Why Trauma-informed Services Are Important in Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Programs

Written by Chris Jongeling

At the last NNEDV roundtable in Seattle, Carole Warshaw, Director, and others from the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma and Mental Health presented a symposium specifically for Coalition directors. She addressed, among other things, the reasons that her group, in conjunction with our funders, and especially Health and Human Services and the FVPSA program, are emphasizing trauma-informed services in shelters and other dv/sa programs.

Most of us know that trauma-informed services are those in which service delivery is influenced by an understanding of the impact of interpersonal violence and victimization on an individual’s life and development. Those of us who have spent long nights at a shelter, have attended PMTC, have staffed crisis lines, have worked with our intervention programs, know of the physical changes to women’s brains that cause many behavior and thought problems that make the woman’s life difficult and that make it difficult sometimes for advocates to communicate with women effectively.

We used to think that once we got a woman and her children safe, the woman would be fine, and would be fully able to manage her life and raise her children. We saw her as a victim of a crime, NOT a mental case, NOT a client, NOT a patient, and we fought to have something written in the shelter’s policy that said “Our only goal is that the woman be physically safe.”

The understanding about the impact of trauma on a woman’s life is the equivalent of denying the existence and significance of trauma in women’s lives.

This project is supported by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Grant 2010-MU-AX-009 from the Office for Violence Against Women, US Department of Justice. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or Department of Justice.

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Congratulations Nichole Witt, Recipient of 2012 Carol Maicki Advocacy Award!

Every year since 2006, the South Dakota Coalition Ending Domestic & Sexual Violence honors the spirit and legacy of Carol Maicki and her example of woman-centered advocacy by presenting a monetary award and a plaque to an advocate who emulates the qualities Carol brought not only to her work, but her relationships with women.

Carol lived the wisdom that relationships between women are the foundation of our work. Carol had the unique ability, as one long-time friend said, to “make so many women feel like they were her best friend.” One of Carol’s mantras was that no woman should stand alone. Regardless if she agreed with a woman’s decision, Carol would go with her as the woman so wasn’t alone. Women still recall how Carol opened her heart, home, resources and time to women in a caring, respectful way.

Kimberly Doody, of Mita Maske Ti Ki states in her nomination of Nichole:

“…Nichole Witt has worked for White Buffalo Calf Woman Society since 2003. Nicole wrote, and implemented federal grants for WBCWS [in conjunction with] the Rosebud Sioux Tribe … including the STOP. Grants to Encourage Arrest, Safety for Indian Women, and Grants to Indian Tribal Governments grants. She was responsible for the implementation of the grant’s goals, and coordinating the criminal justice system, victim and health services response to victims of domestic and sexual violence. She is a member of Advisory Council for the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. In 2010, Nichole was appointed by the WBCWS Board of Director’s as the Executive Director. She oversees a staff of approximately 21, including the shelter and outreach staff. Nichole has spoken at the U.S. Attorneys Conference regarding the importance of collaboration within the community and other organizations that can hold offenders accountable. Nichole also addressed United Nation Commission on the Status of Women, explaining how hard and dangerous it is to be a Native American woman in the United States because of the high rates of sexual assault and domestic violence committed against Native American women. Nicole was also nominated to speak at NOW National Organization for Women… I believe that Nicole has continued to fight for battered women’s rights. She is an awesome role model to younger Native women and girls.”

In Memory of Carol Maicki
July 16, 1936 – December 11, 2004

“…Carol has touched thousands of lives as a tireless advocate for the disadvantaged and powerless. She started over 50 shelters and programs for battered woman, their children and rape victims across the Midwest. She was recognized as a leader and expert in her field locally and nationally. As a State Senator she championed bills on behalf of the disenfranchised. She was appointed by Senator Tom Daschle during President Clinton’s administration as Special Advisor on DACOWITS Defense Advisory Commission on the status of women in our armed forces. She rose to leadership there as well and traveled the world helping our sisters. For the past twenty years she has passionately fought racism on behalf of her many friends of the Great Sioux Nation. In addition to alleviating crisis lines at all times of night, mentoring women to lead, changing laws as a lobbyist and legislator; she was a beloved daughter, sister, wife, mother and grandmother. She has inspired so many. Her light is so bright it cannot be extinguished in her death. She left us all with a deeper understanding of the need to continue her work. Women must all continue her work - this is her only request…” Excerpt from Carol’s obituary written by her daughters.