Group Work with Mothers Experiencing Domestic Violence and Their Children in Wisconsin

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GROWING TOGETHER ACTIVITIES

1. Focus groups with mothers experiencing domestic violence and youth

2. Evaluation of the Child Witness to Violence Project at the Sojourner Family Peace Center (SFPC) in Milwaukee

3. Three small two-year grants to culturally specific domestic violence programs
THREE GRANTS . . .

Lac du Flambeau Domestic Abuse Program and Lac du Flambeau Indian Child Welfare (Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians):
- Establish collaboration between tribal DV advocates and child protective services.

Wise Women Gathering Place (Green Bay):
- Adapt Discovery Dating healthy relationships curriculum to facilitate relationships between mothers and daughters who have lived with domestic violence.

Women’s Community Creciendo Juntos (Wausau), :
- Use popular media to increase understanding between immigrant mothers experiencing domestic violence and their children.
FOCUS GROUPS AND SUPPORT GROUPS

- Six adult focus groups = 47 women
- Two youth focus groups = 12 teens
- Support group questions = 71 children
# Adult Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Participant Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Battered mothers w/CPS involvement, multi-ethnic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Green Bay</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Battered mothers, multi-ethnic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Latina battered mothers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wausau</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Hmong battered mothers</td>
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<td>Madison</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>African-American battered mothers</td>
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<td>Superior</td>
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CHARACTERISTICS OF MOTHERS

• Recruited by local DV program
• DV survivors who had received services from the program
• Represented major nonwhite ethnic groups in WI: Latino, African-American, Native and Hmong
CHARACTERISTICS OF MOTHERS

• Most separated, all from male partners
• Living with children (except CPS)
• Still connected to local DV program
• Positive experience with DV program
ADULT FOCUS GROUPS

• First language of participants
• Facilitator was native speaker
• Advocate known to participants was present
• Simultaneous interpretation for digital recording
ADULT FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Range of questions to learn:

• Impact of DV on motherhood, children and mother-child relationships
• How DV program was helpful
• How DV programs could improve services
RESULTS

• Affirmed and amplified what we already know

• Likely affected by positive relationship with DV program
CULTURALLY-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

• Much unanimity despite cultural differences

• Satisfaction enhanced by DV services in their language provided by an advocate from their cultural community
HOW DV AFFECTS MOTHERHOOD

• Tense, stressed, living in fear
• Put partner’s needs first
• Less time and energy for children
• Poor role model for children
DV IMPACT ON CHILDREN

- Angry, fearful
- Behavioral, physical and mental health problems
- Parentified, protective of mothers
- Learned to accept and engage in violence
DV IMPACT ON MOTHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

• Less time together
• Undermines trust
• Children misunderstand mother’s protective behaviors
WHAT MOTHERS NEEDED WHILE IN CRISIS

1. Help securing permanent housing
2. Counseling and emotional support
3. Respite child care in shelter
4. Opportunities to enjoy spending time with their children
5. Activities for their children sponsored by the DV program
HOW DV PROGRAMS HAVE HELPED

• Counseling and emotional support – helped them stay strong for their children

• Helped rebuild relationships with children
HOW DV PROGRAMS CAN IMPROVE

1. More children’s programming
2. Offer counseling and family activities for mothers and children together
3. More respite care
HOW DV PROGRAMS CAN IMPROVE

4. Assistance with more than domestic violence (mental health issues, managing parental stress, anger management etc...)

5. Offer services in more languages other than English

6. Permit extended shelter stays as needed
EXPERIENCES WITH CPS

• All CPS mothers had children removed for some period of time

• Removal is “the worst thing that could happen”

• CPS didn’t understand their efforts to protect

• Some said CPS was helpful with rent or household items
Two focus groups with teens:

• Ojibwe teen girls, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, Bayfield, WI

• Multi-ethnic group of teen boys and girls in Neenah, WI
YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS

• All youth had mothers who were DV survivors

• All were living with at least one parent and receiving services from a local DV service provider

• Jointly facilitated by WCADV staff and DV advocate known to the participants
RESULTS: HOW DV AFFECTS YOUTH

• Required them to grow up fast, take on parental roles
• Made them feel sad
• Compromised their trust in others
• “Put up walls” for self-protection
• Affected grades and concentration in school
• More socially isolated and estranged peers who don’t understand DV
HOW DV PROGRAMS HELPED

• Support during difficult times
• An escape from stressful lives
• Offered hope
• Advocates were truthful
• Offered a voice for youth
• Connection to financial resources for their families
CHILDREN’S SUPPORT GROUP QUESTIONS

• Gathered information from children in DV program support groups
• 71 children, average age 10
• Most were current shelter residents.
• Facilitators asked group and took notes
• WCADV analyzed for themes
QUESTIONS . . .

*Five questions similar to adult and teen focus groups:*

- Impact of DV on you and your family
- How DV programs can help children and families
HOW DV MAKES YOU FEEL

• Sad, angry, fearful, helpless
• Want to protect mother and retaliate against abuser
• Struggling to make sense of the abuse
HOW THEY FEEL ABOUT THEIR MOTHERS

- Empathy for her difficult situation
- Wish mothers were more physically and emotionally available
- Wish their mothers would leave the abuser and get help
HOW DV MAKES LIFE HARDER

• Instability of being in transition
• Mother is sad & less available
HOW DV PROGRAM CAN HELP

• Money, food, housing and employment
• Emotional support for themselves and their mothers
Impact of DV on self and family:

- Forced me to put abuser’s needs first
- DV made me tense, stressed and fearful
- Partner and I were poor role models
- Children forced to take on adult roles
CONCLUSIONS - MOTHERS

What kind of support and services do they need most?

• Counseling and emotional support
• Assistance with concrete services: housing, employment, child care
• Respite care is shelter
• Children’s programming, esp. programming that supports mother-child relationships
CONCLUSIONS - OLDER YOUTH

Impact of DV on self and family:

• Forced them to grow up too quickly
• DV caused them to distance themselves emotionally from other people
• Anger at the adults in their lives, including legal and child welfare systems
What kind of support and services do they need most?

• Supportive adults who understand and believe them

• Emotional support and concrete services (e.g. employment, housing) for their mothers
CONCLUSIONS - YOUNGER YOUTH

Impact of DV on self and family:

• Sad, angry, frustrated, fearful
• Conflicted feelings about their mothers - sympathetic, but wish she would do more for them or resist abuser
CONCLUSIONS - YOUNGER YOUTH

What kind of support and services do they need?

- Emphasis on concrete support for their mothers: money, food housing and employment
Children and youth:
“Please help my mother.”

Mothers:
“Please help my child.”
CHILD WITNESS TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Our mission is to create peaceful communities in which domestic respect and a life free from violence is the right of every woman, man and child.
HISTORY OF CWDV

- Started in 2003
- Based on models from Families and Schools together, Betsy McAlister Groves’ book, and the Nurturing Program
- Goal: Reduce harmful effects of children’s exposure to DV by training professionals who work with children, offering direct case management services for families affected by DV, and facilitating educational support groups for mothers experiencing domestic violence and their children who have witnessed violence
PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- 12 week closed group
- Utilizes components of Nurturing Program
- Families enter in different ways - all are assigned ongoing Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS) advocates
- Groups begin with a meal followed by transitions into the various groups
- Last night of the group is a celebration - families share lessons learned and are awarded certificates of completion and a prize that promotes “family time”
- After graduation, invited back for family fun nights
WHAT DOES THE GROUP LOOK LIKE?

- Welcome and family activity
- Expectations of meal time
- Meal - family time
- Group division by age and developmental level
- Adult groups begin with a check-in and move into the topic with a closing activity completed before reuniting with their children for the evening
- Children’s groups begin with circle time, an ice breaker, review of expectations, developmentally appropriate learning activities, closing activity, and they are brought back together with family
OBJECTIVES AND LESSONS – CHILDREN’S GROUPS

1. Breaking the family secrets about violence by defining violence
2. Sharing personal experiences and learning about a range of feelings
3. Safety planning
4. Learning peaceful conflict resolution
5. Having a positive experience in a safe and structured environment
6. Strengthening self-esteem through positive reinforcement and validation of feelings
OBJECTIVES AND LESSONS – ADULT GROUPS

DV/parenting curriculum includes:

1. Effects of DV on children
2. Parent-child communication/talking with the child about the violence
3. Childhood development and behavioral expectations
4. Positive non-abusive discipline
5. Enhancing the child’s self-esteem
6. General skills of healthy, nurturing parenting
FAMILY FUN NIGHT

- Designed to bring graduates together for family-centered activity in the community
- Meal and transportation are provided
- Locations/themes: Children’s Museum, Humane Society, Carnival-themed in house activities, etc...
- Provides the families a chance to reconnect; spend quality, fun time together; learn about other community events; and receive additional ongoing support
CHALLENGES

- More, More, More......
- Family Fun Nights - participating families have had much younger children lately - have to find activities that are appropriate and engaging for a wide range of ages
LESSONS LEARNED - GROWING TOGETHER EVALUATIONS

- More, More, More......

- As a result of feedback
  - Changed intake process
  - Linked all participants with a FASS advocate
  - Incorporated more community resources into CWDV adult curriculum
CRECIENDO JUNTOS

Andrea Oyuela
Coordinator of the Hispanic Program
The Women’s Community
Wausau, WI
Helping Latina women experience domestic violence improve communication with their children by using media as a conversation starter.
Common Stressors for Latina Women Experiencing Domestic Violence

- Language barriers
- Immigration status
- Difficulty finding a job
- Low acculturation
- Low self-esteem
- Guilt
- Isolation
- Fear of the unknown
CRECIENDO JUNTOS - CHILDREN OF WOMEN EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- Majority born in U.S. or brought to this country at a very young age
- At school age, begin to be exposed to a culture their mothers ignore
- Choose English as their primary language
- Feel they do not have anything in common with their parents
- Do not identify as Latino
- Ignore how acculturation affects their mothers
Promote cultural pride and resilience
Mothers able to identify their children’s issues
Children able to understand why their mothers are different from their U.S. friends’ mothers
Mothers improve their parenting skills
Mothers feel connected in the community, lessening emotional isolation and increasing emotional safety
CRECIENDO JUNTOS
Group started with 15 families

- Meetings were held once a month
- Families eager to continue and were actively involved in discussions and workshops
CRECIENDO JUNTOS - OBSTACLES

ICE RAIDS!
CRECIENDO JUNTOS - OBSTACLES
Meeting space in school with bilingual program, where families feel comfortable and safe.

Able to resume meetings once a month.
CRECIENDO JUNTOS – COMMON DISAGREEMENTS BETWEEN PARENTS AND THEIR TEENAGER

- Morality
- Spirituality
- Family values
- Language
- Technology
- Life style
Parents learning about the differences between cultures, feeling more competent in their parenting skills and more connected to their children.

Parents identifying fears and becoming more open to having conversations with their children.
Children learning more about how their parents struggle to assimilate in U.S. culture

Children learning about acculturation process, additional stressors and trauma response

Children identifying the lack of time they spend with their parents as a stressor in their relationship
EVALUATION TOOLS

- Pre – test
- Post- test

Questions focus on trust, friendship, connectedness and heritage
Thank you for joining us!

Please visit out Promising Futures Site: www.PromisingFuturesWithoutviolence.org

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