

Gender-Inclusive Work with Victims and their Children in a Coed-Shelter

Carol Ensign, Director, Antelope Valley Oasis Shelter, Lancaster California

Patricia Jones, Assistant Director, Antelope Valley Oasis Shelter, Lancaster, California

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Imagine being too afraid to return to your home. Imagine leaving your home in the dead of night with only the clothes on your back. Imagine sitting in your car with your children not knowing where to go or who to call. Every year thousands of women, men and children face these struggles, fearing the very place they live in and the loved one they once trusted. The only refuge for many of these families is one of the 2,000+ domestic violence shelters operating in the United States today, and while that number seems large, it is far from the number needed to assist the millions of victims in this country each year. Relatively speaking, animal shelters have, and continue to outnumber domestic violence shelters at a rate of 2:1, an alarming comparison given the number of children fleeing violent homes every day.

The decision to enter a shelter is far from an easy one, and many people would find their every sense of comfort challenged by the accommodations, as most exist on limited budgets and the generosity of the communities in which they operate. Shelters average in capacity anywhere from five to 100+ beds, with some offering residential and emergency food services exclusively and others operating multi-faceted programs providing services such as counseling, job development and advocacy.

The number of shelters currently operating worldwide is undetermined; however, shelters continue to develop and have even become evident in many countries that demonstrate extreme patriarchal social systems. The overall development of such a large network is impressive given the relatively “young” age of the movements that gave birth to the concept.

The Shelter Movement

While organized and compensated police departments have operated for well over a hundred years in the United States (e.g., New York’s began in 1845), their focus has been on apprehending lawbreakers, and only relatively recently would they regard victims as anything more than an evidentiary part of a criminal act.

The Domestic Violence Shelter Movement was an offspring of the larger victim advocacy movement which gained strength from the determination of the victims themselves. The idea of “victimology” was an increasing area of interest in the United States as concern for the rising crime rate was considered, subsequently, the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice were established in the 1960’s. This alone however, was not enough to illuminate the needs of domestic violence victims; indeed, it would be the Women’s Movement that would focus attention on the victimization of women – in particular, domestic abuse and sexual assault.

Rural England was the setting for the first “victory” for the domestic violence movement, with the opening of the first shelter dedicated to victims of domestic violence by the Chiswick Women’s Aid in 1971, under the guidance of Erin Pizzey, who would later publish the first recognized book of domestic violence from the perspective of a battered woman, *Scream Quietly or the Neighbors will Hear* (Pizzey, 1974). The following year, the United States would follow

with the opening of Haven House in Pasadena, California and the establishment of the nation's first domestic violence hotline by the Women's Advocates in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The next decade would see a multitude of advancements addressing the issue of domestic violence, from the formation of the first dedicated task force by the National Organization of Women and the first National Conference hosted by the Milwaukee Task Force on Battered Women in 1976 to the organization of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence in 1978 and the dedication of the First Day of Unity in October 1980 which would later develop into Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Throughout these years, individual states would begin to address the variables of domestic abuse, including Oregon's 1977 legislation mandating arrest in domestic violence cases; the Minnesota law, passed in 1978, allowing probable cause arrests, regardless of whether a protection order has been issued against the offender; and the 1976 groundbreaking legislation in Nebraska abolishing the marital rape exemption (1976). Nationally, the U.S. Attorney General convened the first Task Force on Family Violence in 1984, the same year the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act passed, earmarking federal funding for domestic violence programs. The following year, the U.S. Surgeon General identified domestic violence as a major health problem. These efforts ultimately culminated in the passage of the Violence Against Women's Act of 1994 which enacted laws and promoted interventions for domestic violence while also emphasizing the need for continued research and program development.

The effort and findings of the multitude of pioneers working for the abolishment of domestic violence have laid the foundation for modern day strategies which recognize the need to not only shelter victims and their children, but also assist them to identify and develop the skills necessary to exist independent of their abusers. This is accomplished through a wide variety of programs offering emotional, psychological and financial support, job training and education, living skills development and community education and advocacy.

The Valley Oasis Shelter: Origins

The Antelope Valley Domestic Violence Council (AVDVC) was organized in 1980 at the request of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. The Antelope Valley is located in the Northern High Desert area of the county and, during the 1980's was experiencing an inordinate amount of family violence. Spearheaded by Supervisor Michael Antonovich, the Antelope Valley Domestic Violence Council was formed to address this important social problem. Through his efforts, a life-long, free-lease on an area of county property was obtained.

Subsequent to approval of the free-lease, renovation of the property and granting of the non-profit status, the *Valley Oasis Shelter* opened up its doors on September 21, 1981. Since that time the shelter has served approximately 25,000 victims of domestic violence with twenty-four (24) hours of shelter services, around the clock crisis intervention and meals which are prepared by the residents in their cottages. In its early years, Valley Oasis was the largest shelter in the state of California with a bed capacity of 102. The capacity has been reduced over the years to accommodate space for service programs; however, the shelter still remains one of the largest in the state. The current shelter configuration allows emergency space for 65 men, women and children. The reputation of the shelter is nationally known; and victims from Ohio, Wisconsin, Colorado and, as far away as Florida have sought shelter with the Valley Oasis.

As the Domestic Violence Movement progressed, it became apparent that shelter was far from the only service needed by victims and their children. Counseling, peer support, education

and childcare were only a few of the additional services in demand. Responding to the growing needs of victims, the Council developed a variety of support programs designed to address the personal and communal challenges facing its clients. Current services include crisis intervention transitional housing, childcare, school readiness programming, peer counseling, case management, social service advocacy, legal advocacy, domestic violence education, living skills and parenting education, individual and group therapy for both adults and children, and community awareness and education.

The Council has grown from its modest beginning with a start-up grant for \$50,000.00 to its current budget of over \$3,000,000.00, employing an average of 45 employees and operating seven program locations; and while the Agency is far more than a shelter, the Valley Oasis Shelter remains its core program, the beginning of each victim's long journey to well-being.

The Co-ed Model

The agency's decision to accept male victims of family violence and offer them the SAME residential and support services offered nation-wide to female victims of domestic violence seemed not only a practical one, but essentially, a *necessary one*. Nowhere in the definition of violence, "*the act or an instance of violent action or behavior; abusive or unjust exercise of power,*" (American Heritage ® Dictionary) does it state that violence is a gender specific issue. In other words, a particular act should not be deemed violent only when perpetrated by a male. And yet, because of the feminist roots of the victims' movement, efforts to help female victims have somehow overshadowed the reality that men can and are abused by female intimate partners. Depending on whose research you accept, the percent of domestic violence perpetrated by women on their male partners is anywhere between 15% of the total, according to crime reports (Rennison, 2003), and 50% according to most random sample surveys (Archer, 2000; Fiebert, 2004). The AVDVC, however, has never been compelled to pinpoint the exact percentage, the program has always been based on the belief that even ONE male victim in need of services is sufficient. Additionally, because domestic violence perpetrated by either parent is detrimental to children (see Hamel & Nicholls, this volume; Davies and Sturge-Apple, this volume), the absence of services for victimized fathers and their children seemed to us a problem in dire need of remediation.

It cannot be overlooked that Valley Oasis' decision to accept men was rooted in its unique configuration. While many shelters began and still remain, single unit, "dormitory" settings, the agency has been fortunate to operate in a location offering multiple housing units, thus allowing for the residential separation of male and female clients; however, it should be noted that on occasion, capacity has forced the coed housing of clients and no problems or objections have arisen.

Cooperation with Law Enforcement and Batterer Intervention Programs

The Antelope Valley is in the jurisdiction of only one law enforcement agency, the Los Angeles County Sheriff. There are two stations, one in the City of Palmdale and the other in the City of Lancaster. The administrative staff of Valley Oasis has worked diligently to develop a positive relationship with law enforcement. For five years the Sheriff Department had a domestic violence response team. The team was comprised of two officers, one sergeant and one lieutenant that were highly trained in the field of domestic violence. The agency had two

domestic violence advocates that actually responded with the deputies to domestic violence calls. Over the five years the team was in operation successful filing and prosecution of domestic violence cases rose 40%. This team was dissolved in 2003 due to State and County fiscal cutbacks. The agency continues to have advocates go to the sheriff stations to pick up reports for follow-up calls and services. The agency staff goes to monthly role calls at both stations to answer questions the deputies may have and to provide on going domestic violence training. The agency has two officers from the sheriff department on its' Board of Directors. The trust that has been groomed over the years has been a key factor in the agency staff educating sheriff deputies to the issues, dynamics and behaviors of domestic violence victims, especially male victims. The deputies have been open to learning about male victimization and as a result have been able to identify male victims and make referrals to the agency as well as encouraging male victims to go to the shelter. In addition to being given resources and referrals by law enforcement, male victims in the Antelope Valley receive more understanding and compassion from law enforcement officers. A positive result from the relationship between Valley Oasis and the Sheriff Department is that deputies from other stations in Los Angeles County are aware of the services that Valley Oasis provides and not only make referrals to male victims but on numerous occasions, have driven male victims up to the shelter.

The Antelope Valley has one District Attorneys Office. This office has a designated domestic violence attorney who works with the agency very closely. Up until the cutbacks of 2003, the agency had a District Attorney on its' Board of Directors. The agency provides training to the DAs on domestic violence and male victim issues. As a result, more cases involving male victims are being accepted by the DA.

The agency has developed a close working relationship with the judges and commissioners at the Court House. At the request of several judges, the agency has advocates at the courthouse to provide support and resources to victims. The advocates work out of an office that is shared with local attorneys. This arrangement was solicited by the attorneys and has proven successful. It has provided the advocates an opportunity to educate attorneys about issues concerning male victims. In addition, the agency has been able to meet with local judges and discuss male victim concerns and issues. This relationship has resulted in judges having an increased awareness of the dynamics and behaviors of couples in domestic violence relationships where the male is the victim and male victims are being treated with compassion and understanding in more courtrooms.

Valley Oasis is the only domestic violence shelter in the Antelope Valley and there are 5 or 6 batterer's intervention programs. Staff members attend monthly batterer's service provider meetings to discuss treatment issues of domestic violence victims and perpetrators including male victims and female batterers and the impact this dynamic has on children, family members and society. Present at these meetings are also judges and attorneys.

Responses from the Domestic Violence Community

Valley Oasis has provided services to male victims for over 17 years. The agency has provided these services quietly and steadily during this time focusing on how to improve the services it provides and advocating for male victims in the local area. As this issue has risen to the forefront the agency has been thrown into a spotlight that was not desired but will not be backed down from. Valley Oasis maintains the philosophy that all victims of domestic violence have the right to services and to be treated with respect and dignity. The agency also believes

that domestic violence is a societal issue not a gender issue. These beliefs challenge the original concepts and models of domestic violence. In addition, the agency's philosophy challenges the myth that only women can be victims and also challenges traditional societal gender stereotypes and roles.

Initial responses from most domestic violence advocates were that of anger and defensiveness. Comments included that men could not be victims, domestic violence is a woman's issue and that by acknowledging that males can be victims it minimized the degree of suffering and pain that women experience at the hands of men. As time has passed, the agency has had mostly positive responses to the services that are provided to men. The staff has been applauded for its' work with male victims and has been asked to provide training to other domestic violence agency staff and consultation on how to run a program for male victims. We receive compliments on our courage and conviction to treat all victims of domestic violence and have earned the respect of many domestic violence programs both nationally and internationally.

Responses from Victims and their Families

Overall, victims and their families who have obtained shelter services have had a very favorable response. The coed environment of the Valley Oasis Shelter extends beyond the residents as the agency has always employed male staff members in all capacities, including advocates, case managers and shelter supervisor. It is not unusual for a client who has previously resided in a different shelter program to alert staff to the presence of a "man" on grounds, often identifying a member of the maintenance staff. It is rare however, that a client requests a transfer when assigned to a male advocate, with most welcoming feedback from a positive member of the gender. When such a transfer is requested, it is granted as the program priority is the provision of services to clients, not gender education.

The single most important factor of the Shelter's success in operating a coed shelter is without a doubt the overall agency approach which creates a respectful environment in which ALL victim is of domestic violence are welcome and equally served. Individual staff members who cannot reconcile stereotypical responses to male victims often resign their positions early in their employment, as it is clearly evident to all that bias and discrimination is unacceptable and essentially, "a victim is a victim, is a victim."

Clients are obviously surprised to find that there is no separation in the provision of group services, with male and female victims attending group together, along with gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered clients. This approach is based upon the fact that battering, at its core, involves the struggle for power and control by one partner over another. Regardless of the batterer's gender, his or her objectives are all the same - to control his or her victim. We believe that gender differences can be found primarily in the particular tactics used. With this clarification, group members have welcomed the feedback received from victims of the other gender, often commenting on the benefit of being reminded that all men or all women are not approving of the violent actions of their peers.

In the residential setting, those clients with children often cite the benefit of their children being exposed to mothers and fathers who are not abusive to their family members. The playgroup often serves as place of recovery as the parents and children begin to discover moments of enjoyment, while also being exposed to the positive parenting of members of the other gender.

A final benefit related by victims who have completed the Valley Oasis program is that of unbiased services. Many female victims who, encouraged by friends, family and sometimes previous service providers, had previously expressed sentiments of “male-bashing,” later comment on the positive impact the discouragement of these feelings had on their ultimate healing. This was particularly important to the mothers of sons, who stated that they were often conflicted by the message of the abusive male and its impact on their sons, hence the programs focus on the behaviors of the batterer, backed up by the presence of men during their stay, had helped them and their children to correctly focus blame on the abuser, male or female.

Services

The Valley Oasis Shelter provides a variety of services designed to provide the resident with a safe environment in which to heal, emotionally, psychologically and physically as well as review his/her options for themselves and their children. The Shelter and Children’s Services programs employ approximately fourteen staff members as advocates, childcare specialists, and therapists, while the agency as a whole employs an average of forty-five staff members throughout the various programs. The number of clients served each year by the shelter varies in accordance with space availability - i.e. space closure due to renovation or damage as well as family size; however the average residents per year range from 300-400.

Our shelter serves ALL victims of domestic violence regardless of age, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or socio-economic status, and has historically provided shelter to victims as old as ninety and others born during residency. While the majority of the residents originate from a 3,600 square mile service area immediately around the shelter, residents have been received from nearly every state in search of safety or program specific services. Unlike many other shelters, ours does not restrict the gender or ages of children residing with the parent and accepts families with adolescent boys as well as adult children residing in the violent home (adult children are registered as an individual resident), with potentially at-risk situations abated by careful placement of families within the residential units and attention given to the age gender, and history of children in each residence. Additionally, victims who have previously stayed at the shelter are welcome to return, providing there have been no reports of violence or abuse on their part. This allowance is fairly unusual in the shelter movement because of the safety issues surrounding shelter locations, however, research indicates that a victim will most likely leave his/her abuser 7-9 times before leaving permanently. With this in mind, it seems counterproductive to limit the amount of service a resident receives from the program. As a result of the shelter’s broad eligibility criteria, it is often the first call in another agency’s search for a safety move location and the shelter regularly receives residents from other shelters

A victim wishing to enter the program must first make contact through the Agency’s hotline, where they will respond to a series of intake questions designed to identify their eligibility for the shelter as well as the appropriateness of the program for their specific needs. A client’s acceptance is based upon space availability (assistance in locating other shelters will be given in cases of full capacity), willingness and ability to participate fully in shelter programs and ability to care for themselves and their minor children.

Upon arrival at the shelter, residents are assigned to a room, provided with the immediate essentials, i.e. food, hygiene items, clothing and bedding, and placed on a forty-eight hour “quiet time.” This time is allowed for the resident to acclimate to his/her new environment, rest,

provide for the immediate needs of their children and establish a sense of safety. Additionally, the resident is assigned to an advocate who will be responsible for completing a comprehensive needs assessment with the victim in order to develop a service plan to best utilize their sixty-day stay at the shelter.

At the end of the forty-eight hour quiet period, the resident will begin to attend scheduled groups, including, domestic violence education, career and job development, living skills, and group therapy. All groups, with the exception of the therapy groups are divided based upon the length of time a resident has been at the shelter, with those residing one to four weeks and those residing five to eight weeks attending different groups. This schedule is designed to address the unique issues facing the two groups, as the first group is in the early stages of the program, learning the basics and identifying resources, while the latter group is preparing for their eventual departure and coping with the anxiety related to the move.

Individually, the resident will work with their assigned advocate to identify community resources for which they are eligible, complete individual safety plans for themselves and their children and identify and monitor weekly goals. The primary goals for each client during their shelter stay are the identification of financial resources, location of affordable and safe housing and initiation or continuation of legal action.

Children's Services, a companion program to the Shelter, provides childcare for the resident children in a safe and supportive environment, while also offering school readiness curriculum for preschool age children and educational tutoring for school children. The Children's Advocates also assist the parent in the enrollment of the children in the appropriate school program or the application for independent study for those whose safety issues prevent school attendance.

Addressing Safety Concerns

The most common question posed to staff members of the agency is "How can you have men and women living together – doesn't that threaten the women?" In reality, this has not been the case and, as previously discussed, the women often find the presence of male victims to be a benefit. Operating a coed facility is not without concern; however, staff has found that the establishment of universal policies and procedures prevents any accusation of gender bias or favoritism – e.g., the one stating that "no resident shall be in a residential unit other than his/her own." Furthermore, rather than having a rule preventing romantic or sexual contact between male and female residents, the policy states that "there shall be no romantic or sexual contact between residents," period.

An honest review of shelter operations anywhere will reveal that safety issues exist regardless of the gender of the clients. Female clients can be and often are abusive to other female residents; it is not easy to live with someone you don't know, and even harder when you are experiencing the uncertainty of leaving an abusive relationship.

Valley Oasis has been fortunate that, in its twenty-four years of operation, it has never experienced a serious incident of violence from either residents or an abuser. Staff and clients work well together to identify potential dangers and alert one another in order that proper action may be taken. Clients are encouraged to report violations that may compromise the safety of a resident or the facility in general, additionally, staff is trained to identify the early signs of conflict and implement preventative action wherever possible.

Clinical Services

The Valley Oasis shelter provides a full range of clinical services to adults and children staying at the shelter. These services are provided by a licensed Marriage Family Therapist, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Master's level interns. The interns are supervised by the Licensed Clinical Social Worker.

The clinical services offered at the shelter include individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, forensic interviews and family therapy. Within these modalities the therapist will complete assessments, make a complete DSM diagnosis on all five axes, develop a treatment plan and an individual service plan that includes short term and long term goals. Additional services include case management, advocacy and referrals.

When a person enters the shelter an intake and needs assessment is completed within the first 48 hours they are there. All individuals entering the program will have an appointment with a therapist within the first 24 hours. The focus of this session is to assess the emotional stability of the individual.

The shelter is a 60-day program. All therapeutic interventions are crisis oriented with the focus being on stabilizing the individual so they can make necessary immediate plans for their future and overall safety and that of their children. Therapeutic modalities used for short term crisis intervention by the therapist include Brief Solution Focused therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and EMDR.

Individual one hour therapy sessions are held based on the individual client needs. Although all clients come to the shelter to escape domestic violence, each client's situation and coping skill is different. Not all clients want to attend individual therapy nor do they require short term crisis intervention. The therapist refers approximately 82% of all shelter clients to therapy at the time they exit the program to deal with long term psychological/emotional issues. Clients who are seen in individual therapy are seen for one hour sessions on a weekly basis. Although the therapy is focused on the immediate crisis of homelessness, trauma and abuse the therapist will use traditional psychotherapy modalities such as Rogerian theory, psychoanalysis, Bowenian, Ericksonian and grief and loss work. Other services include psychological testing and psycho-education.

Group therapy occurs twice a week. Each group is one and a half hour long. One group focuses on specific topics such as self-esteem, self-confidence, support building and insight work. The second therapy group is quite controversial. A licensed therapist co-facilitates this group with an ex-batterer. The focus of this group was originally to educate the clients about batterer behavior and dynamics. It has evolved into a therapeutic group where the focus is on role playing and Gestalt. This group has been used to train law enforcement, interns and was highlighted on an award winning documentary called Hidden Victims: Children of Domestic Violence (Lifetime Television, 2002).

In many homes where domestic violence occurs, the victim has to focus all of their attention on the batterer. The children have experienced inconsistent parenting, abusive and harsh discipline and or emotional neglect. They may also have been forced to take part in the battering. In one case at the shelter, a young woman of 27 had 5 children. The children's ages were between 1 and 8. The father would come home drunk and wake the children up. They would have to sit on the couch and watch him beat up their mother. Then, before they could go back to bed each one would have to get off of the couch and kick their mother. If they did not, they would get hit. Other children would try to rescue their mother's from the batterer or would

identify with the batterer and once they were at the shelter, the child would become abusive to the mother. Many children are confused, angry and do not know how to talk to their parent and their parents do not know how to parent their children.

Family therapy is available to all clients who request it. Staff may also make referrals to the therapist for a family either by completing a Referral Form or by discussing the case in Case Review. When a family is referred to therapy by a staff member it is usually due to an observation the staff has made of poor parenting, abusive behavior by the parent towards the child or abusive behavior towards the parent by the child. Upon receiving the referral, the therapist will schedule an appointment for a family assessment. Because of the time limitations at the shelter, it is a 60-day shelter, the focus of the therapy is on short term interventions that will improve parenting and communication, empowering the parent and setting limits.

Case Examples

Yoko

Yoko is a 37 year old Japanese female. She has no children. Yoko reports that her parents had a violent and abusive relationship. She also stated that she was both physically and verbally abused by her mother. She met her husband in Japan when he was stationed there in the military. The verbal abuse began early in the marriage, and she was later subjected to physical assaults that included slapping, punching and hair pulling. But there was nothing she could do; her culture did not allow her to leave the marriage or to challenge her husbands' authority over her. In addition, the military would do nothing to protect her. Within two years he was transferred to the States and she was then totally isolated. They lived on the military base and she had no transportation. He would not allow her to go anywhere. He allowed her to work but he controlled all of the money. His violence was increasing and Yoko felt she had to escape or he would kill her. She spoke with a counselor on the base that referred her to Valley Oasis.

Yoko came to Valley Oasis in 2001, her face and arms still swollen with bruises from the last beating. She felt very isolated and focused all of her attention on school and completing the program. Yoko has a strong desire to please and attended all required groups. While at the shelter she received group and individual therapy, job development and living skills, domestic violence education and peer support groups. Yoko's self-esteem quickly rose and she was soon able to face her abusive husband and demand a divorce. It took longer for her to deal with abuse she suffered from her mother. Yoko applied for one of the transitional housing programs operated by the shelter. She was accepted and quickly began working towards achieving her goals of going to graduate school and getting her own apartment. During the two years she was in the transitional housing program she went to school, worked part time and attended therapy. After one year of being in the transitional housing program an opening came available in the Scattered Site transitional housing program. Yoko applied for the opening. She was accepted and moved to an apartment. After two years in this program, Yoko has completed and graduated from the transitional housing program. After six months out of the program, she contacted the Executive Director and asked if she could do her clinical internship at the shelter. She was accepted. After two months of her clinical internship an opportunity came up in the agency and Yoko was hired full time. She has completed therapy and is currently living in her own apartment, has a full time job and lives without violence in her life.

Frank

Frank is a 38 years old Caucasian gay male. He was referred to Valley Oasis by a LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) counselor after being severely beaten by his partner of 14 months. This was Frank's second abusive relationship. The first one he left after 3 and one half years. Frank had a long history of drug and alcohol abuse beginning when he was a teenager after coming out to his family who could not accept his lifestyle. Frank had a history of mental illness. He had been hospitalized on two occasions due to suicide attempts and was diagnosed with depression.

The abuse Frank suffered in this relationship included being hit, punched, kicked, bit and having his hair pulled out. His abuser was very verbally abusive and was emotionally abusive as well. Frank endured threats, social isolation, deprivation of food and shelter and his partner constantly followed Frank wherever he went. During the last episode of abuse, Frank had his collar bone broken. Frank's abuser would not let him work and he did not allow Frank to have any money.

When Frank came to the shelter he did not have a job, had no money and only an 11th grade education. Frank entered Valley Oasis in 2003. During his stay at the shelter, Frank complied with the shelter rules, regulations and program requirements. He attended group and individual therapy, domestic violence education groups, job development, living skills and peer support groups. Frank received legal advocacy and secured a temporary restraining order and ultimately a permanent restraining order. Although he was uncomfortable initially, Frank quickly adapted to the shelter and developed friendships with other residents and got along well with staff. Just before his two months were up, Frank applied for one of the Transitional Housing programs run by the agency. At this time, the agency had not had a male request transitional housing and the program was designed for families. We contacted the funding agency and asked if we could accept Frank into the program. The funding agency stated they would allow Frank into the program if we, the agency, accepted him. Frank was accepted and became our first male victim in our transitional housing program.

Frank's established goals were to complete his education, get a job and get permanent housing. While he was in the transitional housing program, Frank received job development training, case management, counseling and living skills.

Frank initially applied and received GR. He enrolled in school to complete his high school course work. He also enrolled in a temporary employment agency as he completed job development training in the transitional housing program. Eventually, Frank completed the two year program with accomplishing all of his goals. He has a full time job that he has had for two years. He completed his adult education and received his high school diploma. He currently lives in his own apartment. Frank has remained single and has dated but has not been in an abusive relationship in over three years.

Frank has stayed connected to the agency in many ways. He initially stayed connected by attending on going counseling through the outreach program. He also was asked and accepted a position on the Client Advisory Committee where he was an active member and was instrumental in reviewing and developing policies regarding clients. Frank is currently an active member on the Board of Directors for the agency and sits on the Program development committee. Frank also is active on the agency's Speakers Bureau.

Eddie

Eddie was a 30-year old Caucasian male who arrived at the shelter with his three children, Michael (8), Mary (5) and Nancy (2). His wife, Rhonda, a 29-year old of Hispanic

origin, had verbally and physically assaulted him for years, demeaning him in front of the children, punching and kicking him and once scratching his face so badly he nearly lost an eye. Eddie had no prior history of drug or alcohol usage, no criminal convictions and had been previously employed. The couple had been married approximately nine years. Eddie had limited experience with the “system” and had not previously attempted to leave the relationship. The area in which the family resided was fairly remote in relations to the nearest “metropolitan” community and local resources were primarily limited to county services, i.e. CPF, social services, etc. Visually, this couple presented the very paradox that promotes the stereotypical response to male victimization, “how could she abuse him?” At five feet, ten inches and a little over 200 pounds, Eddie almost doubled Rhonda’s five foot, seven inch, 125 pound frame. Eddie’s non-violent beliefs and concern for the welfare of his children presented a dilemma, as he would not fight back against Rhonda’s physical and emotional abuse, yet he refused to leave without his children. Eventually, after reaching out to an advocacy group for father’s rights, Eddie realized that it was critical to the welfare of himself and his children that he leave the home and begin divorce and custody proceedings.

Eddie and his children adapted well to the shelter environment and he actively participated in all of the programs. He was able to secure housing for himself and the children in as community whose proximity allowed him to continue to participate in the agencies outreach programs. Eddie was eventually awarded custody of his children and they have established the safe and nurturing environment they all sought.

Post-Discharge Services

Residents who complete the sixty day program at the Shelter typically transfer to a transitional program, possibly within the agency, relocate with friends or family or, on occasion, return home to the batterer. The latter is the most difficult for staff to address, however the agency has established a policy of offering a supportive exit. It is vitally important that a resident returning to his or her abuser know that the staff respects their right to decide for themselves and, while fearful for their safety, will provide them with the support necessary to make the transition as smooth as possible. Essentially, the staff will begin the process of “safety planning the client home.” Safe exist procedures, code words, and safe resources will be established. Additionally, the resident may secure copies of important documents with the shelter staff to eliminate one more concern in the event that the client must flee the home again.

Wherever the resident exits the program to, whether it is home or another program, they are encouraged to maintain contact as necessary and, in the cases where they are remaining in the community; the client is encouraged to continue support services with the agency’s Outreach facility. It is not certain that each client’s new location will be the safe place they seek, however, those who have completed the program carry with them an increased awareness of the behaviors their batterer exhibits that should indicate impending danger as well as their own behaviors that place them in danger. It is hoped that in the event of an abusive incident in the future, the client will hear not only his/her own thoughts of safety and escape, but will also remember the support offered by the program and leave before more violence occurs.

A follow-up survey is sent to any shelter client that provides a forwarding address and permission to contact them. This survey is designed to identify the current living situation of the client, those services that they have continued to utilize and the program practices that ultimately provided the most preparation for their move into the community.

The Future

The agency is currently in a planning and developing period. It is looking forward to celebrating its' 25th Anniversary in September, 2006. This is a time for reflection and planning. To look at how the agency began, what it has accomplished, what we need to do in the future and the direction we want to take. The Board of Directors, Administration and staff are working together to establish the goals for the agency for the next 25 years. There is, however, an immediate plan of action.

The first part of the plan is to continue to assess and evaluate the effectiveness and quality of care of the existing programs. The agency has identified tools and will be implementing them this year. The second part of the plan is to evaluate the performance and attitudes of existing staff. The agency will continue to identify areas of need and will provide on-going training to staff to improve quality and effectiveness of care.

The agency never set out to become the single light at the end of the tunnel facing male victims. It had, in fact, hoped to begin a movement that would lead to the development of full-service agencies and shelters for male victims nationwide; and while the agency is proud to have been the first agency in the United States to open its doors to men, we are saddened to remain one of less than a handful operating today. As the request for services for male victims continues to grow, the agency will be evaluating existing programs and looking for ways to improve services.

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