



REACHING AND ASSISTING TANF RECIPIENTS WHO ARE IN VIOLENT RELATIONSHIPS

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The number of families receiving TANF benefits has declined significantly since federal and state welfare policies have changed. Between August, 1996, and June, 1999 there was a drop of 43 percent in the number of TANF recipients nationwide and 56 percent drop in Texas, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The families who have returned to or remained on TANF are described as the "hardest to serve" because they usually have many personal or situational obstacles to long-term success in employment. They are at greatest risk of exceeding TANF time limits without being able to support themselves and their families through ongoing employment that pays living wages. Without public benefits or wages sufficient to support their families, they are likely to sink into even deeper levels of poverty and to have fewer resources to assist them in overcoming the multiple hardships that complicate and disrupt their lives.

By reaching and assisting TANF recipients who are or have been in violent partnerships so that they can make a successful transition from welfare to long-term employment, we have opportunities to help in making their lives both safer and more financially secure. Federal and state laws and policies are in place to allow certain protections for TANF recipients in violent partnerships and to offer them a wide range of support and assistance to overcome obstacles that prevent them from holding jobs that pay living wages and resolving other personal and circumstantial issues that disrupt their lives. Policies and procedures to implement welfare-to-work laws and regulations are evolving, with most of the authority and responsibilities vest in local communities. **Our challenge is to work collaboratively with public and private agencies and organizations to design and implement programs and services that are effective with the families who continue to struggle to move safely and successfully out of the welfare system and into employment that pays living wages.**

Domestic violence advocates and service providers are important players on the teams of people attempting to implement welfare reform in a way that benefits as many families and hurts as few as possible. Many women who seek services from local domestic violence agencies rely on TANF for financial support and need the services that are or should be available through TANF and other public assistance programs. Advocates can be very helpful to the women in their programs by assuring that they understand what is expected once they enroll in TANF, what options are available to protect their safety, and how to get support services or skills development assistance that may help them earn wages sufficient to support themselves and their families.

While many women involved with local domestic violence service agencies are or are applying to become TANF recipients, **most TANF recipients in violent partnerships are not affiliated with domestic violence programs or services.** In order to reach and assist them, it is important that we learn as much about them as possible. We need to understand the conditions that affect their lives, the types

of assistance that best meet their needs, and the factors that influence their ability and their willingness to participate in programs and services intended to help them.

Effective participation in TANF and Welfare-to-Work programs requires that advocates understand the systems charged with implementing these programs. Where new and different approaches are needed to serve the diverse population receiving welfare, advocates need to be flexible, creative, and willing to share responsibilities with others who may be more effective in meeting the needs of certain women in violent partnerships. It also may be possible for some domestic violence programs and advocates to expand the scope and nature of their services when necessary to accommodate certain women. **The challenges are great, but so are the opportunities to reach and assist women who are not being served through existing programs and whose needs are extreme and wide-ranging.**

The following discussion addresses three issues that have an impact on the design and implementation programs and services that are effective in helping families move safely and successfully from welfare to financial security:

1. What we know about the "hardest to serve" families who are experiencing the greatest difficulties in moving off welfare and into permanent employment;
2. What we have learned about procedures to identify and assist TANF recipients who are in violent relationships;
3. Possibilities for designing and supporting alternative strategies that meet the needs of the diverse groups of women who are trying to make a safe and successful transition off welfare and to assure the well being of their families.

Much of the discussion is applicable for women who are involved with domestic violence service programs. However, the primary focus is intended to address the women who are not involved with domestic violence programs, since they represent the majority of women in the TANF system, and reaching and assisting them is likely to be our greatest challenge.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT FAMILIES RECEIVING TANF

Research studies of families enrolled in TANF are consistently finding that domestic violence is both a safety threat and an employment barrier for many women. However, focusing on domestic violence in isolation from other important aspects of their lives does not lead to solutions that are meaningful and helpful to them. Domestic violence is interwoven with other personal issues and ongoing hardships that complicate their lives and influence their responses to offers of domestic violence and other services. The following points highlight what has been learned through research and practical experience with women in the TANF system that live in families and communities affected by extreme poverty and who are having the most difficulty moving from welfare to employment that allows them to support themselves and their families.

- 20 to 30% of women enrolled in TANF are currently in violent partnerships, and approximately two-thirds have experienced domestic violence at some time in their adult lives.
- Women who live in extreme poverty are more likely to be victims of domestic violence and sexual assault than are women in higher income households. A report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics states that women in households where the income is below \$10,000 are four time more likely to be victims of

violence, often at the hands of a male partner, than are women in households with higher incomes.

- Low-income women who are victims of partner violence are just as likely as women in nonviolent partnerships to be employed at a given point in time. However, they have more difficulty maintaining employment, have lower incomes, are more likely to cycle on and off welfare, and are more likely to spend a greater cumulative time on welfare rolls. They are most likely to have sporadic employment if their partners harass them at work or threaten to harm their children. Because they often keep jobs for a shorter time period, they are less likely to get salary raises or job promotions.
- Most women on TANF who are in violent partnerships face other personal or circumstantial hardships, similar to other impoverished women who are not in violent relationships. They have a higher than usual incidence of mental health programs (most often depression or Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome), drug or alcohol abuse and addiction, and physical health problems. Their lives are complicated by other poverty-related hardships that result in an ongoing struggle to meet basic needs such as affordable housing, food and clothing for their children. Research shows that the greater number of hardships they face, the less likely they are to succeed in employment.
- Many women on TANF may acknowledge domestic violence, but frequently it is not their most urgent concern. They often rank their struggle to meet the basic needs of their family for food, housing, clothes, and health care as more urgent and potentially devastating crises. In terms of going to work, they may view their lack of accessible, affordable child care and transportation as bigger obstacles than the partner violence they experience.
- Most women living in extreme poverty and having difficulty moving from welfare to work are from families and communities where poverty is pervasive. People in their support network also struggle to meet basic needs. While willing to be of assistance, people close to them rarely are able to provide substantial or consistent financial assistance. Research shows that women without financial support networks have greater difficulty overcoming domestic violence and other hardships that complicate and disrupt their lives.
- Because of the link between race and poverty in Texas and the United States, in most places, the majority of TANF recipients are families of color. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services statistics show that nationwide, 39% of the families on TANF rolls are African American, 32% are Anglo, 22% are Hispanic, 4% are Asian, 2% are Native American, and 1% are classified "Unknown". Anglos represent a majority of TANF families in only sixteen states. TDHS statistics show that among TANF recipients statewide in Texas, 46% are Hispanic, 32% are African American, 21% are Anglo, and 1% are classified as "Other". While the racial/ethnic characteristics of TANF families vary considerably across TDHS regions in Texas, families of color make up the majority of TANF recipients in all eleven TDHS regions.
- Many families with a long history of poverty do not have confidence that law enforcement, the judicial system, governmental agencies, and mainstream service providers will be of help to them. This is especially true in communities

of color and is based in their own past experiences and the experiences of others in their communities. As a result, they often will not take part in traditional family violence services, which most often are built around involvement with police and the justice system and shelter or counseling that many women say they do not feel is appropriate for their culture, sensitive to their needs, or relevant to their current circumstances.

The characteristics of families who remain on TANF rolls and the personal and circumstantial conditions in their lives have an impact on their efforts to move off welfare and into work. To address their situations and needs effectively, the programs we design and the services we offer must be flexible enough to accommodate the diversity among families and the range of conditions and needs that influence their ability and willingness to seek or accept the assistance offered. **A "one-size-fits-all" approach will not reach many women. We must not set up service systems and require that the women and families fit themselves into those systems. Rather we must adapt, adjust, and create service approaches to fit their needs and their reality.**

PROCEDURES AND SERVICES IN THE TANF SYSTEM TO IDENTIFY AND ASSIST WOMEN IN VIOLENT RELATIONSHIPS

All across the United States, local and sometimes statewide efforts are being made to implement the Family Violence Option in TANF Systems. Over the past three years, experiences in these programs have revealed certain policies and practices that seem most promising in terms of identifying and helping women whose safety and employment are threatened by family violence. Sometimes what we have learned has come from finding that what was being done did not work and adjusting to improve results. The experiences of many programs have been tracked and reported by the Taylor Institute in Chicago, working with the Urban Institute under a contract with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The following information and suggestions come from a combination of four sources: information reported by the Taylor Institute; conversations and correspondence with people working in TANF programs around the country; information provided by TANF recipients; and experiences with a project in San Antonio, TX, where domestic violence specialists employed by Family Violence Prevention Services, Inc., worked in TANF offices.

The discussion and suggestions focus primarily on procedures for identifying and providing assistance to women in the TANF system who are not affiliated with domestic violence agencies when they enter the TANF system and are faced with time limits and participation requirements. Many of the suggestions also will be applicable to women who are affiliated with domestic violence programs. The discussion will address:

- identifying women enrolled in TANF for whom domestic violence is both a safety threat and an employment barrier;
- assessing their needs and designing service plans;
- providing assistance that addresses their safety needs and other personal and situational obstacles; and
- assisting them in gaining employment that pays living wages.

People from local domestic violence agencies can play a very important role in working directly with women in the TANF system. Domestic violence advocates and experts also are needed to train and work collaboratively with the people who work in TANF agencies or provide women other services they need to move from welfare to work.

Identifying Women in Violent Relationships

Women applying for or receiving TANF are doing so because of their financial needs. From their first encounter with staff in TDHS and local workforce offices through their final involvement with TANF, they are repeatedly given the message that they are expected to go to work as quickly as possible and that they can stay on TANF for a limited time. Until now, information about the possibility of receiving good cause exemptions or special assistance if they are experiencing domestic violence has been mentioned briefly in the many pages of written information applicants are given. In a few offices, Texas Works or Choices staff may mention domestic violence options in talking to women, but it appears that this does not happen in most offices.

Experiences in numerous state programs and pilot projects around the country have found that clarity and repetition of the messages about domestic violence good cause exemptions, other available services, and concern for the woman's safety are extremely important as a basis for encouraging women to seek help if they need it. **It is every woman's right to decide if she wants to reveal domestic violence, but in order to make an informed decision, she must know that she can disclose the information and why it may be in her best interest to do so.** She needs to feel assured that people in the TANF programs are concerned for her safety, that assistance may be available, and that her receipt of TANF benefits or other opportunities to participate in TANF activities will not be affected if she acknowledges domestic violence.

Written Notices

All women applying for and progressing through the TANF system should be given written notice about concerns for their safety and options available if participating in required TANF activities will increase risks to their safety or if domestic violence will make it more difficult for them to meet the requirements and hold a job. The notices should be given to women at several points as they move through the TANF process. Written notices should be provided in the women's preferred language and should:

- Include statements about what participation requirements will entail and why victims of domestic violence might want temporary good cause exemptions or special assistance in meeting the requirements. Written notices also should mention concern for the safety of women and their children.
- Contain questions or written information that relate domestic violence to specific expectations or requirements of the TANF system. Avoid questions such as "Does your husband or boyfriend hit, slap, kick, or choke you?" or "Have you ever called the police (or had to go to the hospital) because your husband or boyfriend hurt you?" Women often interpret such questions as invading their privacy or overly personal. They do not understand why the TANF worked needs to know such things and may actually be pushed farther into silence by this type of inquiry.
- Be sure to say what happens in the child support enforcement process. To

decide if child support enforcement will put her in danger, a woman needs to know that she will be expected to help locate the father, that he will be sent papers about coming to court and the papers may contain her address, and that he will be given child visitation rights as part of the child support orders. Simply asking a woman if collecting child support will put her in danger does not give her a clear picture of what that entails.

- Use terminology that is easily understood by the women, avoiding technical terms, overly formal language, and vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to people applying for and participating in TANF. For example, many women do not understand the terms "good cause exemption" or "participation requirements".
- Avoid using the terms "domestic violence," "family violence," "victim of..." because these terms are not meaningful to some women and may have undesirable implications or interpretations that are quite different from the intended meaning.
- Assure women that what they say will not affect whether they receive TANF benefits and will not keep them from going to work or getting services if that is what they want to do.
- State clearly that women are not required to answer questions or reveal domestic violence. It is up to them to decide. Also tell them that they can talk to their caseworker about domestic violence at any time - even after they take a job (or begin training or education). If they begin employment services and domestic violence becomes a safety risk or barrier, they can be given a temporary good cause exemption at that time.
- Be sure to tell them that what they say about being afraid of being hurt will be kept confidential, but if they say their children are being hurt, this must be reported to the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services.

An example of a written notice to give to all TANF applicants is provided as follows:

(SAMPLE WRITTEN NOTICE)

WE CARE ABOUT YOUR SAFETY

Will collecting child support from your child's other parent put you or your children in danger of being hurt?

Is there someone who does not want you to take a job and might try to hurt you or your children to keep you from working? Is there someone that will bother you when you are at work and might cause you to quit or lose a job?

CHILD SUPPORT: We expect parents receiving TANF to help locate the child's other parent and help in collecting child support. **If you are afraid that collecting child support may put you or your children in danger, tell us and we may not have to collect child support for you.**

Here is what happens when we collect child support. We ask you where we can locate the child's father. Then the father is sent a notice about a court hearing where a judge will order him to pay child support. Your address may be on the notice that is sent to the father. When the judge orders the father to pay child support, he also will order that the father has the right to visit the children on a regular basis.

We may not have to collect child support if it would put you or your children in danger of being hurt. Please tell us if you are afraid. We care about your safety.

GOING TO WORK: Everyone who receives TANF is expected to get a job as soon as possible. However, we don't want to require you to get a job quickly if going to work puts you or your children in danger. If someone doesn't want you to work and may hurt you or your children to keep you from working, we may be able to wait before you have to start work and to assist you in getting help. If someone will bother you at work and make you lose your job or get fired, we may be able to delay when you are required to start working and assist you in getting help. **Please tell us if going to work puts your or your children in danger of being hurt. We want you to be safe.**

You are not required to tell us if you are afraid of being hurt. If you do tell us, we will not tell anyone without your permission, and you will still be able to get TANF benefits. However, if you tell us someone is hurting your child, we are required to tell that to the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services.

If you don't tell us now, you can tell us later if you are afraid for your own or your children's safety and we will try to help you. **You deserve to be safe.**

(END OF SAMPLE WRITTEN NOTICE)

Domestic Violence Screening Tools

In addition to providing all TANF applicants and recipients with the Written Notice about possible assistance if domestic violence is a problem, it may be useful for them to be asked a few questions more directly. The questions may be in written form and given to all applicants and recipients, or they may be asked in interviews. In whatever format they are asked, **it is essential that the responses be kept confidential.** The following suggestions are made for the type of questions and the context in which they are asked:

- Questions should relate domestic violence to TANF requirements and should not be overly personal (see suggestions for Written Notices).
- If possible, it is best to lead into the questions about domestic violence with a brief statement that all applicants/participants are asked these questions because you do not want to require them to do something that would cause them or their children to get hurt. Since women assume they are in the TANF office because they need financial assistance and not because of domestic violence, they are more likely to respond if they understand the relationship between the questions about domestic violence and TANF requirements.

- If case workers are trained so that they know how to include questions about domestic violence in a conversational situation, this is often a more effective way to get an accurate response than may be elicited from written questions or from more rote asked questions. However, if the questioner is not trained to engage the woman in a conversational interchange, the use of specific questions is preferable.
- If questions are to be asked, the questioner must be prepared to respond appropriately if the woman reveals domestic violence. Before including direct questions in a protocol, the staff who will follow up written questions or ask the questions directly need to be trained about what to say if a woman says she is afraid for her own or her children's safety.
- Unless something is going to be offered to assist the woman if she reveals domestic violence, do not ask about it.
- If questions are to be asked orally, the interview must be done in a situation where the questions and responses cannot be overheard by other people, including her children or the abusive partner if he has accompanied her.

Sample questions about domestic violence are given as follows:

(SAMPLE QUESTIONS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE)

Example #1

We know that in many families, things happen that might make a person afraid or feel that they or their children are in danger of being hurt. We don't want to require anyone to do anything that puts them in danger, so we ask everyone these questions.

1. If we collect child support, your children's father will be ordered by a judge to pay child support, and the judge will order that the father be allowed to visit the children regularly. Would you or your children be in danger of getting hurt if their father is ordered to pay support or is allowed to visit them on a regular basis?
2. We require everyone receiving TANF to try to get a job as soon as possible. Is there anyone who does not want you to work or who might hurt you or your children if you get a job?
3. Are you concerned that if you get a job, someone will follow you to your work or bother you while you are working so that you might have to quit the job or get fired?

Example #2

We want everyone receiving TANF to be safe and to be successful in getting and keeping a job. We ask everyone these questions so that we will not require them to

do something that might put them or their children in danger.

1. If we contact your children's father and tell him he must pay child support, would that in any way put you or your children in danger of getting hurt?
2. If you children's father know where you live or if he is allowed to visit the children regularly, would that put you or your children in danger of getting hurt?
3. Do the people in your family, or your boyfriend, want you to get a job (or get education or training)?
4. Is there anyone that might hurt you or your children to keep you from working or that may cause you trouble so that you might have to quit your job or get fired?

(END OF SAMPLE QUESTIONS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE)

Many TANF recipients will not reveal domestic violence when they enter the system or before they begin employment or other participation activities. However, the impact of the violence may affect their ability to keep appointments, go to work regularly, attend classes, or attempt other required participation in regularly scheduled activities. Staff often recommend sanctions when women fail to participate or quit or lose a job. It is strongly recommended that before a woman is sanctioned, she be encouraged to explain what happened that caused her not to succeed. This is often a good time for staff to ask questions about domestic violence, such as the questions previously suggested. If domestic violence has caused her to miss appointments or kept her from attending education or training programs or staying employed, she probably can avoid being sanctioned by telling that to her caseworker. At the same time, she may be able to get a good cause exemption if she needs time before re-entering employment activities and to receive domestic violence or other services to assist her.

Risk Assessments and Domestic Violence Services

Policies and procedures in TANF offices often are to refer women who are identified as victims of partner violence to local domestic violence programs for risk assessment and domestic violence services. TANF staff may provide a woman with the telephone number of domestic violence service agencies and tell her to call them. **Experiences in TANF offices all across the country demonstrate overwhelmingly that only a very small percentage of women will call or go to local domestic violence programs when referred through TANF programs.** If the only assistance available to them depends on their calling or going to domestic violence agencies, most of the women will try to meet TANF requirements without help in dealing with the domestic violence, or they may simply drop out of the program.

Projects set up to assist TANF recipients in addressing domestic violence have consistently shown that many more women will follow up on referrals to talk with domestic violence specialists if those meetings take place at or very near the TANF office. Research and interviews with the women have uncovered many reasons that

this is the case. Those reasons include the following:

- Lack of transportation to domestic violence facilities;
- Fear that her partner will follow her or find out that she went to a domestic violence agency;
- Lack of child care and reluctance to take her children to the domestic violence agency;
- Resistance to labeling herself as a victim of domestic violence;
- Belief that the domestic violence agency does not understand and cannot help "people like me";
- Belief that the domestic violence agency will expect her to leave her partner; and
- Fear that people in her community will find out she is going to a domestic violence agency.

The TANF programs that have been most successful have had domestic violence specialists on staff or under contract to talk with women at or near the TANF offices. Because many women do not identify with, or even reject, the term "domestic violence" or "family violence," it is often more effective to refer to the specialists by a more general title. The project in San Antonio used the title "**Special Services Coordinator**" for the domestic violence specialist. Women who revealed partner violence were told that the Special Services Coordinator was a person who was there to talk with women who feared someone might hurt them or their children if they went to work or who thought someone close to them might make it difficult for them to get or keep a job. **The women are more likely to feel comfortable and safe talking to someone of the same race/ethnicity.**

If a domestic violence specialist is not available on site or near TDHS or workforce offices, it may be possible to train a TANF caseworker to do a risk assessment. **TDHS is planning to arrange for women who request a good cause exemption from child support enforcement to talk with a domestic violence specialist by telephone immediately after the request is made. Domestic violence centers statewide will need to participate in this effort if it is to be a success.** The TANF federal regulations say that the needs assessment for domestic violence good cause exemptions from TANF requirements must be done by a person with expertise in domestic violence. The regulations also say that women who are granted good cause exemptions must have a service plan that they will follow during the exemption period and that domestic violence experts must be involved in developing the service plan.

One of our greatest challenges in effectively helping TANF recipients who need domestic violence exemptions or services is to assure that appropriately trained personnel are accessible to all women and that services are designed and provided to match the women's preferences and circumstances. **At present, women who choose not to utilize existing domestic violence programs face the risk of being blamed or penalized or are faced with going without assistance if they do not adjust to the existing service systems. It is unfair and not helpful to blame women. We must design and provide services that are appropriate and effective, given women's preferences, circumstances, and needs.** It may take time and innovative planning, but women's safety and their ability to move from welfare to financial security may hinge on the ability to reach them through diverse service delivery mechanisms.

Services that Address Women's Priorities

In programs where domestic violence specialists have been on site or near TANF offices and women have come to them for assistance, the women's statement about their most critical needs have varied considerably. **Initially most programs planned that the domestic violence specialist would focus specifically on domestic violence, but in practice, what has evolved in many places is that domestic violence personnel often take on a broader case management or advocacy role.**

Some women who seek help through the TANF office are in a crisis situation in their relationship with an abusive partner. They want and need police protection, and they want to get away from the violent partner. In virtually all of these cases, the domestic violence specialist recommends that they call a local domestic violence program. However, in the many instances where a woman said she did not want to go to a domestic violence program, the domestic violence specialists in TANF offices have assisted women in getting protective orders, finding an alternative place to live, or taking other immediate steps to protect her and her children. With women in situations such as this, good cause exemptions to give them time to deal with the crisis are essential. The domestic violence specialist helps her get the exemption and then assists her with meeting the requirements of the service plan that accompanied the exemption.

More often, women in TANF offices who acknowledge domestic violence face multiple crises, and frequently they want help in resolving other critical issues before they will talk extensively about the domestic violence. Domestic violence specialists have first helped these women find child care, money for utilities, medical services for a sick child, or assistance with other issues the woman considers more urgent. Domestic violence specialists in several TANF projects have found that by helping women with other problem areas, many women begin to trust them and are more likely to start talking about how domestic violence affects their lives and about developing safety plans to protect themselves and their children. Additionally, domestic violence specialists in TANF offices have found that once they began helping some women deal with critical situations in their lives, other women hear about this and come forward for help.

Federal and state laws to protect victims of partner abuse as they go through the TANF system focused largely on allowing good cause exemptions from certain requirements. **In all places where extensive efforts to implement domestic violence exemption policies have been undertaken, most women who reveal partner violence have not wanted an exemption from participation.** Only a very small percentage of women have wanted exemptions from child support enforcement, even when they understand what that process entails. Most of the women have said that delaying employment or training will not be helpful, and many want to move forward as quickly as possible. **If they have reservations about succeeding in employment, those reservations are more likely to be tied to other obstacles, usually related to poverty, than they are to domestic violence.** With these women, talking about partner violence and safety planning for them and their children needs to be done in a context of their staying in the abusive relationship, since they do not plan to leave that relationship in the foreseeable future.

Dealing with Multiple Service Needs

Many women face multiple barriers to employment, including domestic violence, mental health problems, drug or alcohol addiction, and limited education and training. Additionally, they may have a myriad of other demands on their time, including legal issues or problems their children or other relatives are having. **The full**

scope of the demands on their time must be taken into account when service plans are made to help them overcome obstacles to moving from welfare to work. With limited transportation and often problems with child care, their mobility is restricted.

A cooperative approach among the person responsible for the woman's employment and service plans, the various service providers, and the woman need to collaborate to set priorities and establish a reasonable schedule for her. If more than one problem can be dealt with within the same service context, it may be to her benefit for several reasons.

1. Avoiding multiple appointments may be necessary to make it possible for her to get to the places she is supposed to go.
2. Because the woman is coping with all of the problems at once, the services may be more coherent and meaningful if the various problem areas are dealt with as they may relate to each other.
3. As the woman establishes a good relationship with the service provider, she may reveal issues or problems she has not brought up before. In such cases, it may be more beneficial if the person to whom she acknowledges the issue or problem can help her deal with it than it would be to send her to yet another agency/provider.

Local workforce agencies' TANF and Welfare-to-Work programs often contract with different providers who specialize in various areas of need. For example, they may contract with a drug and alcohol treatment provider, a domestic violence services program, a mental health service provider, an organization providing job mentoring, etc. Because a single woman or family often has needs in several of these areas, it is important that these providers get together to plan some coordinated strategies for working with women and families. They may want to do cross training, or they may want to arrange some procedure for consulting with each other when they see women who have problems normally outside their area of practice. While it is important to safeguard a woman's privacy and confidentiality, it also is important that there be some coordination and prioritization of services. Otherwise, she may be overwhelmed, confused about different or conflicting messages she gets from various providers, or even sanctioned if she is unable to keep multiple appointments with several different providers.

Expanding Sources of Assistance

To reach and assist a majority of women in violent relationships that go through TANF or other parts of the welfare system, expanding sources of assistance for them is important in order to address their safety needs. The approximately 75 domestic violence centers in Texas cannot possibly expand and diversify enough to make appropriate and meaningful services available to all women who may want assistance.

We must also consider that many women in the TANF program do not want to utilize existing family violence agencies. To reach them, there need to be services available in contexts that they identify with and find relevant to their preferences and circumstances. Given the racial/ethnic characteristics of the TANF population, it seems especially important to encourage communities of color to develop and provide domestic violence services within their communities. When people who are part of the community in which the women live put the programs together, they will consider the important cultural values, beliefs, and customs that influence women's willingness to seek assistance and how they respond to services. The problems often associated with differences in language and communication style will also be eliminated. Difficulties with transportation will be lessened if women can get services

near where they live. All of these issues are important to consider as we are faced with both challenges and opportunities to reach large numbers of women in violent partnerships who have not been reached through our existing domestic violence delivery system.

Promoting Education, Training, and Living-Wage Jobs

Women who cannot support themselves and their children have far fewer options for dealing with domestic violence and overcoming other obstacles to their well being than do women with sufficient job skills and financial resources. Research consistently shows that women in extreme poverty are at the highest risk for violence, often partner violence and sexual assault. Preventing violence against women in impoverished communities and giving women real options for dealing with violence requires that they be assisted in moving out of poverty.

Advocates and others concerned with violence against all women and with the well being of all women and their families must become vocal advocates for education, training, and jobs that pay living wages and provide reasonable benefits. Reducing the number of women trapped in poverty will reduce the number of women who experience domestic violence and sexual assault. While we must attempt to reach women in impoverished communities and provide them domestic violence and other services, unless we work just as hard to assure that they have opportunities to gain marketable skills and earn living wages, the effectiveness of our domestic violence prevention and intervention services will be greatly diminished.

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