



Milwaukee

Brighter Futures

Meeting Summary: Feb. 17, 2009

New program aims at changing abusers' behaviors within families

Milwaukee Brighter Futures
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A new program supported by Brighter Futures seeks to disprove the belief that men who are batterers in their family can never change.

The program, entitled the Fatherhood Wisdom Walk Project, enrolls men who have a history of being violent to their intimate partner to assist them in learning more about themselves in a quest to end their violent behavior. Most of the men have been mandated to take part in the program that lasts for a year.

The program was described by Terri Strodthoff, executive director of the Alma Center, and Jojopah Maria Nsoroma, consultant to the project, at the February 17th Brighter Futures meeting at Aurora Family Service.

Strodthoff acknowledged that the agency often works with men who find little support in public opinion; furthermore many of the men come to the program with anger about their situation and are often not open to new ideas. She said the agency works with these men for several reasons, including the realization of three

basic realities: That people are not born violent, that violence is learned behavior, and that the "primary school" where children learn about violence is their own home.

The other reason to work with these men, she said, is that for a variety of complicated reasons, the majority of couples who experience domestic violence remain together. Surveys show 64% are with the same partner and 87% are fathers, with more than a third of them having three or more children. "The reality is men will continue to be in intimate relationship and will continue to be the father of their children whether or not they learn how to be a respectful partner and nurturing parent. If we are to break the cycle of learning passed from these fathers to their children, the men must change," she said.

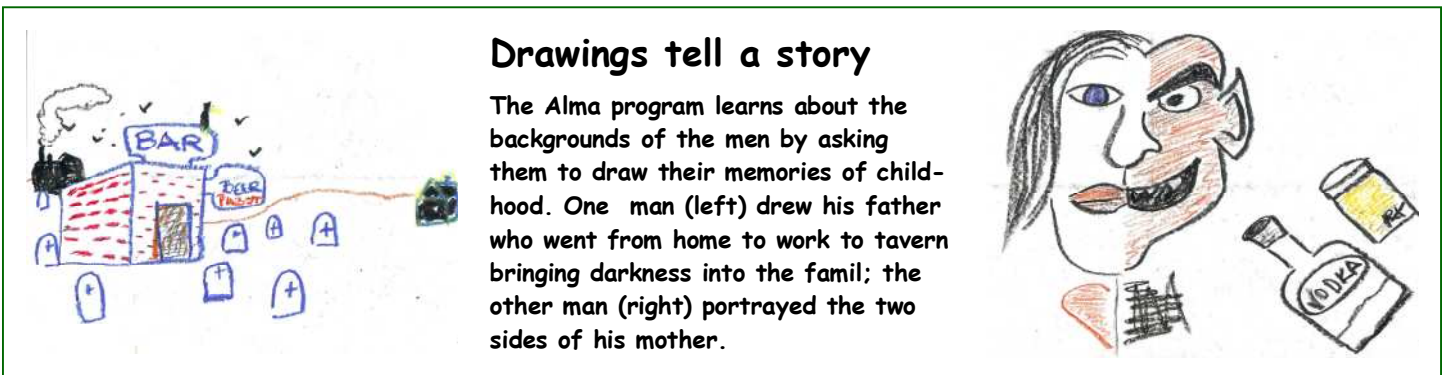
The *Men Ending Violence* Batterer Intervention Program attempts to understand the roots of the men's problem, Strodthoff said. She said the program looks into the lives of these men in a way that is able to

take seriously the impact of their own painful childhoods.

One of the activities in the program is for men to draw pictures of their mother and father which helps them to reflect upon their childhood, she said. The use of art directives helps the men to discuss issues they may not have otherwise mentioned, she said.

Strodthoff showed some of the drawings on a screen, and many of them demonstrated the troubled childhoods of the men. Typical was a picture drawn by a man who showed his mother with black "x's" in place of eyes, standing in a kitchen with darkened windows. The picture of this man's father, showed a dark house, a dark factory workplace and a tavern hangout in between the two other places. The man described his father as the source of the darkness—which he described as feelings of emptiness, unhappiness and anger, and the tavern was the fuel for the father's problems. In

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Drawings tell a story

The Alma program learns about the backgrounds of the men by asking them to draw their memories of childhood. One man (left) drew his father who went from home to work to tavern bringing darkness into the family; the other man (right) portrayed the two sides of his mother.

Changing behavior brings challenge to program

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front of the tavern the man drew a series of tombstones marking the death of the dreams of what could have been.

Another man drew a picture that portrayed his pain from losing both parents, his mother having died in his own childbirth and his father who then walked away from the family, leaving the boy to be raised by grandparents.

Strodt Hoff noted that most of the men grew up in a home experiencing problems of domestic violence and abuse -- 40% witnessing or experiencing physical violence; and 60% witnessing or experiencing verbal abuse; 60% had a parent or parents who abused alcohol or drugs; and, 20% said they experienced child abuse or neglect. The absence of their father was also a problem experienced by many of the men--50% did not know or live with their father and 34% had a father who was incarcerated.

Outside of the home, experiences of violence continued. It was sobering to learn that 60% of the men had family or friends who had been shot, 40% had friends or family murdered, and 32% had actually witnessed at least one homicide.

Other statistics tell about the fathers themselves: 35% of them were teen fathers; 40% have had children with multiple mothers, and 36% have three or more children. "So these men touch a lot of people," she said, giving urgency to finding ways to change their behavior.

Strodt Hoff said: "The question is: Can the perpetrators change?"

She referred to Social Learning Theory, which argues that growing up in an abusive family can increase risk for adult per-

petration because the experience teaches that "aggression works" for short term results, and may also instill a belief that



Nsoroma

aggressive behavior is acceptable and appropriate. For boys, socio-cultural lessons inside and outside the family continue to teach destructive myths of masculinity which connect being a man to violence.

Also these men have been exposed to trauma in their young lives and most men will never talk about it, she said. In order to help people find the motivation for change, we need to understand the roots of their violence, she added.

She described the components of the multifaceted Fatherhood Wisdom Walk program:

- Comprehensive assessment
- Men ending violence BIP
- Caring Dad Fatherhood Education Program
- Fatherhood Wisdom Walk trauma resolution retreat
- Case-management/ life skills
- Father/Youth Wisdom Walk Retreat

Jojobah Maria Nsoroma said the Fatherhood Wisdom Walk Project opens an opportunity for men who are ready to learn something new about themselves.

"They're so ready for something different. They are men who are at a point to learn."

She described the process as an evolutionary walk and journey for men to discover something about themselves. The five parts of the program follow in progression:

Meditation is done to help calm the men's minds, and enable them to focus.

Contemplation, in which the men are asked to think critically and emotionally about the ideas which continue to cause disruption in their lives

Affirmation brings faith gestures, and non-religious prayer to recreate a "rites of passage," so that the men can better

know themselves as human being." She added: "You can talk to them about doing the right things until doomsday but it's not until they do something and experience it for themselves that they complete affirmation."

Revelation, which she described as an "aha" moment. Something gets revealed that they were not aware of about their life, their belief systems, or what blocks them from being peaceful and peace-filled.

Redemption, which she said was getting access to the highest point of self-love that is generous and not destructive."

Jojobah said that when the men have completed the five steps, they can say to themselves that "yes the past was bad but I don't need to repeat that anymore."

When this happens it means that their children need not repeat the cycle of abuse, and the new paths of learning will continue for their children, their children's children and seven generations down the road, she said.

Part of the program involves a weeklong retreat, called the "Fatherhood Wisdom Walk trauma resolution retreat," located in a camp-like nature-setting, followed by a three night retreat that will bring fathers and sons (and, grandsons) together.

The facilitators are in a team involving psychotherapists, program instructor and healers. Jojobah said the facilitators are persons who have experienced the change the men are dealing with. "You have got to have walked this walk yourself," she said. There is a component for professional development built into the program, it was noted.

Most participants enter the program under mandates from the criminal justice system. The participants are in the program from a minimum of seven months to 12 months.

They must complete a 12-week program before they go on the week retreat and then the 3-day retreat with their sons. Evaluation is done both by reviewing arrest records and a pre- and post-test process.



Strodt Hoff

Teen Pregnancy Prevention Network aims at reaching out to hard-to-find youth, involving families

One of the state legislative mandates around Brighter Futures programming is to reduce the rate of teen pregnancy, and Anthony McHenry, chair of the Milwaukee BF Teen Pregnancy Prevention Network, discussed the Network's activities aimed at meeting that goal.

He said it's "an exciting time" because the Network is at a place it has never before been: it has resources for its activities.

"We're in a position to offer some programs, and we need more laborers," he said. This is a "recruitment effort," he said, and he was looking for more persons to join in the Network activities and to also attend Network meetings on the second Thursday of each month at noon at Silver Spring Neighborhood Center, 5460 N. 64th St.

The Network, he said, is concentrating in two areas. One is to reach those young people who rarely or never show up at programs of participating agencies. Some of the youth may not even be attending school, he said, and this makes it difficult for program groups to locate the youth. A strategy is to have a "traveling team" summit go into the schools where the children are having the most problems. The program calls for spending a full day in a school, and, he said, the first attempt was a success.

Secondly, he said, the Network wants to address pregnancy prevention at its root, by promoting the discussion of this and other issues between parents and their children. "It's difficult to do," he said. One strategy the Network developed, he

said, was Family Unity Night, which has been held on the second Thursday of each October for the last two years. The idea is to encourage families to join together for supper, either in their own homes, at a restaurant or at a group dinner, such as at a community center or church.

The goal of the Family Unity Night, which this year will be held on Oct. 8, is to help parents and children begin the process of

**Family Unity
Night — F.U.N.
— set Oct. 9th**

communicating with each other on family issues, including those conversations to prevent teen pregnancies. He said the group is working on developing ideas to make it easier for parents to talk with their children and to

provide them with skills to begin the conversation.

Racquel Bell noted that dialog on teen pregnancy prevention began at the January meeting, which brought out many ideas from participants as to how to succeed in the prevention effort. Some of the ideas were listed in a sheet distributed at the meeting and are reproduced in the newsletter. "It's important we continue this work," she said, indicating a fuller

discussion will be scheduled for the March meeting.

Teen Parent group assists teen moms access services

The Teen Parent Task Force works to assist those teens that have become parents and to provide them with resources to complete their high school while raising their children. The group's aim, too, is to prevent additional pregnancies among the young women. The group, which is a committee of the Milwaukee Child Abuse Prevention Services (MCAPS) coalition meets at 1:30 p.m. on the second Monday of each month at United Way, 225 W. Vine St. The meetings are open to all interested persons. For information, contact Jan Buchler, The Parenting Network, 671-5575 or at jbuchler@theparentingnetwork.org.

The MCAPS **Public Policy Committee** meets at 3 p.m. on the second Monday of each month at United Way, 225 W. Vine St. The next meeting is on March 9.

The **Family Resource Connections/Program Committee** of MCAPS will meet at

Tell your views about BMCW, foster care

The Planning Council for Health and Human Services, Inc., which provides planning, research, and evaluation in the health and human services arena, is conducting a study on strategies that will improve the safety of children in Milwaukee County's foster care system. The council is looking for foster parents, policy makers, kinship care providers, child advocates, and biological parents involved with the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare. The council is looking to learn about experiences with and suggestions for Milwaukee's foster care system.

For information go to www.planningcouncil.org and clicking on the link [We want to hear from you](#). You can also write to us at the Planning Council, 1442 N. Farwell Avenue, Suite 300, Milwaukee WI 53202, or email us at fostercare@planningcouncil.org. If you have any questions, call 414-224-0404 ext. 33 and ask for Lonna Kruse.



Meeting Attendance February 17, 2009

Aurora Family Service

Please send any corrections to
keng@communityadvocates.net

NOTE: All Brighter Futures funded agencies are expected to attend monthly MYFDA meetings, according to their contract

**A Better
Community
Through
Prevention**

First Name	Last Name	Agency
Priscilla	Neal	Aurora Family Service
Stephanie	Jung	BEAM
Christina	Treiber	Big Brothers Big Sisters
Sandy	Malone	Boys and Girls Club
Stephen	Adams	CDMP
Virginia	Zerpa	Center for Urban Population
Danielle	Luer	COA YFC - Goldin Center
Kari	Nervig	COA YFC - Riverwest Ctr
Andrea	Kurth	COA Youth and Family Centers
Racquel	Bell	Community Advocates
Andi	Elliott	Community Advocates
Joe	Volk	Community Advocates
Kenneth	Germanson	Community Advocates
Christina	Morris	Counseling Center of Milwaukee
Wendy	Mc Carty	Dept. of Children and Families
Bob	Waite	IMPACT
Clarence	Rice	Innerworks
Betsy	Heinen	La Causa FRC
Cristina	Ledezma	Latino Community Center
John	DeMott	Marquette Univ. Ctr for Peacemaking
Jennifer	Carrasco	Marquette University
Natalie	Fleury	Marquette University
Deborah	Bryant	Milwaukee Adolescent Health
Lenora	Shaw	Milwaukee Adolescent Health Program
Emilio	Lopez	Milwaukee Christian Center
Terence	Ray	Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative
Julie	Bock	Milwaukee LGBT
Jody	Rhodes	Neu-Life Community Resource Ctr
Al	Holmes	New Concept Self Dev. Ctr.
David	Scholl	Ombudsman
Brendan	Gants	Parents Plus
Patrice	Knox	Parents Plus, Inc.
Trudy	Ranallo	Parents Plus, Inc.
Katie	Ames	Pathfinders
Gerry	Howze	Pearls for Teen Girls, Inc.
Marge	Kreuser	Perez-Pena, LTD
Carmen	Ray	Ray's Consulting
Anthony	Mc Henry	Silver Spring Neighborhood Center
Brenda	Bell-White	State of Wis MPSIO
Theresa	Post	Task Force on Family Violence
Jan	Buchler	The Parenting Network
Erin	Ebert	The Parenting Network
Viki	Olsen	The Parenting Network
Stephany	Pruitt	Vincent Family Resource Center
Marissa	Lopez	Walker's Point Youth and Family Ctr.
Sally	Ladky	WI Abstinence Coalition
Leah	Ganjbakhsh	WRTP/Big Step
Jan	Wilberg	Consultant

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