

THE FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROJECT

SUMMARY

The **Family Violence Prevention Project** is an innovative and cost-effective program designed to address the overlap of child and woman abuse within families who are clients of the child welfare system. The overarching goal of this project is to maximize the safety of children by helping non-abusing parents enhance their safety while also holding perpetrators accountable. This dual approach helps to reduce the incidence of abuse and neglect of children and hence, foster care placement.

The **Family Violence Prevention Project, (FVPP)** is both a direct service and capacity building program designed to provide early intervention services. We create expertise in existing child abuse/neglect programs regarding effective identification, intervention and treatment in families where child abuse and woman abuse co-exist. This problem is so pervasive that programs, whose mission is to work with abused and neglected children need to develop the expertise to provide assistance to their abused mothers and abusive fathers.

The **FVPP** is not a traditional direct service program. We have designed a program through which we offer direct assistance as well as building the capacity of existing child welfare agencies, to address this serious problem. There will never be adequate financial resources with which to create a new system of services extensive enough to handle all cases of domestic violence. It is our belief that creating and nurturing this expertise within existing agencies in the most practical and effective manner in which to offer this type of help. Our goal is to create a wide network of experts in the area of family violence in order to reduce the maltreatment of children, enhance the safety of mothers and help men become non-violent.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The Family Violence Prevention Project (FVPP) was created through a collaboration amongst the Urban Justice Center's Family Violence Project (UJC/FVP) and the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). The Columbia University School of Social Work (CUSSW) has worked with us to performed evaluation and research on the program since its inception. In the late 1980's child fatality reports from NYC as well as around the country were revealing that as many as 70% of murdered children were killed by battering husbands and boyfriends. This trend, the murder of Lisa Steinberg, along with evidence from domestic violence programs in NYC, created the impetus for the development of a collaborative program. The FVPP has existed ever since and has grown into a highly regarded program both locally and nationally. Through this collaboration, the FVPP provides a comprehensive strategy which will assist ACS, its direct operations and contracted agencies in the identification and treatment of families in which these problems co-exist. In addition ,the FVPP provides assistance in the development of agency wide strategies to address this pervasive problem in an integrated and

comprehensive way. The Family Violence Project has placed its considerable experience, dedication and resources to the task of creating safer homes for NYC's abused children and their non-abusing parents. Through our Parent Education/Abusive Partner Intervention Program we work to bring abusing men into our work of making families safer. We do this by both holding them accountable for their abuse **AND** giving them the tools for change. The goal of our work is to enhance the capacity of every part of the city's child welfare system to do this important work

In the past year we have seen a significant increase in interest in the work we do. This is due in large measure to the law suit initiated against NYC's child welfare system on behalf of battered women whose children have been placed in foster care. *Nicholson v Scopetta* establishes the legal basis for much of the work that the FVPP has been doing for over a decade. The law suit creates a method for sanctioning the city when it removes children from their non-abusive battered mothers; a remedy that the FVPP has been seeking for years through improved case practice. There are now mechanisms being built into ACS practice that allows the FVPP staff to work to keep battered women and their children safe and prevent foster care placement. The on-going impact of the law suit will only support our on-going work.

In addition, the FVPP is seeking additional funding in order to analyze the 10 years of data that we have collected which will indicate the effectiveness of our program. We hope to be able to write a report describing the program and the results that we have achieved. We would then distribute this manual to other organizations interested in the type of program that we have developed.

WHAT OUR RESEARCH SHOWS

Since the inception of the FVPP in 1993, research and evaluation has been an important element of our work. Our research, along with studies from around the country, has confirmed both the seriousness of the problem and the positive impact created by this new way of doing the work of child welfare. Studies show that, within the population of abused and neglected children, up to 50% of their mothers are also abused. Conversely, in the population of abused mothers, up to 70% have children who are abused by the same perpetrator who abuses them. Spouse and child abuse co-exist so frequently according to one study performed at Yale/New Haven Hospital that researchers concluded that "Spouse abuse may be the single most common context for child abuse." In addition, ACS's own Fatality Review Panel consistently uncovers domestic violence as one of the most common risk factors in lethal and near lethal child abuse.

The following represents some of our own findings:

Data from the Family Violence Prevention Project:

- A. From October 1993 to April 1994 the FVPP trained the protective workers in ZONE C of the Manhattan Field Office to include an assessment of adult domestic

B. Due to our concern that women under investigation for child abuse/neglect would be afraid to admit that they too were victims, we created an additional service and data collection project. This was implemented in the network of child welfare prevention programs. In this study we found a much higher rate of adult domestic violence. Almost 65% of all women interviewed said that they were the victims of adult domestic violence. These women were clients of agencies which had stated that “maybe a couple” of abused women were in their case load. These data, corroborating our belief that this was a wide spread problem, led us to create a comprehensive project designed to increase awareness, identify and serve clients and work towards systemic changes in the treatment of family violence. Columbia University also conducted in this study.

WHAT IS THE FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROJECT

The Family Violence Prevention Project is a comprehensive program designed to help those who work in the child welfare system identify and provide direct assistance to families experiencing child and woman abuse. In addition, the program is designed to work with ACS to develop intervention, policies and strategies that support the safety of children and their non-abusive parent. All components of the child welfare system must be helped to identify and assist abused women and their children as well as developing ways which hold perpetrators accountable. Following is a description of our current work:

I. PROGRAM DESIGN

To date the FVPP has 50 Preventive Services Programs and two foster care agencies in its initiative. Each participating program must agree to three basic requirements: to designate a domestic violence liaison for their program; to use the questionnaire on all new cases; to participate in research and evaluation efforts. The services we provide include: Training, Identification, Case Consultation, Safety Planning, Resource Development (including the development of specialized Parent Education services), Technical Assistance and Research and Evaluation.

One of the main reasons for the success of our program is that the FVPP realizes what both common sense and research confirms: training alone is not an adequate means to creating the ability to do this work. The established practices and historic mindset of the child welfare establishment must change considerably in order to truly take the nexus of child abuse and maternal safety as interconnected phenomena. Training on this new way of approaching the problem of child safety must be underscored by more training, case

based learning, staff support, institutional changes and new services. The FVPP provides the framework for this kind of comprehensive change. Specifically we provide the following:

1. STAFF TRAINING:

Staff from the 50 PPRS and two foster care programs is involved in an extensive training program on the dynamics of abuse in families. Training issues include: identification techniques; effective interventions, successful treatment modalities; domestic violence and substance abuse, mental illness, etc.. Training includes:

A. Initial training on domestic violence and the use of the Questionnaire for identification of families needing these services. The Questionnaire is used **on ALL NEW CASES** at intake. This is so information concerning the co existence of domestic violence and child maltreatment will be integrated into the case plan. A new questionnaire addressing Teen Relationship Abuse is also being developed

B. Twice Monthly half day Seminars which all participating programs attend at a central location. These seminars are for the Domestic Violence Liaisons. Each participating program must identify a domestic violence liaison who is provided with substantial training through these monthly seminars. They are also given extra resources in order that they may become the onsite expert in family violence for their home agency. They are then capable of being the resource person for their agency.

C. On site education geared to each program's individual needs. Often the issues that need attention are related to safety planning and general case consultations. Three programs are visited each week for this personalized attention.

D. Monthly Half Day Conversations are held at a central location for all/any staff of all participating programs in issues related to family violence that are of special importance. These include identification of abusive partners and resources available; working with children; mental health and substance abuse; public benefits and law enforcement, etc..

E. Telephone Consultation: All member programs are entitled to telephone consultation on an as needed basis. This consultation is designed to assist them with the emergency safety needs of victims of domestic violence as well as general assistance in case planning.

II. IDENTIFICATION

Each participating program is provided with a questionnaire used to identify victims of domestic violence in their client population. Training on the proper use of this questionnaire is provided in both the large seminar and on site settings. The protocol is used on all new intakes to identify battered mothers and to develop an effective service plan. The use of the questionnaire on all cases also contributes to our data collection and evaluation activities.

In addition we have developed a new universal screening tool to be used on all child protective investigations in all ACS Field Offices. This unique instrument assesses both for the abuse of women as well as male violence. We are also consulting with ACS's clinical consultation teams which provide domestic violence specialists in each Field Office.

III. REREARCH & EVALUATION:

Our commitment to research and evaluation since the inception of this program has meant that the FVPP has developed a body of data as well as a methodology for learning about the strengths and weaknesses of the program. The evolving nature of our program throughout the years has reflected our interest in seeing a truly **effective** program develop rather than a rigid program that fit the designer's conceptual framework. Columbia University School of Social Work continues to provide on going evaluation of the project through the data collected on the questionnaires.

IV. RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT:

This component of our program continues to operate but it is now funded through our new CONNECT program. This program provides training, capacity building and resource development assistance to community based organizations in the central Brooklyn communities of Flatbush and Crown Heights. This training program is now offered to all member FVPP program staff as well as all of our community partners from central Brooklyn. In addition, we have added a training piece on working with children who are exposed to family violence. This continues to be the only program of its kind in NYC and the rest of the country.

A. Parent Education: In order to assist families in which there is violence, new insights into the dynamics of family violence must be utilized. These are based on an understanding of spouse abuse in which **safety** is the primary concern for the non-abusing parent and children and that perpetrators will be held accountable and learn to take responsibility for their violence. This means that same gender education groups must be led by well trained professionals who understand the dynamics of battering relationships, how to help mothers and children to be safe and to help abusers learn non-abusive relationship skills.

Safety First: Women's Parent Education: Eighteen groups for mothers who are abused are being run. These groups are based on empowerment principles and focus of safety enhancement for mothers and their children.

The Abusive Partners Intervention Project: Men's Parent Education: Men who are abusive engage in behavior that is designed to exert their power and control over the members of their family. Physical abuse, threats, emotional degradation, sexual abuse, destroying property, harming pets, stalking, kidnapping, threats to kill are all common fare in abusive households. Traditional treatment (individual counseling, psychotherapy, family/couple counseling) have all been found to be ineffective in dealing with these

violent and abusive behaviors. These traditional forms of intervention are actually dangerous and should not be used with abusers. However, abusive men can be helped to stop the violence. The FVPP has developed a new form of batterer's intervention group designed for men who are abusive partners and fathers. We run ten APIP groups.

Child Witness to Violence Groups: Children who grow up in violent homes are at risk for many adverse reactions. These include: school problems; aggressive behavior; depression; delinquency; teen pregnancy; substance abuse and general symptoms of trauma. In addition they are more at risk for growing up to be wither battered women and abusive male partners. Child Witness to Violence groups are meant to help children deal with the violence in their lives on a practical and emotional level. These services are essential in attempting to prevent the on-going cycle of abuse.

V. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

At least twice a month meetings are held with program and administrative staff from ACS. This enables the staff of the FVPP to assist ACS in continuing to develop its domestic violence strategy. This includes issues related, but not limited to: Concurrent Planning; Instant Response; 72 Hour Case Consultation; additional areas of service, planning, research, resource development, etc..

CONCLUSION

The Family Violence Prevention Project was developed from the belief that enhancing the safety of women will increase children's safety. Battered mothers make up over 60% of the client families in the city's child welfare system. Through our program clients and staff of the child welfare system have been learning to address the nexus of child and woman abuse and to enhance the wellbeing of these families. Also, we provide the only services designed specifically to help abusive fathers. Our program has proven to be highly successful. We have been able to help programs learn to do this new work AND that families have become safer.