

Erie County Batterer Program Committee

Committee Co-Chairs:

Brenda David
Director, Child & Family Services-Family Violence Intervention Project

Elaine Korthals
Instructor, Catholic Charities Domestic Violence Classes for Men

October 21, 2004

Dear Colleague:

This letter is to inform you that the Erie County Batterer Program Committee has disbanded, effectively immediately. The Erie County Batterer Program Committee (ECBPC) formed almost ten years ago as a forum to discuss responsible batterer program practices, to adopt the most current state-of-the-art practices available across programs, and to coordinate referrals.

Reasons for the decision to disband include:

- ✓ The ECBPC has been comprised of batterer programs, some representation from the criminal justice system, and only one representative from the local domestic violence program. Batterer programs must take their leadership from, be accountable to, and actively address the concerns of the local representative of the battered women's movement - the local domestic violence program. Batterer programs should develop and implement program policies and procedures only with the approval of battered women and their advocates. It is clear that taking leadership from battered women within the forum of the ECBPC has not been possible. Therefore, it is critical that ECBPC disband and take leadership and be informed by battered women by joining in the Erie County Coalition Against Family Violence (ECCAFV). This will ensure the opportunity for batterer programs to receive feedback from victim advocates and domestic violence programs.
- ✓ Batterers must be held accountable for their actions and behaviors. Women who are abused have consistently reported that, when there is no accountability, it is as if the batterer has permission to continue his abusive behaviors. Because court orders are a crucial mechanism for holding batterers accountable, batterer programs should frame themselves only as an additional disposition that is available to the court:

"Without ongoing supervision and monitoring, we are only successful in communicating to the batterer, victim and community that we continue to treat domestic violence less seriously than other crimes." New York State Family Protection and Domestic Violence Intervention Act of 1994: Evaluation of the Mandatory Arrest Provisions, Final Report to the Governor and Legislature, January 2001, NYS Division of Criminal Justice

*Services and NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence
- p. 64*

- ✓ Historically, batterer programs were born prematurely! Because what we know about domestic violence continues to grow and evolve, at best, the research on batterer programs (including what a batterer program can and cannot do) is inconclusive. False assumptions about the “effectiveness” of batterers programs can negatively impact the safety of women who are abused, as many batterer programs have unintentionally created dangerous consequences for women who are abused.
- ✓ The vast majority of batterers remain unidentified by the criminal justice system or the communities in which they live, thus, batterer programs, regardless of their size, can only provide information or education to a very small percentage of all batterers. When offenders are referred to a batterer program, other methods of holding offenders accountable are often ignored. Focusing resources on a batterer program that reaches only limited numbers of batterers with no proven record of effectiveness can leave communities without time, energy, or funds to develop meaningful services or prevention programs.
- ✓ Batterer programs are dangerous to battered women whenever they attempt to exist outside of a community’s coordination efforts. Thus, batterer programs operating in isolation jeopardize safety and are dangerous to women who are abused and their children. Historically, the ECBPC evolved over time as a stand-alone committee, not connected with the coordination efforts in Erie County. Therefore, it is crucial that every batterer program operating within Erie County joins and actively participates in the efforts of the Erie County Coalition Against Family Violence (ECCAFV) to end domestic violence.
- ✓ The appropriate use and role of batterer programs, within the context of a comprehensive coordinated response to domestic violence, should be paramount to any and all community-wide educational initiatives. It is imperative that we understand that the existence of batterer programs will not increase safety for battered women nor will they end domestic violence. Our work to end domestic violence must begin with social change efforts, led by battered women and their advocates, which create the environment to end this oppression:

“Outside of a more broadly coordinated and comprehensive community response that involves every sector of society, ... there is no way that batterers intervention can stop men’s violence.”

***New York State Commission on Domestic Violence Fatalities
Report to the Governor, October 1997 - p. 66***

- ✓ Below are two excerpts from the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence’s draft position paper, “Batterer Programs and Offender Accountability”:
 - 1) “Offender accountability is possible only when there is an ability to impose swift, consistent, and meaningful sanctions, a role that rests primarily within the criminal justice system through arrest, prosecution, and sentencing. Thus, offender accountability can best be achieved through effective and consistent use of criminal justice sanctions, specifically probation supervision, rather than batterer programs. In

communities where batterer programs exist, they should be used only in combination with criminal justice sanctions—not as an alternative to the criminal justice response. Further, referrals to batterer programs should be in conjunction with a criminal justice response that imposes consequences if the abuser fails to attend the program, violates the policies of the program, or re-offends.”

- 2) “The New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence strongly discourages the use of batterers programs as a referral for non-mandated batterers. Many abusers self-refer to batterer programs in order to convince their partners to stay with them, or return if they have already left. This is a powerful and often effective form of emotional manipulation. Such non-mandated participation does not achieve the goal of holding abusers accountable since non-mandated participants are not subject to consequences for non-compliance with the program requirements.”
- ✓ Batterer programs should frame themselves only as a disposition that is available to the court. Thus, they are a service to the courts. It is only through the court’s order that a batterer can be held accountable. Batterer programs should develop written program policies and procedures addressing process, content, reporting process and be implemented only when they have received the approval of battered women and their advocates.
 - ✓ Batterer programs are not always grounded in a clear understanding of the nature and dynamics of domestic violence and the connections between domestic violence and oppression. Instead, many batterers programs labor in the belief that they can have a direct impact on “fixing” batterers by helping them to change their behaviors. Instead, batterer programs that provide education on the intersections of oppression are likely to be less of a danger to women who are abused than batterers programs that are focused on changing behaviors.
 - ✓ Batterer programs must take their leadership from, be accountable to, and actively address the concerns of the local representative of the battered women’s movement - the local licensed domestic violence program (Haven House). The ECBPC has been comprised of batterer programs, some representation from the criminal justice system, and only one representative from the local domestic violence program. It is clear that taking leadership from battered women within the forum of the ECBPC is not possible. Therefore, it is critical that ECBPC disband and take its leadership and be informed by battered women by joining in the Erie County Coalition Against Family Violence (ECCAFV). This will ensure the opportunity for batterer programs to receive feedback and take their leadership from victim advocates and domestic violence programs that represent the battered women’s movement.
 - ✓ Batterer programs are dangerous to battered women whenever they attempt to exist outside of a community’s coordination efforts. Thus, batterer programs can jeopardize safety and are dangerous to women and child victims of domestic violence. Historically, the ECBPC evolved over time as a stand-alone committee, not connected with the coordination efforts in Erie County. Therefore, it is clear that every batterer program that operates in Erie County must join and actively participate in the efforts of the Erie County Coalition Against Family Violence (ECCAFV) toward ending domestic violence. Historically, batterer programs were born prematurely! At best, the research is inconclusive on their effectiveness! What a
-

batterer program can and cannot achieve must be clearly acknowledged including the appropriate use of and role within the context of a comprehensive coordinated response to domestic violence. It is imperative that we understand that the mere existence of batterer programs in our community is a very serious and complex issue. It is also important to understand that the existence of batterer programs does not and will not increase safety for battered women nor can batterer programs end domestic violence. If we are going to end domestic violence, it is through social change efforts, led by battered women and their advocates that will create the environment to do so.

For more information on batterer programs, please refer to the website for the New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence at:

http://www.opdv.state.ny.us/criminal_justice/corrections/bip/index.html

Sincerely,

Bridget Hallock
Member, Erie County Batterer
Program Committee and
Domestic Violence Community
Coordinator

Greg White
Member, Erie County Batterer
Program Committee and
Director, Catholic Charities Domestic
Violence Classes for Men