration at the community grassroots level in order to free women of color, their children and communities from the interwoven oppressions they face;
- To further develop a critique and analysis of the current strengths and weaknesses of the child welfare system as it works with battered women of color;
- To further develop a critique and analysis of the current strengths and weaknesses of domestic violence services as they work with battered women of color who may be involved in the child welfare system; and
- To explore alternatives to current approaches employed by both the child welfare system and the battered women’s movement.

CONSTITUENCY

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (INCITE!) is a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and their communities through direct action, critical dialogue and grassroots organizing.

35 Women of Color activists and service providers from thirteen different states who work with battered women of color and their children within and outside of formal systems participated in INCITE!’s Activist Institute on child welfare and domestic violence.

PROJECT DESIGN

Session I:

A structured discussion designed to promote information sharing as well as critical thinking by the participants, some of who had never met and most of whom had never discussed these issues with one another.

Session II:

Held during an organizing session of the INCITE! Color of Violence II Conference. A particular focus of the dialogue was community-based approaches that produced clear outcomes of benefit to that community.

KEY INSIGHTS

Five themes consistently emerged throughout the two discussions that characterize the viewpoints of most participants.

- **Dismantle systems promoting formulaic and punitive** responses for battered women of color and their children while oppressing their own workers.
- **Focus of responses must shift to community driven** approaches that promote social change and the elimination of oppression. These approaches must:
 - Vary by community;
 - Collaborate across sectors, communities and issues;
 - Be inclusive of arts and culture work;
 - Reflect community-based research; and
 - Be developed, implemented and evaluated by community members.
- **Responses that address the needs of battered women**

of color and their children must include other relevant issues facing women and communities of color. This must include a critical examination of other systems and policies that have a bearing on communities of color (e.g. all race-based public policy and all gender-biased policies).

- **Conceptualize the “good of the child” in the context** of the family and the community, when analyzing programs and determining the needs of community people, since the child’s life is not separate from these entities.
- **Realize that violence against women is symptomatic** of a broader presence of global oppression inclusive of, but not limited to racism, sexism and classism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The child welfare system must stop removing children from homes simply because domestic violence is present.

Focus on and invest in community-based, community-driven responses to violence. For example,

- Fund and implement community-based research (defined, evaluated and controlled by the community);
- Select a community and implement a pilot project to dialogue about these issues for a minimum of two years.
- Document stories of battered women of color and their children;
- Document what has worked in communities to end violence against women while addressing the needs of children; and
- Document 1000 community actions to end violence against women.

Include a broader cross-section of people in the analysis of and generation of alternative responses to family violence. Reach out to others who focus on related issues (e.g. union organizers, immigrant rights workers, guardians ad litem, formerly battered women of color).

The Greenbook Project must be more inclusive of people of color and formerly battered women.

Find mechanisms to address the child welfare system’s

oppression of workers, such as:

- Provide training developed and implemented by women of color and battered women of color that incorporates a social change analysis with confronting domestic violence;
- Do skill building about ways to be culturally accessible to battered women of color and their communities;
- Encourage worker dialogue within and between different systems;
- Encourage worker and system self-critique about how to be more woman/child friendly and how to promote healthy communities and families; and
- Generate and implement solutions to worker burnout.

Increase funding to grassroots, social change organizations.

Invest in artistic and cultural methods of addressing the needs of battered women of color and children.

Increase language accessibility of both child welfare system and domestic violence services.

Distribute more information within communities of color and the entities that serve these communities.

Help contextualize the experiences of people of color by providing information about the various connections between social institutions, social issues and legacies of discrimination.

Match child welfare caseworkers to families of color and immigrant families, according to their language abilities and cultural frame of reference.

Confront the reality that formerly battered women who choose to work on healing their families in conjunction with their former abusers still need support and resources from domestic violence programs. Women may choose to do this for a host of reasons including economic and cultural ones as well as children’s attachment to their fathers.

Define safety of women and children in the context of financial, emotional and community well being instead of focusing solely on punitive, criminal justice solutions to violence.

“Co-Parenting Concerns of African American Battered Women”

Project Directors: Dr. Oliver Williams and Dr. Carolyn Tubbs
 On behalf of the
Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community
www.dvinstitute.org

GOALS

- To develop an instrument to interview battered women concerning what they need from the fathers of their children.
- To further develop policy recommendations regarding domestic violence and child welfare out of home placement issues as they relate to African American children.

CONSTITUENCY

Among the primary goals of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC) are its dedication to create a community of African American scholars and practitioners working in the area of violence in the African American community and its aim to raise community consciousness of the impact of violence in the African American community. IDVAAC is based at the University of Minnesota. One focus group was conducted in Detroit and one in Minneapolis.

PROJECT DESIGN

20 African American women currently or previously involved with the child protection system participated. Some of these women were currently in shelter situations; some were victims of domestic violence that occurred years ago.

Focus groups were supported by:
Black, Indian, Hispanic and Asian Women in Action, a domestic violence services program in Minneapolis
Interim House, a battered women's shelter in Detroit.

Information was gathered through focus groups designed to explore the perspectives of African American women who have experienced violence concerning their expectations of formerly abusive partners in terms of co-parenting and contacting their children. Focus groups were completed in February of 2003.

In addition, a portion of the funds supported the completion of a policy paper. The intent of this paper was to examine the co-occurring issues that contribute

to out-of-home placement of African American children. Domestic violence, substance abuse and poverty are co-contributors to out-of-home placement associated with child abuse and neglect. Even when children are in the system due to neglect only, these aforementioned issues can still contribute to out-of-home placement. The paper offers recommendation for all stakeholders to consider including collective responses and systems and community collaborations.

KEY INSIGHTS

Concern for safety, especially the safety of their children, was at the core of the majority of the focus group participants' remarks on their experience and expectations for co-parenting with a former abuser.

Child Safety

- **Focus group participants explained their primary** co-parenting goal was to facilitate a healthy relationship between their children and the father while decreasing the probability that abuse would be directed toward the child.
- **These women's concerns suggest that certain** measures be enacted to ensure that children would not be kidnapped or physically and/or emotionally endangered.
- **Some women did not share these concerns. They** were convinced that their former abuser would not abuse their children. For them, a violent partner did not equate to an abusive father.

Personal Safety

- **Many women shared the worry of encountering** violence during times when children were transferred from their care to the care of the father. They were afraid that being in the abusive man's presence again would spark unresolved negative feelings and allow abusive relationship dynamics to re-emerge.
- **Participant suggestions for transferring their** children included formal arrangements involving law enforcement and child protection personnel and/or informal arrangements using staggered drop-off times at relatives' homes.
- **Women agreed that gaining clarity about the logistics** of visitation was of vital importance.
- **Many focus group participants emphasized that who** makes the decisions about the specifics of visitation was just as important as when and how the visits occur.

“Domestic Violence and Child Welfare in Latino Communities”

Project Director: Jessica Vasquez

National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence (ALIANZA)

www.dvalianza.org

GOALS

- To identify and explore the experiences of Latina women and children in the child welfare system.

CONSTITUENCY

Five agencies collaborated with Alianza for this project:

- Caminar Latino (Georgia)
- Violence Intervention Program (New York)
- Committee for Hispanic Children and Families (New York)
- East Los Angeles Women’s Center (California)
- Lideres Campesinas (California)

PROJECT DESIGN

This project included two separate methods of information gathering through the five agencies listed above.

Focus Groups & Interviews

- 33 Latina women with some form of involvement with the child welfare system participated.
- Partners conducted four focus groups and five interviews in Spanish.

Surveying Service Providers

Five agencies in New York, California, and Georgia that work with victims of domestic violence involved with child protection services in varying degrees completed a written survey about their work with these women.

KEY INSIGHTS

- **The majority of focus group participants believed** that their interaction with the child welfare system had changed them forever and traumatized their children.
- **Most of the women were involved with the child welfare system** due to domestic violence. Many of the investigations and removals due to domestic violence were the result of calls placed to the welfare office by the batterer or the batterer’s family.
- **All the women who said that they have never received** assistance from domestic violence agencies said that it because they were not aware the services existed.
- **Most of the women believe that their children have** been negatively impacted by their involvement in the child welfare system. They described the differences they see in their children’s behavior. They said that their children are more aggressive, suffer from depression, exhibit anxious behavior, are scared and confused by child welfare caseworkers interrogations and visits, have fear of being separated from their mother, academic and behavioral problems and have a negative image of their father.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Child Welfare System: Focus group participants and those interviewed recommended

That the child welfare system provide caseworkers that speak the same language as the participants and understand the cultural differences;

That the caseworkers be better trained on domestic violence and racism. Many women believed that if the child welfare caseworkers were better trained on domestic violence, fewer children would be removed from mothers;

That mothers be provided with options and services that could possibly prevent removal instead of having their children removed immediately. Those women who had their children removed, said that their children were traumatized not only by the separation from the mother, but also by the system. Those whose children were placed in non-kinship foster care had very negative and damaging experiences;

That the child welfare system conducts better investigations on reports of child abuse/neglect. In many of the participants' cases, a batterer made the reports. The participants believed that if the system conducted better investigations and provided services and resources, the involvement would not be as negative;

That the child welfare system monitor batterers more closely;

That more information should be shared with the mother. It appears that many of the women were never allowed to read reports that were made on them and evaluations conducted. They felt deliberately kept in the dark;

That information provided to the mothers is written in Spanish. For the women who did receive information or reports, they were provided in English although the women could only read and speak Spanish;

That written information (in women's native language) is provided to the women on the services and

limits of the caseworker and child welfare system; **That the child welfare and criminal justice system** hold the fathers accountable for their actions. Many participants said that when their case went to court, only the mothers were accused and the fathers were nowhere to be found. There was no accountability for the fathers.

Domestic Violence Services: The women had similar recommendations for domestic violence service providers. They thought it important to have

Spanish-speaking counselors and more children's counselors;

Child psychologists available to assist the children;
More access to bi-lingual lawyers to represent them in court;

Better orientation on the legal system and shelters; and

Integrated programs that would allow for independence-programs on job training, job skills, housing and English.

Agencies surveyed echoed the sentiments of the women. Agencies called for more community resources, services and materials that are linguistically and culturally relevant, more collaboration between agencies involved with a family and more in-depth training on the dynamics of domestic violence for child welfare workers.

“Forging New Collaborations Between Domestic Violence, Child Welfare and Community”

Project Director: Nita Carter
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 Women of Color Network

A project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, a national project of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence

GOALS

The Women of Color Network (WOCN) project had two main goals:

- To provide an opportunity for women of color working in the field of domestic violence at the local and state levels to contribute to the growing dialogue around how to provide effective services to battered women with children; and
- To gather information from these service providers concerning what types of interventions they would like to see developed to respond to the needs of battered women of color and their children.

CONSTITUENCY

The WOCN supports and promotes the leadership of women of color domestic violence and sexual assault activists and the development of culturally specific programs addressing domestic and sexual violence. The National Network to End Domestic Violence helped WOCN to identify and recruit women of color working in state coalitions.

Other participants included Latinas, Asian Americans and Native Americans. 2 men of color participated. Participants hailed from 30 different states.

PROJECT DESIGN

The data for this project was collected at three intervals:

Initial Strategy Meeting

WOCN convened 27 activists of color working in the fields of domestic violence, sexual assault and child welfare for a two-day meeting in order to shape the survey questions and discussion tools.

WOCN Leadership Institute: Miami

WOCN surveyed its members and facilitated discussions around issues related to child welfare, domestic violence and communities of color.

WOCN Leadership Institute: Green Bay

WOCN surveyed its members and facilitated discussions around issues related to child welfare, domestic violence and communities of color.

KEY INSIGHTS

Participants saw the need for:

- More collaboration between the systems;
- More cross-training of workers from domestic violence and child welfare and training on how to deliver culturally relevant services;
- More outreach and education about programs and services;
- Continuing systems advocacy; and
- More supportive services to address the needs of battered women living in poverty like housing, transportation, childcare and health care.
- The ways racism and discrimination impact women were themes woven throughout much of the dialogues.

“Racism is a major issue for people in our community.

Because of the mistrust of systems, many people will not access services outside of the community.”

The groups provided many examples of how institutionalized racism and discrimination impacted women from their communities when accessing and utilizing both child welfare services and domestic violence services. Excessive child removal was one example participants used to illustrate institutional racism.

- Respondents viewed the community as critical partners if not the leaders in developing services.
- A lack of resources to assist poor women of color with basic survival needs reinforces child removal in many communities of color. Currently, there exist few programs to support women in maintaining their home and family. And for women choosing to remain with their abuser options are even more limited.
- Little to no financial and emotional support for family members able to take in a battered woman’s children until she gets on her feet. When children are placed with relatives through the child protective service agency those relatives must adhere to child protective services intervention but receive little or in most cases no monetary or other supports.
- Battered women from communities of color often do not know their rights and there is a lack of funds for adequate legal representation and/ or interpreters. Cases are often opened and no one ever really sits down with the woman and explains her rights or her options. Women for whom English is a second or foreign language often utilize systems without interpreters.

Trinh Mai (alias) appeared at a child protection custody hearing with no legal representation or interpreter. She did not speak English and did not understand that her 5 children were being removed. Trinh Mai did not have legal representation or an interpreter at the custody hearing. Once removed, the children were separated and placed in foster homes, which took Trinh Mai

hours to reach by bus. In order to visit her children, this mother spent entire days traveling back and forth to foster care homes, while she was also expected to obtain and maintain employment, learn English and find a suitable home for she and her children. Trinh Mai’s children have been in the system for over one year and are presently still there.

- Many domestic violence and child welfare administrators and staff appear to lack sensitivity to the barriers racism and discrimination create for women of color. These issues are rarely addressed when they design programs and attempt to assist women in planning for self-sufficiency and family preservation.

“The field is filled with stereotypes based on race and culture. How can they serve women who they have no respect for?”

- A large gap between the numbers of white leaders and women of color leaders exists in the domestic violence and sexual assault fields. There are more people of color in management in the child welfare system, but a gap exists there as well.
- There is a lack of support for the work of women of color who are expected to work with their communities. Most domestic violence programs are struggling with issues of cultural competency and outreach to communities of color. It is difficult for these programs to provide staff with a broad analysis and tools with which to work in their communities.
- What accountability measures exist to ensure that domestic violence and child welfare programs are serving everyone? There is little accountability for state domestic violence coalitions, local domestic violence programs and child welfare agencies to make their services more responsive to the needs of women and children from racial and ethnic communities of color.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The numbers of women of color in leadership in both the domestic violence and child welfare agencies should increase to reflect the populations they serve.

“A lack of diversity in administrative staff leads to traditional core services never changing.”

a Participants stated that more women of color in leadership/decision-making roles would be a catalyst for different services, or services being delivered in a different way.

b Participants would like emerging women of color leaders trained by people of color who have a track record of working with communities.

Peer-mentoring – for people of color working in domestic violence and child welfare organizations – that build the capacity of people of color to more effectively work with communities of color and assume leadership roles.

Services should come from the community and be integrated into the community. The services should be more holistic and should utilize and strengthen informal networks, community services organizations and local businesses often frequented by women.

Earmark funding & resources to further develop the capacity of culturally specific, community based, and women of color led programs.

“They are getting dollars for people who look like us, but the services are not designed for us.”

“They try to squeeze us into ‘one size fits all.’ The programs were created by people who don’t look like us.”

“When you’re looking at innovative approaches and when there are Latina or African American, Native or Asian programs, these tend to be the least funded; then they are the hardest hit.”

A “report card” for domestic violence and child welfare agencies that provide benchmarks to assess the effectiveness of their services to women from racial

and ethnic communities of color. This tool would help programs assess their strengths and weaknesses.

Recognize informal adoptions and placement by extended families as legitimate and provide them with support. Families who take in a relative’s children often need money, child-care, counseling and other supports to assist them in caring for the children.

Prevention. Domestic violence and child welfare programs should work with families and youth before violence occurs through existing programs such as after-school programs, in school programs, faith based programs, parenting programs and boys and girls clubs.

Poverty limits options for women with children. More financial supports – affordable housing/transitional housing, child care, transportation, legal services, employment development, and job placement services – are needed to assist women end the violence in their lives become self-sufficient.

For more than two decades, the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF) has worked to end violence against women and children around the world, because everyone has the right to live free of violence. Instrumental in developing the landmark Violence Against Women Act passed by Congress in 1994, the FVPF has continued to break new ground by reaching new audiences including men and youth, promoting leadership within communities to ensure that violence prevention efforts become self-sustaining, and transforming the way health care providers, police, judges, employers and others respond to violence.

Family Violence Prevention Fund

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