

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE COORDINATED COMMUNITY RESPONSE

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Coordinated community responses (CCR) are shaped by factors unique to a community such as population, size of the area covered, available resources (especially financial), and the level of cooperation and commitment of practitioners and decision-makers within each agency. The experiences of the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project and dozens of other projects across the country have identified that effective community efforts are identified by eight characteristics. Activities carried out by the involved agencies fall within each of these characteristics.

In Duluth, the program responsible for coordinating these activities is the intervention project. The ways that these activities are carried out in a community and an intervention project varies. If resources are limited, these activities may have to be prioritized. For example, an intervention project may not have the funds to provide educational groups for assailants, and the community may not have the appropriate programs to which assailants can be referred. A decision could be made to focus available resources on tracking assailants through the system, ensuring that they are being held accountable to conditions of probation or orders for protection, and placing assailants in a community work program rather than a rehabilitation program.

Different activities will also take priority at different points in a CCR’s existence. Building a common perspective shared by justice system practitioners will be ongoing and is likely to take more time and energy during the implementation stage.

The eight characteristics of an effective coordinated community response and some of the activities that occur within each follow.

1. The intervention process is guided by an underlying philosophical framework.

Agencies in a CCR are actively involved in challenging each other and changing how the community thinks about violence by building an underlying philosophical framework which guides the intervention process. They do this by:

- reducing conflicting theories about battering and about how to protect victims and hold offenders accountable;
- examining the assumptions and philosophical foundation underlying current practice;
- working towards an understanding among practitioners of the complex dynamics of an abusive relationship and a commitment to handle cases in a manner that doesn’t blame or revictimize the victim;

- recognizing that violence is intended to have an impact on the person being hit, kicked, or shot at, giving one party power over the other;
- staying current on research and educational materials on battering; and
- addressing tensions caused by conflicting philosophies through ongoing discussions among practitioners.

2. Policies, procedures, and protocols are in place, which coordinate and standardize the intervention actions of practitioners involved in the coordinated community response.

Agencies in a CCR have policies, procedures, and protocol which:

- take into account how their practices affect victims;
- chart out the roles, possible intervention actions, and procedures of each intervening agent in the system, e.g., 911 dispatcher, police officer, jailer;
- create linkages between agencies and ensure that each agency's policies complement other agency policies;
- outline the exchange of information, collection of data, and a process to notify administrators when practitioners fail to comply with agreed-upon policies;
- clarify when they may exercise discretion, when they must take certain steps and what conditions suggest different options; and
- are reviewed and updated to include new practices which can maximize victim safety.

3. A data collection system is in place for monitoring and tracking cases from initial contact through case closure to ensure practitioner and offender accountability.

Cases are monitored and tracked from initial contact through case closure to ensure practitioner and offender accountability by:

- maintaining a database and statistical information on the system's response;
- reviewing law enforcement, prosecutor, probation agent, judicial, batterers group, and intervention project behavior for compliance with established policies, protocols and procedures;
- determining what information is important and where and how to get it;
- tracking cases for breakdowns in the system;
- utilizing data to determine if agency objectives are being realized; and
- developing policies with each agency for the collection of data and a process to notify administrators when practitioners fail to comply.

4. A system/process is in place for coordinating the exchange of information and interagency communication and program decisions on individual cases.

Information is exchanged and interagency communication facilitated by:

- routing all available information on a case to those practitioners involved with it;
- distributing information and reports generated through data collection which summarize data, trends, etc.;
- coordinating interagency meetings to resolve problems with individual cases and discuss related issues faced by practitioners;
- holding smaller meetings as needed to address issues as they arise;
- facilitating input by all people/agencies affected by policy change or development; and
- providing for the exchange of information between agencies so there is a common understanding of how their policies complement one another's efforts.

5. Resources and services for victims and other at-risk family members are available to protect them from further abuse.

- Emergency safe housing, legal advocacy, access to resources, and support services are available for all victims; and
- information and referral to battered women's programming are made available by all agencies in the CCR.

6. A combination of sanctions, restrictions, and rehabilitation services hold offenders accountable to the victim and the goals of the community intervention process.

A combination of sanctions, restrictions, and rehabilitation services to hold offenders accountable are in place, including:

- a law enforcement arrest policy;
- prosecution and judicial policies which discourage the "screening out" of cases;
- requiring pre-sentence investigations and extended probation periods;
- judicial policy which ensures that repeated acts of violence or violations of orders for protection result in stricter penalties, including jail, counseling, no-contact provisions, restitution, community service, and other restrictions; and
- monitoring attendance at nonviolence classes to hold offenders accountable, resulting in consequences for failure to attend.

7. Efforts are ongoing to undo harm to children.

The CCR works to undo harm to children by:

- assessing for risk to children at each point of intervention;
- providing safe places for children to visit with their non-custodial parent;
- requiring abusive parents to participate in groups which focus on helping children heal from the effects of living in a home where there has been violence; and

- accounting fully for the pattern, severity and frequency of violence being used by a parent when determining visitation, custody, and rehabilitation plans.

8. Training and evaluation of the coordinated community response is ongoing from the standpoint of victim safety and the goals of the intervening agencies.

Training is provided and the CCR is evaluated from the standpoint of victim safety and their overall objectives by:

- providing training for all participants on the goals of the CCR, new policies and developments in the field;
- participating in research to determine the effectiveness of policies and procedures in protecting women from further violence; and
- evaluating the level of change of court-mandated offenders by analyzing reductions in abusive behaviors and the extent to which women are free to act without control or restraints from the offender.

The agencies coordinated to carry out these activities by the intervention project in conjunction with the women's shelter, are law enforcement, city and county jails, city and county prosecutors, criminal and civil courts, probation, and counseling programs who provide batterers programs. Each agency has a specific role in each case. Their role must be carefully coordinated with all of the other agencies to ensure a consistent and uniform response.

The coordinating body for a coordinated community response is most effective if it is independent from city and county government. The Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth has received limited funding from these units of government, and hence has been relatively unfettered when confronting a particular practice of a participating agency. When intervention projects are separate from the shelter, organizers of projects should work with shelters to ensure that projects are not negatively impacting shelter funding and that the protection of battered women through safe housing and advocacy takes priority.