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Linda McMaster
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**Unsafe at Home 2011: A Strategy Summit on Domestic Violence in Cambridge
Case Study: Karla**

Karla's Background

Karla is a woman in her early 30's who immigrated to the Boston Area from Central America 7 years ago hoping to leave poverty and abuse behind her and become a nurse. She speaks limited English and has only a few distant relatives living in the area. She has a Green Card and has applied for citizenship. Industrious and eager to learn, she enrolled in English language and math classes as soon as she got here to prepare for Nursing school.

Victor's Background

Victor is a 30-year-old man who was born in Cambridge and has a very large extended family. He grew up with his four brothers and lived with both his parents. Victor's father suffered from alcoholism and frequently abused Victor's mother in front of their children. Victor started getting into trouble as a teenager and was well known to administrators at Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School. Victor does not have a stable job, but frequently picks up construction jobs. However, his troubles with the law continued into adulthood. He has a lengthy criminal record that includes 4 pages of violent assaults against women, drug offenses and offenses for theft.

The Relationship:

Karla met Victor not long after she arrived in Boston. She was easily charmed and fell for him instantly. Early in the relationship, Karla became pregnant with their first child and moved into Victor's apartment in Cambridge. Once Karla moved in, the abuse began. Victor was verbally, physically, sexually and psychologically abusive. He demanded that she stop attending classes. After the birth their first daughter, the abuse escalated. For the next 2 years Karla endured continuing cycles of extreme abuse -- rape, threats with weapons and attempts to strangle her -- followed by intense apologies and appeals for forgiveness. Devoutly religious, Karla went to mass and prayed for strength, but had no idea where to get help. Soon after the birth of their second daughter, Victor was arrested for an incident of abuse reported by a neighbor who overheard a commotion in their apartment. He was prosecuted and received 18 months in prison and 5 years of Supervised Probation.

Though Karla appeared to be safe while her husband was in prison, she not only feared his release, but had already received threats from contacts on the outside. Further, she feared retaliation against her, the kids and her siblings from his friends and contacts who would be released before he is.

Karla and the girls moved to a smaller apartment that she could barely afford on her income from public assistance. She could not afford day care and because she had no one to care for the kids she could not work or return to school. She applied to the Cambridge Housing Authority though she had a contact at Victor's cousin who works at the front desk will see her or her papers. (She felt further defeated when she was told that she was at the bottom of a list of thousands one of thousands waiting for a 2 or 3 months wait).

When Victor was released from jail he went to live with his brother in Boston. As part of his probation, he was required to take parenting classes. He also obtained employment doing construction. Karla allowed Victor to see his daughters and he began providing occasional financial support. Karla was glad to have the help of another parent and the girls bonded with their father for the first time. Soon the old patterns of abusive, demeaning behavior started again and Karla became pregnant with their third child. Calls to the police began -- verbal arguments quickly escalated to an aggravated assault less than two months later. Victor was arrested and the Department of Children and Families was called to investigate.

Due to the severity of the Victor's past crimes, Cambridge Police activated the intervention resources of the Cambridge, Arlington and Belmont High Risk Assessment Team and offered Karla the opportunity to meet with

a Spanish speaking advocate from Transition House and a Domestic Violence Detective. Together with Karla, they discussed safety planning and whether or not it would be safe to pursue legal action. Karla opted to ask the judge for a restraining order. Even with extra support and connections to community services, Karla was terrified of repercussions of moving ahead with criminal charges and fearful that she could not support herself and children. She was adamant that she did not wish to have Victor go back to jail and did not press charges. Days later, he violated the restraining order, calling her constantly, forcing his way into the apartment and punching her just a few weeks before the baby was due.

After the birth of their third child, her first son, Karla was torn between cultural expectations and the safety of the family. Victor promised that he would change for his son and so she vacated the restraining order to allow contact. Unfortunately it was simply more empty promises and shortly thereafter, the police were contacted again. She had been assaulted and left with a bruised eye socket. Victor was arrested again and had his probation revoked.

A new program, CAB HART that monitors high risk cases and has funding to provide services stepped in and reviewed ~~Mirra's~~ ^{Karla's} case. CAB HART screened the case into its program and immediately offered her services, including safety planning, financial and emotional support. Even with extra support, ~~Mirra~~ ^{Karla} was terrified of repercussions of moving ahead with criminal charges. She denied the allegations to Victor's probation officer and he remained free.

Outcome of this story

CAB HART connected Karla with Transition House through her advocate and that of a Domestic Violence Detective who often went to her and forged a relationship of trust. Karla remained in contact with Transition House and CAB HART throughout the rest of her pregnancy, receiving financial assistance to help meet her family's basic needs- even supplying holiday gifts for her children and a bassinet and other baby supplies for her baby's upcoming birth. Karla has developed a strong bond of trust with her Transition House advocate, who continues to work with her, although there is no specific funding that supports the continuing and indefinite intensive support for survivors in the community. This support, advocacy, and financial assistance helped Karla feel safe and supported enough to speak out about the long abuse that she had suffered and was able to go to court with her Transition House advocate, obtain and keep a restraining order as well as cooperate with the prosecution of the Victor. Victor, realizing that for the first time in their relationship that she was refusing to be intimidated, threatened or coerced into silence, pled guilty and received 2 ½ years of incarceration.

Questions for the group to consider:

1. In this case study, what individuals and communities came in contact with Karla's life? Think broadly.
2. What individuals/institutions could have been involved and at what point?
3. What challenges/barriers to providing support/assistance would you anticipate encountering?
4. What would need to change to eliminate those barriers?
5. What preventive strategies, policies, early interventions or education would (have) made a difference?
6. How would any of this be different if the person was a member of the GLBTQ community?

Thinking Point:

In this case, because of the high risk nature of Karla's case, CAB HART and Transition House were able to reach her together and provide her with assistance she had never received before. These programs are all currently grant-funded (but not assured)- - think about the implications of Karla's situation without these funds or CAB HART. What about victims of domestic violence who deal with the same struggles as Karla, but where the abuse does not rise to a level of high risk that CAB HART responds to?

**Community Health Committee Agenda
October 11th, 2011**

Welcome

*Marjorie Decker, Cambridge City Council, Chair of Community Health Committee
Robert Healy, Cambridge City Manager
Robert Haas, Cambridge Police Commissioner*

Introductions and Concentric Circles

Case Study Analysis - Small Groups

Group Reflection

Choose one representative from your group to report back on your findings.

BREAK (Please proceed to your second table assignment)

Panel Presentation – Innovative Community Responses to Domestic Violence

Facilitator: Ann Fleck Henderson

*Speakers: Ilana Amrani-Cohen-Guidance Center at Riverside Community Care, CAB HART
Aimee Thompson – Close to Home
Julie Kahn-Shea and Rhonda Greene – Dating Violence Intervention Project*

Next Steps Discussion - Small Groups

Next Steps Report Back

Choose one representative from your group to report back on your findings.

Appreciation Recognition

Closing Remarks

(Please fill out your Registration Card and Summit Evaluation)

Cambridge Domestic Violence Resources

SAFELINK 877-785-2020

24-hour live response in English, Spanish, and TTY
Crisis intervention, safety planning, support, information and referrals
Access to emergency shelter statewide

TRANSITION HOUSE 617-661-7203

24-hour Crisis Line, emergency shelter, education and outreach

GAY MEN'S DV PROJECT 800-832-1901

Hotline for gay, bisexual or transgender (GBT) victims/survivors

NETWORK/LA RED 617-742-4911

Hotline for lesbian, bisexual women and transgender communities

CAMBRIDGE POLICE, DV UNIT 617-349-3371

Immediate Danger, call 911

If you have concerns about your own behavior towards your intimate partner, please call:
EMERGE 617-547-9879

Suggested topics for future Discussions on this issue:

Follow Up City Council Community Health Committee Hearings:

November 16th at 10:00am: Domestic Violence and Technology

November 30th at 10:00am: Domestic Violence and Housing

December 14th at 10:00am: Domestic Violence and Youth

Date to be announced: Healthcare and Mental Health Services for Victims of Domestic Violence

If you have any questions, concerns or suggestions please feel free to contact:

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