

Duluth model

The Duluth model offers a method for communities to coordinate their responses to domestic violence. It is an inter-agency approach that brings the justice and human service interventions together around the primary goal of protecting victims from ongoing abuse. It was conceived and implemented in a small working-class city in northern Minnesota in 1980-81. The original Minnesota organizers were activists in the battered women's movement. They selected Duluth as the best Minnesota city to try and bring criminal and civil justice agencies together to work in a coordinated way to respond to domestic abuse cases involving battering. By battering they meant an ongoing pattern of abuse used by an offender against a current or former intimate partner. Eleven agencies formed the initial collaborative initiative. These included 911, police, sheriff's and prosecutors' offices, probation, the criminal and civil court benches, the local battered women's shelter, three mental health agencies and a newly created coordinating organization called the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP). Its activist, reform oriented origins shaped its development and popularity among reformers in other communities. Over the next three decades this continuously evolving initiative became the most replicated woman abuse intervention model in the country.

The Duluth Model engages legal systems and human service agencies to create a distinctive form of organized public responses to domestic violence. It is characterized by:

- Clearly identifiable and largely shared assumptions and theories about the source of battering and the effective means to deter it;
- Empirically tested intervention strategies that build safety and accountability into all elements of the infrastructure of processing cases of violence
- Well defined methods of inter-agency cooperation guided by advocacy programs.

The Duluth model holds that the goals of public intervention in domestic violence cases should include several key elements. It must protect victims of ongoing abuse (battering). It must hold perpetrators and intervening practitioners accountable for victim safety. It must offer offenders an opportunity to change (including punishment if it enhances victim safety) and it must ensure due process for offenders through the intervention process. The focus of intervention is on stopping the violence, not on fixing or ending interpersonal relationships.

The Duluth model asserts that:

- The primary responsibility of placing controls on abusers belongs to the community and the individual abuser *not* the victim of abuse.
- Battering is a form of domestic violence that entails a patterned use of coercion, intimidation, including violence and other related forms of abuse, whether legal or illegal (see the Power and Control Wheel). To be successful, initiatives must distinguish between and respond differently to domestic violence that constitute

battering and cases that do not and adjust those interventions to the severity of the violence.

- Interventions must account for the economic, cultural, and personal histories of the individuals who become abuse cases in the system.
- Both victims and offenders are members of the community; while they must each act to change the conditions of their lives the community must treat both with respect and dignity recognizing the social causes of their personal circumstances.

The Duluth Model offers four primary strategic principles of inter-agency intervention.

First, change will be required at the basic infrastructure levels of the multiple agencies involved in case processing. Workers must be coordinated in ways that enhance their capacity to protect victims and must comply fully with inter-agency agreements. Participating agencies must work cooperatively on examining, adjusting and standardizing practices by making changes in eight core methods of coordinating workers' actions on a case. This involves;

- Identifying each agency's mission, purpose and specific function or task at each point of intervention in these cases.
- Crafting policies guiding each point of intervention.
- Providing administrative tools that guide individual practitioners in carrying out their duties (e.g. 911 computer screens, specially crafted police report formats, D.V. appropriate pre-sentence investigation formats; education and counselling curricula designed for abusers.)
- Creating a system that links practitioners to each other so that each practitioner is positioned to act in ways that assists subsequent interveners in their interventions.
- Adopting inter-agency systems of accountability, including; an inter-agency tracking and information sharing system; periodic evaluations of aspects of the model; bi-monthly inter-agency meetings to identify, analyse and resolve systemic problems in the handling of cases; accountability clauses in written policies.
- Establishing a cooperative plan to seek appropriate resources.
- Reaching agreements on operative assumptions, theories and concepts to be embedded in written policies and administrative practices.
- Developing and delivering training across agencies on policies procedures and concepts.

Second, the overall strategy must be victim-safety centered. There is an important role for independent victim advocacy services and rehabilitation programming for offenders. Small independent monitoring and coordinating organizations should be set up to coordinate work groups, operate the tracking system, and help coordinate periodic evaluations and research projects. Victim advocacy organizations should be central in all aspects of designing intervention strategies.

Third, agencies must participate as collaborating partners. Each agency agrees to identify, analyse, and find solutions to any ways in which their practices might compromise the collective intervention goals. Small ad hoc problem solving groups, training committees, evaluation projects, and regular meetings are used to coordinate interventions. These working groups are typically facilitated by DAIP staff but, when appropriate, may be lead by another participating agency.

Fourth, abusers must be consistently held accountable for their use of violence. Effective intervention requires a clear and consistent response by police and the courts to initial and repeated acts of abuse. These include:

- Mandatory arrest for primary aggressors;
- Emergency housing, education groups and advocacy for victims;
- Evidenced based prosecution of cases;
- Jail sentences in which offenders receive increasingly harsh penalties for repeated acts of aggression
- The use of court ordered educational groups for men who batter.
- The use of a coordinating organization (DAIP) to track offenders, ensure that repeat offenders or those in non-compliance do not fall through the cracks and that victim-safety is central to the response.

The Duluth model has been widely successful in offering greater victim protection and reducing repeat acts of violence in many different communities. But it has not been successful everywhere. Its success appears to depend on skills, leadership, and follow through from the victim advocacy groups and key intervening agencies.