Helping Families With Multiple Issues ...

At age 17, Carrie met the man with whom she would share her life, give birth to three children, and eventually fear. By age 30, she realized she had been married to an abuser who controlled her. In retrospect, she could see the “red flags” that she had once overlooked. Only after several years of progressively worse, long-term physical and emotional abuse would she turn to the assistance of a battered women’s shelter. Once in the safety of the shelter with her children, she was able to confront many of the issues she was dealing with, including her own addiction to alcohol. She entered a substance abuse program and, after several months of sobriety, began to learn ways to cope and survive without alcohol. As is the situation in many of these cases, Carrie did not present well to the court. She is a recovering alcoholic and does not have a job. Her abuser, on the other hand, appeared to the court to be a man who is financially stable, willing to cooperate, and a concerned father. The court granted custody to him. Now Carrie is forced to make a difficult decision: return to her batterer in an effort to keep her children safe or face years of court battles with no resources in an attempt to regain custody of her children.

Carrie is a compilation character, but her experiences resonate as very real for thousands of battered women. The Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Child Protection and Custody (Resource Center) receives many calls and letters from women facing similar challenges around the violence in their lives, as well as requests for assistance from the those in the field seeking to help them. The events and sentiments expressed convey some common themes; most profoundly they demonstrate how the experience of domestic violence does not happen in isolation and often can carry with it a host of other variables and obstacles. In our well-intentioned efforts to create change, we may often find it necessary to break down our solutions into more manageable interventions which, very possibly, do not meet the comprehensive needs of the families who are affected by violence. Contacts to the Resource Center highlight that some of the barriers battered women and their children face often are created by the very policies and practices of the systems in which they are involved and turn to for help. Additionally, professionals attempting to implement effective policies, programs, and interventions around domestic violence are challenged by real life situations that are complicated and often convoluted with multiple issues.

In this issue of Synergy, we share with you our continuing efforts to change the landscape of child custody and domestic violence; highlight an innovative substance abuse program that empowers victims; review a new book on child custody and domestic violence; direct you to valuable resources on the web; and announce a conference that will focus on prevention and intervention strategies for African American children exposed to domestic violence.

Thank you for guiding our work and helping us remain ever vigilant in our goals.

Merry Hofford, Director
Family Violence Department
The co-occurrence of domestic violence and substance abuse has been widely documented by both the addiction and violence literature. Numerous studies show that battered women are more likely than non-battered women to become dependent on alcohol and other drugs, and that chemically dependent women are up to three times more likely than non-chemically dependent women to become victims of abuse. Moreover, many substance-abusing battered women are investigated by child protection services and are at risk of losing access to their children if they do not achieve sobriety.

Despite these concerns, few battered women’s shelters have the resources to accommodate substance-abusing women, and drug treatment programs rarely are tailored to women with children nor do they address the impact of domestic violence on recovery. The result can often be a safety- and service-gap for these women and their children.

How do battered women with chemical dependencies find safety for themselves and their children? How do they “get clean” given the lack of treatment programs for women? And, as drug treatment is often a condition of maintaining the relationship with her child, how does a battered woman re-learn parenting free from drugs and violence?

By helping battered mothers obtain safety and sobriety while maintaining custody of their children, one program fills the gap in safety and services for chemically-dependent victims. The Turning Point, Inc., Safe Recovery Program (SRP) in Massachusetts is a residential treatment program designed specifically for battered women with alcohol or drug addictions and their children.

This article will describe SRP’s innovative program design, which centers on a four-phase therapeutic approach to violence and addiction recovery, and how SRP uses a multi-system collaboration both to preserve the relationship between battered women and their children as well as reintegrate these families safely and productively into their communities.

History of SRP

SRP came into existence as the result of a need discovered by the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS). Mothers involved with DSS, as a result of abuse or neglect issues, were often victims of domestic violence. In many of these cases, mothers were abusing drugs as well. However, there was no place for these women to go to escape the abuse, get treatment for their substance use, and keep their children with them.

Recognizing this gap in services and with several decades of experience in the area of residential treatment programs, Turning Point, Inc., a non-profit community-based human services agency headquartered in Massachusetts, established SRP in 1992 with funding from Massachusetts DSS and through a collaboration of community agencies.

In seeking to provide services for co-occurring conditions, SRP involved agencies with oftentimes incongruent missions, philosophies, and approaches to care. Massachusetts DSS, the battered women’s community, and the substance abuse community joined together in an alliance to address the intersection of child protection, violence, and addiction in a way that would benefit both mothers and children, requiring all three communities to find philosophical common-ground.

Today, SRP is a six- to 12-month residential program that can accommodate up to 10 chemically-dependent battered women and their children. While some residents self-refer to SRP, most residents are referred by DSS as a condition of parent-child reunification. To maintain safety for its residents, SRP cannot accept clients who live in the local community.

An Innovative Approach

Though the prevalence of co-occurring violence and addiction is well documented, less is known about why this co-occurrence exists. Some researchers theorize that victims “self-medicate” with alcohol and other substances in order to cope with the violence, while others suggest that chemical addictions may predispose women to violent relationships. While the causal link between violence and addiction continues to be explored, SRP’s approach acknowledges that if the trauma and addiction have been experienced together, so must the subsequent services and treatment. At SRP, residents undergo simultaneous services and treatment, while maintaining access to their children in a therapeutic environment. SRP’s approach fosters a sense of hope for the future: by having their children with them, residents are able to concentrate on their work of recovery.
Consistent with the research on effective recovery strategies, SRP residents develop combined safety and sobriety service plans, individualized to the resident's current stage of recovery and the needs of both mother and child. SRP's overall treatment design is divided into four phases: (1) orientation, (2) commitment, (3) transition, and (3) reintegration, each characterized by a specific list of objectives per a variety of indicators such as sobriety, safety, parenting and children's issues, time management, and housing. Accomplishing self-identified objectives for each indicator within established timeframes allows the resident to advance through each phase, leading ultimately to her reintegration into the community with her children.

Regardless of her recovery phase, each SRP resident attends a variety of mandatory on-site group and individual therapeutic interventions, including sessions on trauma and addiction, relapse prevention and recovery, and parent training, all designed through the dual lenses of abuse and addiction. Regular on-site drug-testing is a key monitoring component.

Healing the Whole Family

Statements from former clients consistently speak to a new sense of clarity—of feeling "like myself for the first time in my life"—as a result of completing SRP. Clients feel that they reconnect with themselves and find the part of themselves that helps them organize their experience and make sense of their reality. Residents ask themselves: who and what kind of person do I want to be?

Central to SRP's holistic treatment approach is the re-learning of life-skills free from violence and drugs. During SRP interventions, residents reflect on past behaviors that mediated substance abuse and work on goal-setting for themselves and their children. They identify new behaviors that will support long-term safety and sobriety; then, as drug dependence lessens, they are able to make safe and healthy new choices.

However, residents often struggle with how to plan for life without their abusers. Even though the battered woman's partner is abusing her, he may be the father of her children, her husband, or the major breadwinner of the family. Battered women can remain, in many cases, emotionally or financially connected to their abusers.

As mothers in SRP re-learn life-skills free from violence and drugs, so do their children. SRP teaches children that it is okay to have and express their feelings and then provides a safe space for children to articulate their anger, frustration, pain, and confusion. Through a structured children's program designed to help break the generational nature of both violence and addiction, children learn to communicate their feelings about the abuse and to interact with others in a non-violent manner. Simultaneously, mothers are supported in acknowledging their children's feelings and learn to respond to their children with non-violent actions and words. If mandated, children can also maintain visitation with their fathers while staying at SRP; supervised visits are conducted off-site by DSS and are tailored to the child's safety needs and age. Because SRP addresses the needs of victims as well as their children, all family members can undergo a concurrent process of recovery.

Recovery and Reintegration

Completion of SRP does not end with the residential program; instead, the final phase of SRP's intervention is the resident's successful re-entry into the community with her children along with the tools and resources to sustain long-term safety and sobriety. While at SRP, residents receive intensive case management in addition to treatment that can include assistance with obtaining public benefits and housing. Residents can also access health care, GED classes, and other educational courses on topics such as legal concerns, financial planning, and vocational training. Supportive services such as these are provided through SRP's partnerships with local community-based organizations.

SRP's partnership with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) offers a final level of support for safe and successful community reintegration. Upon leaving SRP's residential program, residents are eligible for Turning Point, Inc.'s HUD-funded Mainstream Housing Program in which battered women and their children can live for up to two years in furnished apartments while continuing to access the case management, support groups, and educational services of SRP.

Since its founding, SRP has sheltered more than 300

Continued on page 7

"Any family who leaves SRP living a healthier lifestyle than when they came in is a success to us. I believe we do well because of ... the belief that each person is a valued human being and deserves respect and another chance."

Jeanne Settipane, Director of Family Services, Safe Recovery Program (SRP)
New Staff Introductions

The Family Violence Department of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges is pleased to announce the arrival of three new staff members:

**Jannette Tucker** joins the Family Violence Department as an attorney. Jannette directed a shelter for battered women in Atlanta, Georgia, and practiced labor and employment law for nearly three years in Chicago, Illinois. Among her primary responsibilities will be providing legal expertise for departmental projects; updating the department's domestic violence statutes database; completing the Family Violence: Legislative Update, Volume 8; and providing technical assistance and resource development for the Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Child Protection and Custody. Jannette received her Juris Doctorate from DePaul University, College of Law, in Chicago. She also has a Master of Arts in Counseling from John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio.

**Tracy Keever** joins the Family Violence Department as an administrative assistant. Her primary responsibilities are to respond to technical assistance requests from the department's website and provide general clerical support. Tracy brings with her several years of experience as a children's advocate in the courts and a medical administrator. She currently volunteers as a Domestic Violence Crisis Counselor and is working towards an Associate's Degree in Juvenile Criminal Justice.

**Cammie Taylor** joins the Family Violence Department as an administrative assistant after transferring from within the National Council. Prior to this position, Cammie was employed with the National Judicial College as well as a family law firm. Her primary responsibilities with the department are coordinating staff and committee travel and supporting the department's conference planning activities.

News Notes

**Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community**

The Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community's annual conference will bring together people from across the country to learn about the impact domestic violence has on children between the ages of preschool and adolescence, and to discuss protection and intervention strategies to equip professionals in assisting African American Children and their families.

African American Children and Domestic Violence: Prevention and Intervention Forum
June 5-6, 2003 • Minneapolis, Minnesota

For more information, contact the Institute at (877) NIDVAAC (643-8222).

**2002 Legislative Update Available Soon**

Each year the Family Violence Department tracks new state laws that focus on domestic and family violence. The Family Violence: Legislative Update, Volume 8, will be available this spring and covers those laws enacted during the 2002 legislative sessions for every state and the District of Columbia. For more information or to receive a copy of the Legislative Update, please contact the Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Child Protection and Custody at (800) 527-3223.


In recognition of the needs of battered women who face language barriers in the court system, the Family Violence Department has translated its instructional publication, Managing Your Divorce: A Guide for Battered Women (Pro Se packet), into a fourth language, Korean. This packet is designed to help battered mothers navigate the judicial system without legal representation when child custody and visitation are at stake. The packet is now available in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Korean.

To receive a copy of the Korean Pro Se packet or for information on any of our resources, please contact the Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Child Protection and Custody at (800) 527-3223.
Conversations on Contested Child Custody and Domestic Violence: A Multi-disciplinary Approach

The Family Violence Department of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges brought together a multi-disciplinary group on January 15-16, 2003, to examine tensions among varying points of view about how to address domestic violence most appropriately in child custody conflicts and to identify specific subjects for which the National Council can produce curriculum pieces that will be instructive and useful to judges and the field.

During the meeting, participants discussed current paradigms that exist in child custody cases involving domestic violence. Some of the child custody paradigms identified by participants include the best interests of the child, frequent and continuing contact as a sacred principle, and the presumption that joint/shared custody works in most cases.

Participants also discussed what neutrality means in child custody cases involving domestic violence and how that neutrality impacts the work of child custody evaluators and supervised visitation programs. Much of the discussion revolved around the tensions between the domestic violence law and family law paradigms. For the most part, participants agreed that there is a collision between the domestic violence lens, on the one hand, with its considerations of safety, protection of the non-abusing parent, and separation as part of protection; and the family law lens, on the other, with its considerations of parental rights, the ability to parent, and the child’s access to both parents.

Throughout the meeting, participants expressed the need for more resources, among them legal representation for victims and their children at the time of problem identification, safe visitation options, and economic resources for the stability of battered women and their children.

Participants also recognized the need for better research data, more judicial accountability, demystification of the court process, culturally appropriate responses and services, elevation of domestic violence in the assessment of best interests of the child, and batterer intervention programs that address issues faced by abusive fathers.

Among the core values of the curriculum identified by participants were: safety for all family members and respect for families; the need for the learner to understand the complexity of the problem of domestic violence and the diversity of potential solutions; and the ability to recognize and respect differences and perspectives among the different professions.

Family Violence Department staff are identifying the next steps in the curriculum development process, while keeping at the forefront the department’s commitment to change the landscape of child custody conflicts in the context of adult domestic violence.

During a breakout session, participants discuss families with multiple issues.

Participants find an opportunity to collaborate during the meeting.
Decades of research on divorce have gradually popularized the notion that, when families are healthy, there is a benefit to children from joint custody and shared parenting. However, public opinion has yet to experience a similar depth of understanding regarding custody decisions when there is domestic violence. Instead, many professionals continue to believe that allegations of domestic violence in custody disputes are mostly false and used only to gain the upper hand in a divorce.

In their new book, Child Custody and Domestic Violence: A Call for Safety and Accountability, Peter G. Jaffe, PhD; Nancy K.D. Lemon, JD; and Samantha E. Poisson, MEd dispel the myth of false allegations and, in its place, offer an evidence-based description of the current custody landscape when domestic violence is involved. In the process, the authors support a central thesis that domestic violence can no longer be minimized as a custody factor and that custody disputes involving domestic violence require “a different analysis and distinct interventions” by professionals involved with divorcing families.

Child Custody and Domestic Violence begins with an overview of the dynamics of domestic violence (i.e., why women stay, the effect of violence on children, etc.) and its relevance to custody disputes, citing from experience and the scientific literature how the impact of violence rarely ends with separation. The authors go on to discuss how legal and mental health professionals can effectively assess allegations of domestic violence within a custody situation. In Chapter 2: Assessing Safety and Responsibility in Child-Custody Disputes, the authors acknowledge the challenges custody professionals face in validating the presence and effect of domestic violence in the family, particularly when clinical validation using psychological testing and interviewing has not been shown to determine the presence of domestic violence reliably in all cases. The authors do put forth and discuss the merits of a selection of tools and guidelines drawn from the current literature that can assist professionals in this task, including leading typologies for assessing batterer behavior and lethality as well as commonly used assessment questionnaires for use with victims, children, and batterers. The authors also provide a sample inventory tool for documenting a history of abuse.

In Chapters 3 and 4: Changing Legislation and Legal Practice to Recognize Domestic Violence in Child-Custody Proceedings and From Theory to Practice: The Varying Responses of the Court System to Domestic Violence in Child-Custody Cases, the authors summarize trends in international, national, and state legislation as well as in appellate and trial court decisions related to custody and domestic violence. The authors observe that most states allow or even require judges to consider domestic violence as a custody factor, yet studies continue to show high percentages of cases involving domestic violence result in sole or joint custody to batterers. Here, the authors note the presence of a conflicting mandate: the majority of states favor the notion of frequent and continuing contact while, at the same time, judges are charged with protecting children from abuse. Reconciliation of this conflict, observe the authors, will require a legislative solution.

Child Custody and Domestic Violence offers a variety of potential solutions to ensuring that domestic violence is appropriately considered in custody disputes. Specific recommendations are provided in the areas of legislation, training, and program and policy development and address such issues as supervised visitation centers, custody evaluators and mediators, and therapeutic interventions for victims, children, and batterers.

In addition to providing a detailed first-hand and evidence-based description of domestic violence and custody practices, what ultimately makes this book unique is the authors’ willingness to delve into the controversial issues surrounding domestic violence and custody. For example, the authors provide a side-by-side comparison of how fathers’ rights groups and domestic violence advocates view differently some key issues around domestic violence and custody. The authors also take on the difficult subjects of “parental alienation,” mutual abuse, relocation, victims as mothers and batterers as fathers, grandparents and third party parenting, “failure to protect,” and false allegations.

Child Custody and Domestic Violence is a comprehensive yet concise commentary on the critical role that domestic violence plays in custody disputes. For any professional working with divorcing families, this book is a valuable new resource, providing succinct reviews of the data, summaries of legislative trends, concrete guidelines for improving practice, and in-roads into the thorny subjects that surround an already complex yet ultimately life-altering issue for battered women and their children.

To receive a copy of Child Custody and Domestic Violence contact Sage Publications at (800) 818-7243 or via the internet at www.sagepublications.com.
women and children and demonstrates how community agencies can collaborate effectively to address service- 
gaps for battered women and their children. By merging treatment modalities, providing a safe and structured 
environment for women to be with their children, and 
including support for safe community reintegration, SRP 
offers a holistic approach to recovery for victims who 
would otherwise have to choose between safety and 
sobriety or—lacking a treatment program—would have 
to relinquish access to their children in order to “get 
clean.”

Unlike traditional programs, SRP offers the opportu-
nity for mothers to remain in contact with their 
children while addressing their chemical-dependen-
ties, thereby increasing the efficacy of recovery as well 
as beginning to break the cycles of abuse. Today, 
professionals from across the country visit SRP to learn 
replicable strategies for addressing co-occurring 
conditions for victims and for facilitating the preserva-
tion of their relationship with their children in the face 
of violence and addiction.

For more information about the Turning Point, Inc., 
Safe Recovery Program, please contact (978) 388-6600 
by email at TPInc@aol.com.

Editor’s Note: Synergy would like to acknowledge 
Jeanne Settipane, SRP’s Director of Family Services, for 
her generous contribution to this article.

1 For a recent review of the literature, see e.g. Salomon, A. et al. The 
relationship between intimate partner violence and the use of addictive 
substances in poor and homeless single mothers. Violence Against 
Women, Vol. 8, No. 7 (July 2002), pp. 784 - 815.
2 Stuart, G. et al Marital violence victimization and perpetration among 
women substance abusers. Violence Against Women, Vol. 8, No. 8 (August 
3 Cited in Turning Point, Inc., Safe Recovery Program. Intersection 
between substance abuse and domestic violence. Handout.
4 Ibid.
5 For a recent review of the literature, see e.g. Salomon, A. et al.
6 See for e.g., Stuart, G. et al.

Resources on the Web

Every day, staff members of the Family Violence 
Department refer to essential resources on the Internet 
to assist them in providing technical assistance and 
researching the most current, up-to-date information. 
Among those resources are the following:

**ABA Center for Pro Bono** - The American Bar 
Association (ABA)’s Center for Pro Bono & Public Service offers an online directory of pro bono pro-
grams. Users can click the interactive map and receive 
a complete listing of state and local pro bono offices, 
including those that specialize in family law. Also on 
this website is information about the ABA’s Pro Bono 
Child Custody Project, which aims to enhance the delivery of legal services to poor and low income 
children involved in parentage matters. The Project’s Child Custody Resource Library contains more than 
230 documents and will be available online soon. 
http://www.abanet.org/legal-services/probono/

**MINCAVA** - A resource of the University of 
Minnesota’s School of Social Work, the Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse Electronic Clear-
ninghouse (MINCAVA) is one of the most comprehen-
sive and widely used websites for violence-related 
information on the internet. Resources available 
through MINCAVA include syllabi and curricula, 
research reports, funding opportunities, training 
events and manuals, referral sources to service provid-
ers, and searchable databases of more than 700 
journals, videos, and other reference materials. 
MINCAVA’s topic areas range from animal abuse to 
youth violence with specific resources earmarked for 
education, health care, criminal justice, and social service professionals. http://www.mincava.umn.edu

**VAWnet** - The National Electronic Network on 
Violence Against Women (VAWnet) is a project of the 
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. 
VAWnet’s library, now open to the public, offers 
several online collections of materials related to 
domestic violence, including a law collection and a 
periodicals page. The website also operates a series of 
Private Forums allowing for discussion among col-
leagues on topics such as applied research, public 
policy, and coalition-building. VAWnet also offers an 
interactive map of state domestic violence coalitions, 
updates on current events, and an extensive listing of 
services for battered women and their children. 
http://www.vawnet.org

**VAWOR** - The Violence Against Women Online 
Resources (VAWOR) is a cooperative project between 
MINCAVA and the U.S. Department of Justice, Office 
on Violence Against Women. This site was designed to 
provide criminal justice, advocacy, health care, and 
social service professionals with up-to-date informa-
tion on domestic violence interventions. Articles 
posted to the site’s document library are reviewed by a 
National Advisory Board comprised of professionals 
from a spectrum of criminal justice and related profes-
sions. As a project of the Office on Violence Against 
Women, this website also offers links to federal 
funding opportunities in the area of domestic violence. 
http://www.vaw.umn.edu
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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES  
University of Nevada, Reno  
Post Office Box 8970  
Reno, Nevada 89507

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