Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

The Batterers’ Intervention Program (BIP) is administered by the Domestic Outreach Center (DOC) and provides court-ordered anger management classes to first-time simple assault offenders in the greater Pittsburgh region with a specific focus on intimate partner abuse and family violence. The BIP provides training and techniques necessary to control anger, mediate conflict, and put an end to abuse.

The BIP directly aids individuals struggling with domestic violence. Through cost effective group programs, individuals are taught that abusive behavior is inexcusable and that they must accept responsibility for their actions. Participants complete 24 weekly group sessions which encompasses the full curriculum of the Batterers’ Intervention Program. Each lesson is designed to show that techniques can be applied to every aspect of life, seeking to create responsible partners and parents while keeping families together.

Each group session is composed of between eight and fifteen individuals, with a trained facilitator presenting the lesson and leading the discussion. During each session, individuals are asked to recount the events that led to their arrest and sentencing to anger management classes, participate in the day’s lesson, and give feedback to other participants on their comments or participation.

By targeting abusers, the Batterers’ Intervention Program seeks to break the cycle of violence, ending abuse in individual relationships, and preventing future outbreaks of violence. The Domestic Outreach Center believes that teaching personal accountability creates responsible adults who are less likely to repeat patterns of abuse.
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Innovation

The focus of the Batterers’ Intervention Program is unusual among organizations working with domestic violence in our region due to its singular focus on rehabilitating abusers. Through a constant commitment to best practices, improving programs, and implementing innovative approaches, the Domestic Outreach Center has developed an extremely effective program. The innovative use of community-based satellite locations, qualified instructors, and the diversity of participants in each group contribute to the BIP’s effectiveness.

The BIP curriculum is a culmination of years of anger management and conflict mediation research. The workbook includes clear lessons and activities that are accessible to individuals at all education levels and from any socio-economic background. It is specially designed to be cyclical, so individuals can enter at any stage in the lesson book and still learn. The DOC is constantly evaluating and updating its curriculum to reflect new approaches to anger management issues.

The strength of the curriculum is coupled with an outstanding quality of instruction to produce a highly effective abuse cessation program. All instructors are qualified professionals with training in the field of education. The strong emphasis on professionalism and mutual respect encourages participants to take the lessons and activities seriously. The commitment of the staff is clearly evident during any group session and provides an atmosphere conducive to learning.

The diversity of participants in the BIP contributes to its amazing success rate. Individuals from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, educational levels, and professions participate together in the program. The groups are purposely composed of a mixture of married, divorced, or unmarried individuals. The universal appeal of the lessons strengthens the curriculum. An emphasis on interaction between group members means that individuals can learn from each other.

Delivery Model

The Domestic Outreach Center found that the necessity to travel to group sessions provided a significant barrier to consistent client participation. In response, the DOC established several satellite locations in communities throughout the Pittsburgh region where services are provided. By bringing conflict mediation resources directly to underserved communities, the number of individuals reached by DOC programs has grown significantly. Concurrently, consistent participation by clients has increased, especially within the Batterers’ Intervention Program.

The vast majority of participants in the Batterers’ Intervention Program are court-ordered to participate in anger management courses. Many of these communities are underserved, sometimes with no alternatives to incarceration for first-time offenders. When entering a new community, the DOC seeks to establish partnerships with the local court system, the conduit through which individuals are referred to the BIP.

A simple questionnaire is administered to each client upon entering the Batterers’ Intervention Program and again as the individual completes the 24-week requirement. Answers to this test are evaluated to determine both effectiveness of the program and attitudinal changes as a result of participation in the BIP. Individuals are also required to complete a “letter of understanding” which they must read during their last group session. In this personal essay, clients must state what they have learned and what they have or will change to ensure that abuse does not occur in the future. This reinforces BIP lessons while providing a mechanism to evaluate the curriculum.

The local courts in communities where DOC operates are closely monitored for repeat offenders, especially those who are past participants in the Batterers’ Intervention Program. The steady decline in recidivism in those locations provides a clear indication of the effectiveness of the BIP as an abuse cessation program.

Key Operational Partnerships

Because of the central role of the judicial system in finding participants for the Batterers’ Intervention Program, partnerships with court officials are imperative. Therefore, DOC works tirelessly to establish and maintain close working relationships with magistrates, judges, and parole officers. These individuals are the pipeline to obtain clients.

We recognize that working with abusers is only a small part of combating intimate partner violence. For this reason, we seek to form positive relationships with victims’ assistance programs including women’s shelters. However, since DOC programs are an alternative to jail time for perpetrators, that relationship is sometimes strained.

To obtain a physical location to hold satellite sessions, it is necessary to forge partnerships with service providers already operating in a community. Therefore, the DOC forms close relationships with community centers, educational institutions, and places of worship.

In addition, the DOC is a member and active participant in several forums working to prevent domestic violence. These include the Batterers’ Intervention Services of Pennsylvania, the Forbes Funds, and the Batterers’ Intervention Services Coalition of Michigan. Our Executive Director is a member of the Allegheny County Committee on Domestic Violence and the Board of U.S. Probation and Pre-Trial Services of Western Pennsylvania.

Impact

Financial Model

All DOC program fees are on a sliding scale based on income. Program fees are adjusted according to the ability of clients to pay. Individuals are never turned away because of lack of funds. The Batterers’ Intervention Program has the highest proportion of low-income participants of any DOC program.

Thanks to grant funding, special subsidies have been introduced for low-income individuals with small children. These people are often the most in need of anger management programs, but are also the most likely to quit due to lack of funds. Therefore, services are provided to
those individuals at little or no cost.

What percentage, if any, of the total operating costs does earned income (from products, services, or other fees) represent?

90%

How is the initiative financed? Is it financially self-sustainable or profitable? How much do beneficiaries contribute?

The activities of the Domestic Outreach Center are primarily funded by client fees. Clients purchase their workbook upon entrance into the program, which not only covers the cost of producing course materials, but also reduces the likelihood that individuals will misplace materials. In addition, individuals are charged a small fee for each of the twenty-four weekly group sessions.

The Batterers’ Intervention Program is predominantly self-sustaining. However, if there is a period of usually low-income participants, finances become strained.

The very low overhead expenses of the DOC organization permit the BIP to be self-sustaining. Administrative and marketing costs are kept to a minimum, and the use of satellite locations means that the DOC does not have to support the cost of maintaining several offices.

Effectiveness

Since it’s founding, over 5,000 people have participated in the Batterers’ Intervention Program in the greater Pittsburgh region. Of those who complete the program, there is a recidivism rate of only 0.2%. Executive Director Linda Sherman attributes this success to several factors including an effective curriculum based on research, the composition of group sessions, and an ongoing commitment to best practices.

Because of the incredible effectiveness of DOC programs, there has been a fundamental shift in sentencing in the communities in which we operate. In many of these locations, district judges are hesitant to sentence first-time offenders to jail time, believing that incarceration was an unnecessarily harsh punishment in some cases of intimate partner violence. The availability of the BIP as an abuse cessation program means that first-time offenders have meaningful requirements to fulfill as conditions of their probation.

How many people have benefited from your program over the last year? Which element of the program proved itself most effective?

In the past year, the Domestic Outreach Center has undertaken an aggressive geographic expansion project that significantly increased the number of individuals reached by our programs. As a result, approximately 3,000 individuals have participated in the Batterers’ Intervention Program in the last year.

Scaling up Strategy

In the next three years, the Domestic Outreach Center will seek to continue the expansion of the Batterers’ Intervention Program. We seek to increase the number of abusers counseled, and help more families as a result. The ultimate goal of the BIP is to provide a program of outstanding quality, rather than simply increasing the quantity of clients. Therefore, DOC will continue its constant monitoring of the program to ensure that the outstanding level of service is not compromised during this period of geographic and programmatic expansion.

The Domestic Outreach Center also hopes to establish an annual fund that will enable the organization to become more financially secure, increase office space and administrative staff, and establish new programs without the fear of endangering existing activities.

Stage of the Initiative

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Origin of the Initiative

Domestic Outreach Center founder and Executive Director Linda Sherman has always been passionate about helping families. Beginning her career as a schoolteacher, she witnessed the myriad of detrimental effects that family violence can have on children.

As the supervisor of a child abuse prevention program, Ms. Sherman recognized a dangerous void in programs in the Pittsburgh Region. Abusers were often vilified and their problems ignored. Identifying a desperate need for sentencing alternatives in domestic violence cases and rehabilitation programs for abusers, Ms. Sherman founded the DOC with the mission of "minimizing abuse by teaching accountability and personal responsibility."

The Batterers’ Intervention Program was introduced in 2000. In seven years of operation, the DOC has grown from a one-woman operation to a successful nonprofit organization with six locations.

Sustainability

How did you hear about this contest and what is your main incentive to participate?

The main incentive for DOC to participate in this contest is the ability to receive publicity for our programs, and to learn what others are doing to prevent domestic violence. We learned of the competition from the Batterers’ Intervention Services of Pennsylvania.

Main Obstacles to Scaling Up

Financial constraints are the largest obstacle to scaling up the Batterers’ Intervention Program. Currently, DOC programs are self-sustaining, but for several years the DOC has been unable to contribute to an annual fund. Opening new centers and satellite locations requires a large initial investment and it typically takes six months to one year before locations become self-sustaining.

In addition, the attitudes of individual court officers often produce barriers to the introduction of the Batterers’ Intervention Program into new communities. The Domestic Outreach Center staff has worked tirelessly to increase awareness of the use of anger management programs as an alternative sentencing tool.
Main Financial Challenges

We have found that the majority of foundation and government funding for domestic abuse prevention goes to victim assistance programs, making the Batterers’ Intervention Program ineligible for most grants. Because the BIP is founded on the principle that working with abusers is central to preventing future violence, we believe strongly that much of the violence prevention efforts are drastically one-sided.

The Domestic Outreach Center has been unsuccessful in obtaining funding to pay additional facilitators and for administrative staff salaries. Because of the barely break-even nature of DOC activities, it is currently impossible to hire additional administrative staff necessary to support continued expansion, and resources are currently stretched to the limit.

We are currently most interested in foundation or social investor funding. The reporting required by most government funding is beyond the scope of what can be provided by our small administrative staff at this time.

Main Partnership Challenges

Forging productive partnerships with victim assistance programs has proven particularly difficult for the Batterers’ Intervention Program. These challenges are understandable, given that the BIP represents an alternative to incarceration for abusers. It is frustrating, however, because ultimately both women’s shelters and abuse cessation programs both have the ultimate goal of preventing domestic abuse.

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