

Being Backed-up by The System: Graham Barnes and the Duluth Model

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Coordinated Community Responses

Hopefully, many of you would have had the opportunity to see Graham Barnes speak at one of his events during his October visit to Victoria. Graham generously shared a range of tools, resources, insights, practice wisdom and learnings on systems transformation, which he and his colleagues at the Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs (DAIP) have developed and refined over many years. Much gratitude goes to the Integrated Family Violence Reform Executive Committee of South Metropolitan for initiating his visit.

There were many, many things that struck me about the work of DAIP (www.theduluthmodel.org) and Praxis International (www.praxisinternational.org) in Minnesota, and elsewhere through their consultancy, advocacy and research work. There were also a number of things that stood out in terms of how the context of their work is different from Victoria, and what this means for their Coordinated Community Response (CCR) systems. I'd like to share some of what I discovered through Graham's visit, both for the benefit of those who did not attend one of his events, but also as part of the ongoing conversations that many of us who did attend are having.

A key feature of 'gold standard' CCRs in the U.S. is the tremendous amount of thinking and care taken to build respectful relationships between various stakeholders, including the time taken to deeply understand the constraints, conditions and cultures within which these stakeholders do their work. This has required a mature understanding of the nature of interagency service systems and how to transform them over time, including the operation of hierarchy within systems. Graham shared some tools and resources which he and his colleagues use to sensitively attempt to introduce changes, adopt innovations or solve particular problems within a CCR.

A further theme is the rich, narrative-based information collected by various stakeholders at different points in the response to a family violence incident, and the ways in which this information is shared. Graham mentioned, for example, that when a man is referred to their men's program there is usually sufficiently detailed and high quality written assessment information from police, the probation officer and the relevant women's advocacy service that the program does not need to do a fresh assessment of the man. Furthermore, reports compiled by the women's advocate play an essential role in prosecution of the offender.

This theme brings me to the next point – the central role that women's advocacy services have in the CCR. While Graham stressed that CCRs in the U.S. vary considerably, in some at least the women's advocacy service is at the hub of the CCR. As well as having a vital role in helping to assess and respond to risk, they provide essential information to the operations of the other stakeholders, and have quite an important role in leadership and encouraging accountability of stakeholders to women's voices.

The major role played by corrective services and probation officers in many U.S. CCRs is notable. Graham mentioned that at any typical forum or gathering of stakeholders involved in a CCR, he'd expect about 30% of the attendees to be probation officers. This reflects the context

for many men's programs in the U.S., where the majority of referrals are provided through a community-based order. It is on this issue that I'd like to focus the remainder of my ponderings about Graham's visit.

After listening to and speaking with Graham, I came away with a much clearer understanding of the ways in which a sufficiently strong criminal and civil justice system response can assist efforts to change men's behaviour. I had previously thought that the main purposes of a sufficient criminal justice system response to men's use of family violence was three-fold – to provide men with at least the same consequences for their use of violence in the family than if they used violence elsewhere, to assist in monitoring men's behaviour and assess ongoing risk through the probation process, and in a preventative sense to help establish strong social norms that violence against women and children is unacceptable.

These are still important reasons for a sufficient criminal justice system response, but Graham's visit has posed a fourth – that the involvement of the criminal justice system can actually support our work in encouraging men to change. This is not through any assertion that locking men away in prison will in itself result in deep behaviour change (though Graham referred to evidence that arrest can deter re-abuse), but rather the potential of men's behaviour change programs to become more supported by the system.

Graham explained it this way. We know that the work required to encourage men to swim against the tide of their conditioning to become non-violent men is pretty big. Giving up hierarchy, entitlement and gender-based privilege is not something that men easily or very willingly do, especially when after they walk out the door of the men's behaviour change group, they experience multiple sources of reinforcement in the 'real world' that drags them back into being the man that they are comfortable with.

Graham emphasised that in this context, behaviour change work is more likely to be successful when the whole system is backing the program up in inviting the man to change. He gives the example that by sentencing a man to jail for two weekends as a result of breaching the conditions of his probation – for example, when he discloses in the group that he has used violence against his partner, even when it is not sufficient to result in a (new) criminal charge – he is given a strong message that his behaviour is not acceptable (while not leaving his partner in the lurch if his continued income is important for the family). He would still be required to participate in the program, and indeed might need to start it again. Graham's point was that the active involvement of probation officers and the court system can make it more likely that men will take the program seriously, because there are real consequences for them either not attending or not changing their behaviour.

For this reason, Graham emphasised that a high quality men's program demonstrating excellent practice but which is not backed up by the system is likely to result in less behaviour change than a good-enough quality program that is highly supported by the system.

There is so much more that Graham shared that I couldn't begin to represent here: safety and accountability audits, how to embed offender accountability at each point of the system, efforts to more concertedly assess and respond to men's use of sexual violence within family violence contexts, men's non-violent parenting groups, the use of dominance and oppression theories in group work, a tool for determining the primary aggressor in situations where the man presents as the victim (or is assessed as such by police), etc.

Graham emphasised that what he presented was by no means just his own work, and that he was the conduit for the collective work involving all his colleagues, particularly for women such

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as Ellen Pence who is honoured in the September edition of the journal *Violence Against Women*.

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