

Interventions and Restorative Responses to Address Teen Violence Against Parents

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REPORT OVERVIEW

Teen violence against parents (TVAP) is arguably one of the most taboo subjects of modern society. Its complexity of victim/offender dynamic juxtaposes with a confusing array of individual (and joint) needs, and a societal value that discourages parents from abandoning their children. All of which, may have contributed to the extent of this problem remaining hidden and largely unaddressed. Politicians and policy makers must not look to data and statistics to assess the extent of TVAP as, (like adult forms of domestic violence), actual incident report numbers; and youths charged with offences against parents (and other family members), only make up the visible 'tip of this emerging iceberg'.

Whilst it's true that many TVAP cases are single mothers raising adolescent sons; this issue spans both genders, the entire range of family structures and all income brackets. It can be found in deprived and affluent neighbourhoods; crossing many cultural and international boundaries

My Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship was born out of a professional awareness (as a Youth Justice practitioner) of the current deficit of adequate or meaningful responses to TVAP in the UK, and the desire to explore alternative and empowering models for change in the U.S.A.

It invites the questions; What is being done to arrest this issue in our own country? What programmes, services and support are we offering these families and 'in-house victims'? How are we working preventatively to stop such teens becoming future adult perpetrators? And, importantly, How are we supporting parents to keep families safe, whilst both parties are learning new skills which enable them to resolve and repair family conflict in respectful, non-violent and restorative ways?

Part I is taken from six weeks spent examining TVAP interventions in Juvenile Justice Departments in Seattle, Washington, and Toledo, Ohio. The report's main focus is '*Step Up*'; a successful parent-teen specialist group work programme that evidences high parent-teen engagement, reduced recidivism and aims to meet the needs of both victims and perpetrator; whilst increasing family safety and wellbeing. Accounts are also given of two Family Safety Plan Intervention Projects and observations of one Juvenile Violence Court.

My report seeks not to come from an intellectual or theoretical stance but one that offers a high level of first hand awareness from 'grassroots' experience of actual TVAP families. It aims to incorporate such knowledge into predominantly qualitative data from families; in both the UK and America. As professionals, we can always provide interventions that 'tick boxes', but important evidence of effective practice lies within the voice of service users, as to a programme's validity and ability to create change that sustains beyond the life of an intervention; thereby contributing to a greater wellbeing and safety; not only of the immediate, but also wider societal family at large.

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Primary and Secondary Sources:

Consultation & liaison with:

- 5 Step Up facilitators, (2 original Step Up authors), and a range of administrators, judges & magistrates at 2 Juvenile Court Departments in the States of Washington, and Ohio.

Attendance at:

- 11 Step Up (joint parent/teen) group work sessions across 3 existing groups in King County, Seattle and 1 group programme in Lucas County, Toledo.
- 5 Safety Planning sessions with families and Safety Plan hearings
- 8 Youth Court hearings of juvenile domestic violence cases.
- 2 Step Up assessment and intake sessions of referred parents and teens
- 3 Family mediation sessions prior to release from detention after DV arrests.
- 1 Family violence court
- 2 Multi-agency 'staffing' meetings.

Also:

- Visit to Lucas County Juvenile Detention Centre & Long-stay Treatment Centre
- Conducted 6 structured (video) interviews with parents/teens attending Step Up, as well as week on week informal discussions with Step Up participants.
- Extracts from letter received by from the mother of 2 past Step Up graduates.

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Whichever aspect of my report 'speaks to you', it is my hope that it will contribute towards new knowledge, vision and understanding of practices and service provision, to assist the greater development of individual and family wellbeing and thereby supporting the wider wellbeing of our societal family, as one.

Thank You

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1:1 TVAP - WHERE DID MY FOCUS COME FROM?

The last 10 years of my professional life, has been in various roles that support disaffected adolescents (and their parents), in both educational and juvenile justice settings. All of which, gives me considerable 'inside knowledge' of the complex needs of troubled families and the many barriers to engagement that surround them.

Between 2005 -2010, I held the post of Lead Practitioner for parenting work, within a Youth Offending Team in West Yorkshire. I carried a caseload of parents ((and carers) whose children were in our justice system for a whole range of offending behaviours. Most parents engaged with parenting interventions, on a voluntarily basis whilst a small number came through Parenting Orders; issued by magistrates in Youth Courts. Family backgrounds, histories and compositions were mixed. Many were single mothers, with adolescent sons, and over half of these had past (and sometimes present) experience of domestic abuse, but others had no history of abuse, and were two parent families. Some were carers e.g. grandparent(s) step parents, or families whose children were in the care system and occasionally, the secure estate. I worked with parents from low to high income brackets, a range of educational abilities, and a small number of ethnic minority families.

Over the years, a consistent theme/barrier to engagement kept re-appearing across my caseload as parents and carers began disclosing varying degrees of fear of one (or more) violent, aggressive/ or overly demanding adolescent. On a continuum of severity, these abusive behaviours ranged from verbal abuse, power tactics, emotional control, intimidation, through to physical abuses of kicking, spitting, punching, slapping, destruction of property, use of weapons, and threats to kill.

Some parents were regularly handing over large sums of money to demanding teens, (leaving them without essential funds), because of fear of retribution to self and/or siblings. A number of these parents had resorted to phoning the police and a small number of their young people were on community based orders (through courts) for family based offences. However, the majority of information about incidents of teen violence only became revealed to me as our relationship and rapport developed over time. Such information was not only of concern on a family safety/protection level, but this issue was also creating a considerable barrier to my work as parenting practitioner, trying to support parents in developing positive and assertive parenting styles; through a range of group work, or 1 -1 tailored interventions.

For parents experiencing high fear levels, their ability to engage with me in parenting interventions around boundary setting/consequence giving, etc, was not only near impossible, and often meaningless, but in some cases, downright dangerous! Their seriously disempowered, victimised, parenting position appeared to render them vulnerable to almost any demands their adolescent wanted to make. Their roles and responsibilities as parent juxtaposed with their needs as vulnerable victims and put them in a seemingly Catch-22 situation.

When domestic violence from adult family member was revealed, Social Services processes and protection procedures were more easily defined, yet cases that involved teen perpetrators with parents as victims, seemed to create a whole new dimension (and confusion) to assessments of care and protection needs, vulnerability, family safety and service provisions.

When a victim is the parent (s), and the perpetrator their child, (the very person they have a duty to provide care, and have responsibility for), what then?

Family support or victim support services (as a whole) for this type of complex victim/perpetrator dynamic appeared not to exist. Whilst social services were generally sympathetic, in reality the many demands on thresholds of allocation for resource, etc, seemed to place the majority of TVAP cases on lower levels of priority and needs. Most domestic violence services, offered support services to children as victims of violence and adults as perpetrators, but what of the services for pre 18 perpetrators? And where was the intervention that supported the relational needs of parents and teens as victim and perpetrator; along with the skills education to prevent cycles of violence playing out again? And what of restorative work, to assist the repair of those seriously hurt and damaged key family relationships?

The nearest piece of joined up family work I found, was through a small voluntary sector domestic violence charity, offering parent and teens either individual or joined up relationship sessions. This was a valuable piece of family support for parents and siblings, but as it could only be offered on a voluntary basis, (engagement optional), many teens were too immature, embarrassed, or lacking in self discipline or ownership of their violent behaviours to attend/keep attending sessions.

1: 2 A PARENTING PROVISION RESPONSE?

In my experience, referrals to generic parenting programmes were rarely meaningful or effective, for the majority of such parents. Those who did attend said they were unable to identify with most of the session content, as something applicable to parenting in their family context. Referrals to joint parent- teen family programmes (e.g. Strengthening Families), largely resulted in teens refusing to go, (parents or agencies having little/no ability to direct this); thereby parent(s) could not/did not attend either. Even if joint attendance was achieved, the delicate control and abuse patterns that plays out in these kinds of families, still remained unaddressed , unsupported and in some cases made parents even more vulnerable, through attending. I recall one parent, with her 15 year old son, only attending one session. Her son had actually lashed out at her, during the joint part of the group; leaving the woman both publicly humiliated and fearful of further retributions from him. Increasingly, TVAP families seemed to be going round in circles, and professionally, I was also feeling frustrated and ineffective, in my own practice and resource options. The more I explored dynamics and barriers to engagement, the more I began to realise how complex this issue was.

A range of barriers prevented these parents asking for support or accessing services. Parents seeking help or refuge from social services or police were often reminded of their parental roles and responsibilities for their under 18 year olds. Or parents would, again, be referred (unhelpfully) back to generic parenting group providers.

Due to the 'abuser' being their own child, options of abandonment, or rejection were often too painful for the majority to conceive, and generated added feelings of failure and guilt. I observed a range of unhealthy parental coping mechanisms (perhaps for this reason) e.g. minimising, ignoring or hiding the abuse, all of which only gave further 'mixed messages' to teens, around the unacceptability of such behaviours. These parental stances were sometimes motivated by fears that younger siblings would be taken into care, if social services deemed their ability to care and protect, as ineffective. Other common coping mechanisms observed in parents (and teens) were the use of alcohol, legal (and sometimes illegal drugs), which quite likely further exasperated conflict, escalation and the level of violence.

1: 3 A YOUTH JUSTICE RESPONSE ?

Magistrates sometimes use Parenting Orders, as a Youth Court disposal when sentencing 'unruly' adolescents. Their parents could be '*ordered*' to attend individual sessions or, (once again) a generic parenting programmes, (for up to a year) to learn new parenting skills.

it is my professional opinion and experience, that for the very small percentage of parents that refuse to engage voluntarily, seeking a Parenting Order can be a necessary and effective route to encourage engagement and responsibility. However, if interventions are not available to addresses the specific needs of this abusive relationship dynamic, are these effective, meaningful or helpful for such cases? Or, do such Parenting Orders criminalise, stigmatise and isolate these parents (often mums) further, (both from other family members and the professionals who seek to engage with them); thus creating more harm than good?

I recall one single mother (with a horrific history of domestic abuse), telling me how she had sought *voluntarily* help from Social Services, for her 12 year old son's violent behaviours, (whilst pregnant). The outcome being, all her children placed on Child Protection Orders, with no specific provision to address the issues around the violence or the family's unmet 'victim' needs. A year on, her son entered the Juvenile Justice system, mum was given a Parenting Order, her son a community based sentence, (with 2 year Anti Social Behaviour Order); thus increasing the stress and shame she (and the boy) already experienced. This courageous woman, who had experienced years of extreme abuse from two violent partners, had never actually been given an opportunity to engage voluntarily with Youth Offending parenting services, (prior to her P.O.). She shared her frustration, anger and pain with me through the words '*Don't you think we've been punished enough, already with what we've been through as a family, without any more.*'

I kept hearing similar stories, and realised that families (and teens) who disengage or appear to reject or do not access services, might often just have had enough of the damage that 'ineffective provision' and/or a punishment and blame response can have on both motivation for engagement and their hope that '*things could get better*'.

Whilst I can only report on experience at a micro level of practice, Dr Amanda Holt echoes many similar themes in her report regarding a Youth Justice Response to parent abuse. (See http://www.internetjournalofcriminology.com/Holt_Parent_Abuse_Nov_09.)

1: 4 A POLICE RESPONSE?

I knew of parents, who had dialled 999, after/during domestic incidents and had their youth arrested. The majority of such cases being released later that day/accommodated overnight, or released with or without charge. Which ever way, the outcome generally resulted in a return back to the family home; and the cycle of violence continuing unaddressed. Similar to adult perpetrated domestic abuse, every time a parent phones the police to report an abusive teen, they run the risk of more violence from a (now even angrier) teen on his/her return home. This violence regularly extends down to younger siblings, in the family, thereby compounding the fallout, effect and abuse cycle.

Too often, parents spoke to me of a lack of understanding and supportive police response over TVAP, and many parents appeared discouraged to use this option. I knew of parents who had refused to have sons/daughters home, after release from cells, courts or secure accommodation and were told, '*You have to*', that it was *their responsibility to*'. Some mothers, (still in fear) took them back, because they, '*felt pressured into it*', and sometimes overridden with guilt of parental failings. One mother told me how the police officer had '*been judgemental of her parenting ability*' in front of her aggressive teenage daughters, and within '*earshot of neighbours*', when she had tried to explain her fears over having the girls home.

In occasional cases (following TVAP arrests), teens would reside with other family members, or Local Authority Care, until court appearances. Almost always, the priority of family support services, police and youth justice was to facilitate re-integration of a teen back into the family, without any assessment of TVAP needs.

One single mum, (whose son had been in and out of the juvenile justice system over a 3 years period), had (voluntarily) attended generic parenting programmes; to little effect. Her son had been on a range of Youth Orders and interventions, for offences such as car thefts, but no TVAP related charges. Yet his violent behaviours at home had worsened, over the years, and recently his mother presented as depressed, fearful and increasingly isolated. Later she only met with professionals secretly (within the safety of her elderly mother's home), for fear of retribution, from an extremely controlling and abusive son, who disapproved of her accessing support services.

Over the years, referrals had been made to domestic violence providers, police, social services, vulnerable victims and voluntary organisations. Many professionals were doing their best to support this difficult case; within the services and provisions available.

This mother confided in me how she feared her son (now 17) had a bread knife hidden in his room. Previously he had twisted her arms, kicked and punched her (and house walls), smashed belongings and daily used a wide range of abuse and control methods. She felt afraid he might use the knife; as he had once threatened to kill her. Despite my many attempt to encourage her to report this (and other recent incidents) to the police, she consistently refused to do so. The police (although sympathetic) said they could not proceed on second hand information/reports alone.

Wearily, and tearful, she finally shared, with me, that she would not phone the police, because it did not help; that she had phoned them last year, (after a particularly violent outburst), and got him arrested. Revealing her fears to the attending Police Officer, she stated she couldn't have her son back, '*but he still brought him back; told me to just ring 999, if it happened again, and it just got worse*'.

She is at loss as to what to do, and feels powerless to deal with his ever increasing demands for money and control of the family home. At 17, she wants him evicted now, but along with her feelings of failure, guilt and betrayal. she lacks the confidence that police or other services could, or would, protect her with this dangerous step.

1: 5 NOT JUST THE SUM OF THEIR VIOLENT BEHAVIOURS?

And here lies another complexity.

Despite their teen's abusive behaviours, many parents I worked with told me how they dearly loved their teens, and (confusingly) when not 'running' abusive behaviour patterns, parents reported the same teens as being caring loving and thoughtful around the home and towards younger siblings. E.g. 'The youth with the knife' would regularly vacuum the house and offer to help with other housework. His Gran once told me, he broke down in tears and said to her, '*I want help you know, I don't want to be like this...*'

One common feature of all these teens were their very low levels of emotional maturity for chronological age. Minimising, denying, justifying behaviours and/or blaming others for violent outburst were common characteristics. Most violence appeared, or escalated when hearing the word 'no', not getting what they wanted/felt entitled to or being frustrated.

Yet, I found, when working sensitively, offering high challenge and high support, teens often disclosed self loathing and shame, for their abusive tactics. Deep down, I sensed that most did want help to change, and their high levels of shame appeared to be (unhelpfully) released in the escalating cycle of abuse and family violence.

At this point, I ask the question.

Are these teens' simply evil, antisocial monsters and violent offenders who can be pre-defined as our next generation of adult perpetrators?

Or, can they be viewed as immature adolescents with a range of specific behaviours, attitudes and belief patterns that they have developed/been 'allowed' to develop/have seen role modelled by others. Are they simply utilising their only power, control and abusive problem solving skills, to vent frustration and get their own way? Whilst it's true that, (whatever their past histories/diagnostic label), we need to be encouraging personal responsibility and ownership of behaviour and actions in violent adolescents, how are we locating this responsibility within meaningful and effective interventions for all concerned? And how are we utilising this very important pre-adult window of opportunity for change?

1:6 DO WE NEED TO FOCUS ON CAUSE?

The causes of TVAP seem to me, to be wide ranging, complex and often interwoven. What past or current factors cause or influence these negative behaviour, are not always fully locatable. Due to the high engagement rates, satisfaction and positive outcomes achieved (in the 'Step Up' Programme) from families from a diverse range of backgrounds, influential factors and conditions, (even teens diagnosed ADHD, and PTSD), I therefore conclude, is not always necessary.

Whilst DV numbers make up at least half of TVAP cases, we must also acknowledge the wider, complex range of factors and characteristics of other TVAP cases, and a growing number of those termed 'high entitlement teens' from affluent backgrounds with many privileges but few clear boundaries or consequences, around respectful behaviours, and personal accountability. Some violent teens are also living within grandparents/extended families and a range of blended step parent families.

My own practice findings and assessment of TVAP profiling, were, consistent with those of Seattle and Toledo, in that at least 50% of violent teens have lived /been exposed to abusive adults; so the development of violent and controlling behaviours could be attributed to 'learnt' behaviour and disrespectful/abusive role models.

I would also suggest that when viewed from a restorative conceptual framework of understanding, perhaps these extreme behaviours characterise the high levels of internalised shame these families may be unconsciously carrying, without any safe or supportive outlets of release. In similar consideration, the needs of teens as 'victims' (not just 'perpetrators'), must also sit within an awareness of the detrimental effect that past domestic abuse often has on confidence and parenting skills of the remaining parent, (usually the mother), and their difficulties in establishing parental authority (particularly during adolescent years). Equally the presence of guilt and feelings of shame and failure to protect their children from past abuse, often affect parenting, thus creating specific parenting support needs.

Once again, it is my belief that we do not need to focus too much on causes, as this could be what makes professionals become stuck (withdraw in despair), by the seemingly complex needs of such families. And it may well be why (unhelpfully) such cases, get labelled as 'dysfunctional' or 'The Families from Hell'

1:7 DEVELOPING A RESTORATIVE RESPONSE

As a trained restorative justice practitioner, I knew the value and effect of working within restorative frameworks, rather than just a lens of blame or punishment. In cases of TVAP (acknowledged harm), I began offering (voluntarily) restorative Family Group Conferences, where family relationships had been hurt or broken, to the extent that teens were at risk of being homeless. Often, I used these meetings to create Family ABC's (my version of a family-owned) Acceptable Behaviour Contract. This encouraged both individual and collective ownership of 'the problem' These meetings gave the whole family a chance to come together, talk about how they had been affected by the violence and for teens to hear this directly.

They were important opportunities to encourage and empower families (and teens) to think in solution focused ways about how to 'put things right' in key relationships. Most families could develop a plan of what needed to happen (identifying their own support needs), to prevent it happening again. Families felt able to forgive, draw a line under the incident and move on. Sometimes, the meeting created a big 'wake up call' for teens (or parent/s) to accept services over unaddressed issues of drug, alcohol, bereavement or health etc. I was all too aware that this was not a full intervention to address TVAP, but it did prove effective and empowering for some families with less dangerous/entrenched patterns of disrespect or abuse, and prior to my U.S. trip, I had also begun to utilise this as a preventative intervention within diversionary cases.

Offering Restorative Family Group Conferences at various points of relationship breakdown between parents and offending teens, aimed to increase important protective factors to reduce offending; restoring significant and supportive adult relationships for these vulnerable young offenders.

However, without a more in-depth intervention for established abusive behavioural dynamics, some parents reported 'peaceful honeymoon periods' were followed by the return of old patterns of abuse and disrespect. *I recently learnt that the use of

restorative conferencing for adolescent family violence is also being used in Canada. See. <http://dc.msvu.ca:8080/xmlui/handle/10587/293>

1:8 PILOTING A GROUP WORK RESPONSE TO TVAP

It was against the back drop of all the above knowledge, experience and awareness, that I began research over the internet for existing programmes for TVAP. The Step Up Programme from Seattle, Washington, U.S.A. seemed to be the only established joint group work programme I could find, whose framework addressed the individual and dualistic needs of parents and teens within their perpetrator/victim dynamic.

I began email consultation with Step Up programme authors, Lily Anderson and Greg Routt, with a view to developing an 8 week pilot, in our own YOT, that would incorporate key core Step Up themes e.g. time outs, safety plans, Abuse and Respect Wheels, etc. An initial TVAP target group of single (post DV) mums with sons aged 14-17 yrs was easily identified from YOT caseloads. Significantly here, we also became aware (through our YOT nurse) that many of TVAP youths were beginning to display abusive behaviours within intimate dating relationships.

We called our pilot '*Do It Different*'. It was developed and delivered as a multi-agency partnership model by myself, a YOT nurse, a YOT case holder, a YOT substance misuse worker, along with a male facilitator from our (public sector) adult perpetrator programme, and a manager from our local DV charity. The details of this small pilot project, is a whole report in itself, but served as a great learning curve for all involved and evaluation identified the following themes:

1. TVAP parents/carers indicated a specialist programme was useful, and wanted it to continue.
2. Teens were initially interested to attend the group, but most found it difficult/lacked the maturity, confidence, or experienced peer pressure over attending voluntarily on a consistent basis.
3. Pre-engagement work and ongoing assessment was essential.
4. Ideally, the intervention needed to be mainly statutory (included as a part of the young person's Court Order)/or offered as part of a diversionary process; to achieve higher engagement and programme completion.
5. Some change was evident in a few families; (in both teen and parental behaviours), even after such a short pilot.
6. An eight week programme was not long enough, and needed expanding; to cover further skills based sessions and more pre-engagement work.
7. Dedicated staff time and funding were necessary to develop a regularly delivered programme, to create sustainable and effective changes in behaviour and family dynamics.

Around this time, I became aware that Brighton Youth Offending Team (along with partner agencies), were in their own early stages of developing and evaluating a similar intervention.

This was definitely a new and emerging area of practice across the UK; however, there seemed to be many professional barriers and hurdles to overcome, such as more awareness, adequate screening tools across services, shared funding allocations etc. Without evidence from established models of effective practice, or any

governmental or strategic direction; it seemed unlikely that this emerging area of specialist provision would be prioritised or funded in the UK, in the near future.

It was at this point; I applied to the Winston Churchill Trust, to visit the U.S. for an extended period, with the aim of bringing back extensive knowledge, evidence and understanding about The Step Up Model; as an established programme, along with the desire to explore other emerging practices and alternative restorative responses for TVAP.

1:9 STEP UP – AN ESTABLISHED GROUP WORK MODEL FROM AMERICA

Step Up, was developed over 12 years ago, and has been running successfully since that time, as a specialist intervention/disposal within King County. Juvenile Court Dept, Seattle. See www.kingcounty.gov/courts/stepup. This year, 85% of referrals came through Diversionary programmes, and are all first time offenders, (avoiding costly courts and criminal records). In 2009 70% of youths referred had past exposure to DV. The Step Up authors, run a 3 day Step Up facilitator training workshop, and in recent years, juvenile courts in other states have taken on the programme (e.g. Lucas County, Toledo, 2007); its popularity has also extended into other family service providers, in both the U.S. and countries such as New Zealand and Canada. In 2005, independent research from Organisational Research Services gave favourable evidence around recidivism and Step Up stating, *'after 12 months, the average number of filings among non-completers is twice as high as the average among completers of Step Up'*. In 2009 Toledo evaluated recidivism amongst past Step Up participants as less than 30%. Wider evidence based research is currently being undertaken by the University of Illinois, as part of a U.S national initiative of juvenile justice reform, called *'Models for Change'*. Two youth justice courts and 1 community agency in Illinois, (all who use Step Up) are part of this wider evaluation. <http://www.kingcounty.gov/courts/stepUp/Leader.aspx>

Beginning with a belief that change is possible

The underlying philosophy of Step Up is that most individuals can make changes; if the right support and environment is available to them. Step Up is an acronym for **Stop, Time out, Evaluate, Prepare, Use skills and Patience**. Based on the Balanced and Restorative Justice Model of Accountability (BARJ), the programme offers a range of responses, within an intervention that is high on accountability and high on support. As a restorative practitioner, I am aware that such a balance, not only assists engagement, but also creates an environment more conducive to the growth of personal responsibility, empathy and behavioural change.

At a cognitive behavioural level Step Up challenges attitudes around the acceptability of using violence and abuse. It focuses heavily on the development of self awareness, personal responsibility and accountability for ones own actions, whilst offering parents and teens a comprehensive tool kit of peaceful problem solving skills and solution focused de-escalation tools.

On a restorative level, it equips both parents and teens with a new and (non abusive) language to assist them with restoring and repairing important family relationships, after harm and hurt has been caused.

During the first half of each session, both parties can safely communicate and practice new skills during a restorative framework called Check In. Through skilled facilitation, this process fosters accountability, growth of mutual respect and empathy and models the use of restorative language.

The ability to empower parents and teens through knowledge about which behaviours constitute abuse and which resemble respect, through The Abuse And Mutual Respect Wheels; is at the heart of the success of this multifaceted programme.

THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF STEP UP

Step up can be used as a rolling, ongoing programme or a closed 20 session approach. Whilst Toledo generally runs a closed programme, Seattle operates it as a rolling model, with new intakes at suitable points. Usually one assessment and intake session takes place prior to commencement on the programme to prepare parent and teen for the programme structure; but sometimes more (depending on assessment). Serious cases may have safety planning work prioritised, prior to attending. (See Safety Plan section for more information)

The programme uses a Behaviour Check-list tool; (with both parents and teens), to assess abusive and violent behaviours used by teens in the home. This tool is used as an intake pre-assessment tool and also as a post evaluation tool to measure behaviour change. Information on drug and alcohol use, mental health issues, ongoing adult domestic violence and any gang based issues, is gathered during intake interviews, to assess for unsuitable referrals. Whilst drug and alcohol use is a characteristic of many violent teens, referrals with low level usage (and those accessing recovery services) are often accepted; due to past Step Up participants making dramatic changes in the reduction of substance abuse; possibly due to increased well being, self esteem, and improvements in parental relationships.

In Seattle, most group sessions now take place with parents and teens together, although specific skills based or awareness-raising sessions do happen separately on some weeks; depend on the session content and group needs. (See curriculum content page)

Step Up uses incidents of real family conflict as teachable moments for both teen and parent alike, and therefore a large part of the programme is personal and experiential.

CHECK- IN

All sessions start with parents and teens sitting together. The check-in itself, whilst appearing a simple process, is a powerful framework that operates in a multi-faceted way to build strong group identity and cohesion, whilst giving parents and teens a safe place to express tensions, learn about and practice, respectful communication and ways to restore family relationships.

One of two facilitators invites the teens to start Check-in, with each young person voluntarily choosing their place in the round. Two important visual aids, detailed in individual work books, (The Abuse Wheel and The Mutual Respect Wheel) are used week on week. These two wheels encourage and educate teens, (and parents) to be very specific about actual behaviours used and to help them identify which behaviour sits in which category of abusive or mutually respectful. Facilitators can refer to teen behaviours, through the wheels, thus allowing them to remain objective and neutral. Teens are required to self-report on their behaviours at home, that week. Teens are asked, (by the facilitator) to identify which wheel they were on, when displaying that specific behaviour?

The learning begins straight away, through encouragement of personal responsibility, ownership of behaviour, and an opportunity to gain new understanding and insight into how behaviour affected other family members. Teens self rate on achievement of their personal behavioural goal, and then set a further goal after evaluating their own

progress. A facilitator's ability to mediate (impartially) between the parent/carer (s) and teen(s) is an important aspect of the success of check in.

The second part of check-in is undertaken by the parent/s, which either confirms the teen's account of the week, or takes the opportunity to add their interpretation. For parents, it's a rare chance to communicate with their adolescent (with support) and try out new communication skills (in a supportive and safe environment) with adult backup. If teens/parents report abusive incidents, the use of restorative questions facilitate added self-awareness, problem solving opportunities and assist the development of empathy, along with support for parent/teen conflict resolutions, thereby repairing harm, in ways that are meaningful, and healing to both parties.

SKILL SESSIONS

After a short break, the second part (depending on session number) is either specific skill based session, or about developing new understanding, awareness or challenging existing beliefs.

Early on in the sessions, parents and teen complete important safety plans, and learn a core de-escalation technique called "Time Out", to assist family safety at home throughout the programme and early stages of change.

Separate parent/teen groups teach specific content relevant to individual needs. (see separate list in 20 session content).

Important restorative practice sessions within individual teen group time, are ones that focus on accountability and those that assist teens to write their own, '*Responsibility and Empathy Letters along with Accountability Sheets*' about abusive behaviour(s) towards a family 'victim(s)'.

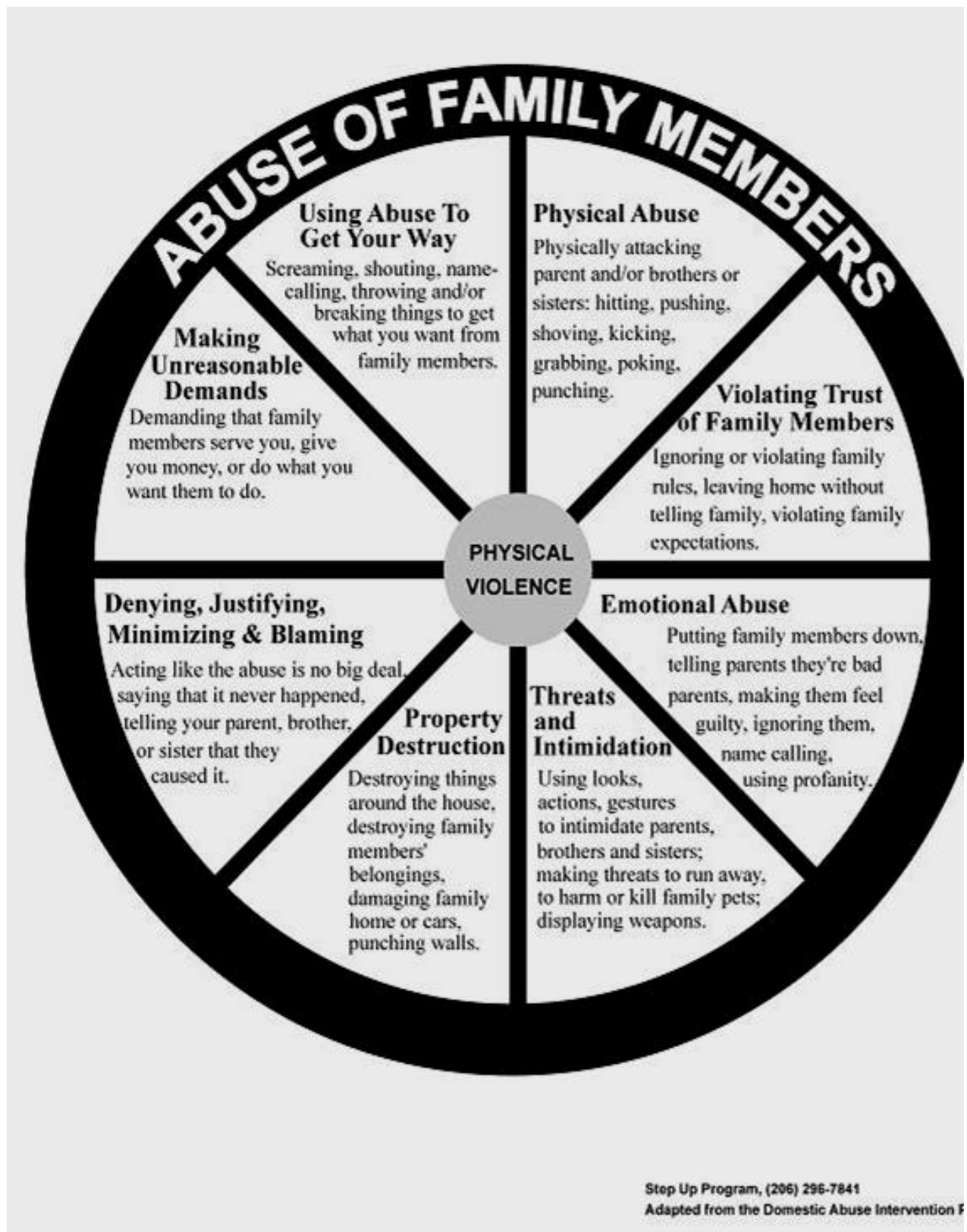
One session also aims to work preventatively by focusing on the unacceptability of violence in intimate dating relationships, as well as within the family context.

During separate parent group time, parents support, encourage and empower each other. Group facilitators invite group problem solving around specific family issues and assist parents to develop specific parenting skills e.g. boundary setting and new understandings of adolescent behaviours and the various dynamics of TVAP.

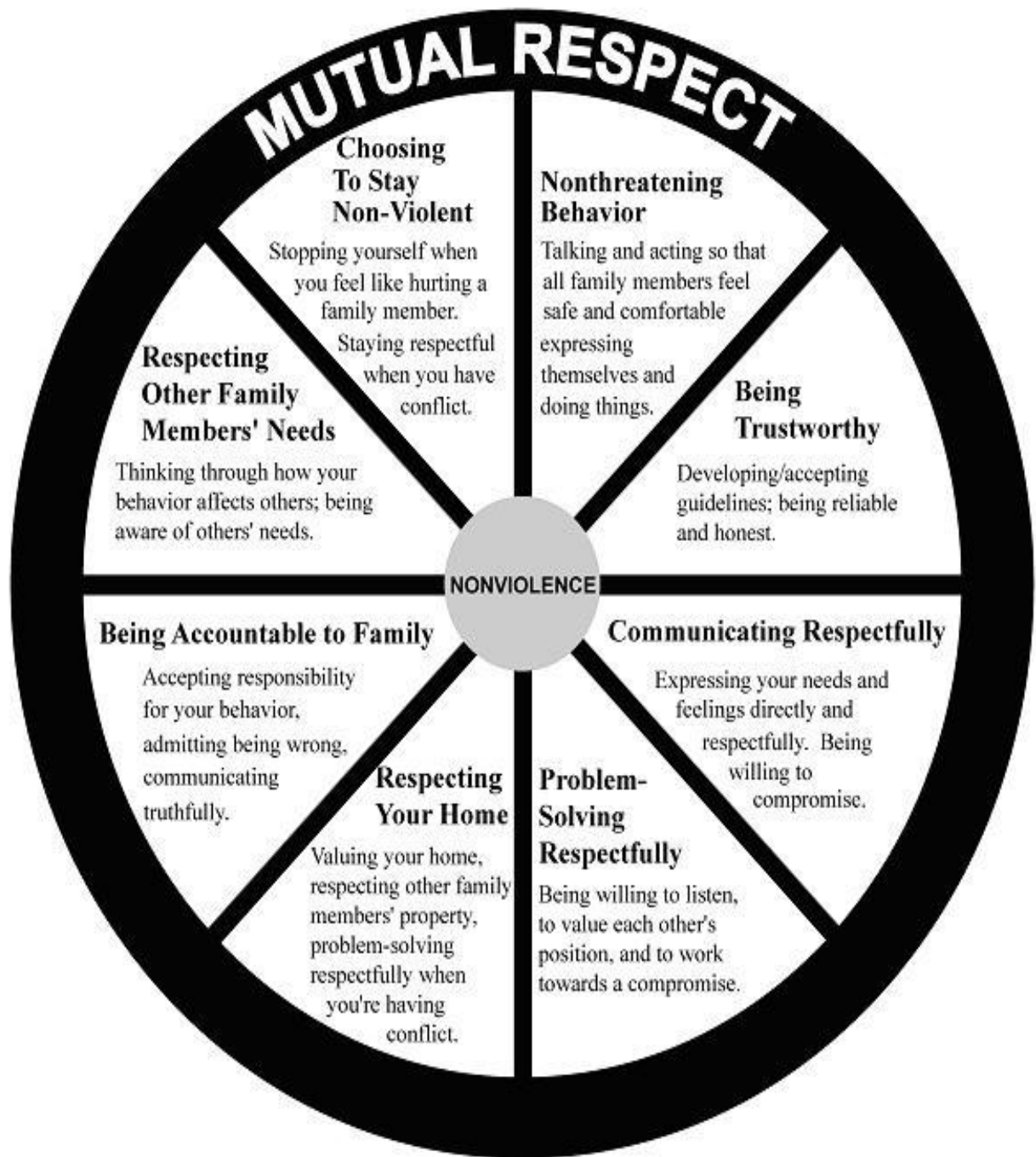
Each full session runs for 90 (Seattle) or 120 minutes (Toledo). Both parents and teens have personal workbook, with information regarding each session, teens have specific areas given to record week on week, personal behavioural goals/use of time outs and self scaling on their achievements and progress.

CONTENT OF STEP UP - 20 SESSIONS

<u>Session</u>	<u>Teens</u>	<u>Parents</u>	<u>Combined</u>
1	My family	Strengths/challenges/change	
2	Goal Planning	Making Changes	
3	Understanding Violence	How to respond to teen violence	
4			Taking Timeouts
5			Red flags/triggers
6	Understanding power	Time outs for parents	
7	Understand feelings	Effects of teen abuse on parenting	
8	Understanding Self Talk	Adolescent developments	
9	Understanding beliefs	Consequences for behaviour	
10	Hurtful and helpful moves	Encouraging your teen	
11	Accountability	Teens being responsible for behaviour.	
12		Making amends	
13	Responsibility	What kind of a message are you giving your teen?	
14			Assertive communication
15			Using 'I' statements
16	Understanding empathy	Listening to your teen	
17			Guide lines for respectful communication
18			Problem solving together
19	Healthy dating relationship	Supporting positive changes In your teen	
20			Moving forward



EXAMPLE OF ABUSE WHEEL



Step Up Program, (206) 296-7841
Adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project

EXAMPLE OF MUTUAL RESPECT WHEEL

STEP UP - IN ACTION (LUCAS COUNTY, TOLEDO)

Its 6pm on a Tuesday evening in downtown Toledo. A room is set up in a horseshoe shape, with a lap top displaying a visual presentation at the front of the room. This weekly 2 hour session is facilitated by Hans Giller and Amy Lentz. Toledo adopted Step Up over 3 years ago and has made minor adaptations to session delivery, e.g. power point presentations, and workbook format.

The first to arrive is a 14 year old boy who has been escorted down from the Juvenile Detention Centre on the upper floors of the Court Dept. Dressed in standard green uniform, his hands handcuffed together; he shuffles in and sits down. His mum arrives shortly after, and without any greeting, sits down next to him. This youth has been arrested recently for a burglary charge against his mother. He is already on the Step Up programme for a charge of violence against her. As the Detention Centre is housed in the same building, this allows his specialist intervention to continue, uninterrupted, whilst awaiting trial for his latest offence. Consistency appears to be a strong feature in Toledo, and a delivery model that gives clear, consistent messages is seen as central to its success. The boy looks pleased to see his mother at the group; despite her reservations towards him. He glances fondly towards her, and (in the safe place of the group) she tentatively receives his look. Hans asks after her, and she comments she is still too upset to visit her son, since his latest offence. Yet here she is here today, attending voluntarily to support him on this programme. That's surely a clear sign to her son that he still matters; and she's hanging in with him - even though things are pretty bad between them right now, and he's living at his dad's house.

A tall slim 17 year old youth, in a tight bobble hat strolls in, and is greeted by both facilitators. He has come from school and wants to know, straight away, where his mum is? Hans tells him that she's phoned in to say she can't make it tonight. He looks a little sad. A dark haired girl bounces in with a young looking, ponytailed mum, close behind her. They sit together at the front of class, clutching individual work books. The energy between them is clearly good and mum looks relaxed. Slowly, the room fills, and finally, (a little late), a be-spectacled, adolescent girl enters dramatically and glares at everyone in the room. The handcuffed boy smirks at her, and she sits down quickly between him and the bubbly girl; placing herself in a seat with no room for anyone to sit beside her. Shortly after, Mum arrives, looking flustered, red-eyed and upset. She sits as far away from her daughter as possible. The looks they exchange, tell us that things are not good! After an initial attempt to benchmark where the pair is at, the facilitators assess it's ok to start; and the group begin their Check-in round.

To remind teens why they are here, each takes a turn to complete the sentences:

My name is....

I am here because.....

I am here to learn/ am learning/ have learnt.....

(Depending on how long on the programme)

This will help me because.....

My motivation level for change is.....

The Toledo programme asks each teen to name their specific offence, and towards which family members e.g. I hear teens say, they are here to learn, *'how to behave respectfully* and *'not get angry or hit people'*.

Despite my initial surprise and scepticism, at this uniformed 'wooden' start, I observe that most youths seem connected to the words they speak and not just turning them out rote fashion. All teen gave motivation levels of between 7.5 and 10, for change, and seemed to enjoy this firm but respectfully facilitated framework

Now it was time for the full Check-in round.

(Week on week, in both States, I observed this process as being the most powerful part of the programme)

The visual wheels of Abuse and Respect are on the overhead projector, in front of the group. They serve as constant reminders and educators for teens (and parents); as to which behaviours are respectful and which are violent and abusive, in the family context.

Rounds of applause fill the room, when a teen reports being on the Respect Wheel and parents confirm this in their own self reporting. If a teenager or parent reports an abusive incident during the week, Hans prompts the restorative enquiry (given in their workbooks).

Affective questions like *'what happened?'*

'What were you thinking about at the time'.... seemed to help the young person (and parent) gain greater awareness and understanding around the incident.

Moving on then, to ask, *'who was harmed by your actions?'*

Who else?' encouraged the young person begin to understand how their actions affect others, in the wider family and not just their victim.

Finally, the question,

'How can you put this right?' allowed the facilitator to support a dialogue between parent and teen, over how harm could be repaired.

Sometimes it was a simple 'sorry' that the parent or carer wanted from teens, other times, they asked for financial reparation or commitment from them to do extra chores.

The 17 year old boy (without his mum), sits quietly, waiting to speak, then in his deep Southern accent, reports he's been on the Respect Wheel all week; *'apart from some cussing (swearing) at his mum'*, which he *'doesn't seem to be able to stop doing'*. The facilitator explores this area gently, with him; giving strength based feedback over past progress, and then invites the group for their suggestions. The boy mutters quietly to himself that his mum cusses too and that he usually only does it after she does it to him!

This is a sensitive (but common one) for facilitators to go into, a) as mum is not here, and b) as the youth is the person with the DV charge, (not the other way around!).

I am also aware, (from my own experience) that it can sometimes be a thin grey line that separates the youth's behaviours at home from a parents' own disrespectful ways. This apart, I see how this can be a safe place to open up that awareness for parents, and encourage adolescents to take personal ownership of their own behaviour, and change; regardless.

To my surprise, the young people in the room appear to have a strong commitment to this clearly challenging programme, (not resentment) and seem to be very serious about wanting help and well motivated to change their abusive behaviour patterns.

There is a definite air of high accountability and personal responsibility in here, coupled with high levels of support from facilitators and the wider group.

In the final part of Check-in, each teen goes to a flip chart which has individual goals written up (from a previous week). Now, they are invited to publicly review their personal goal and decide whether to keep it, revise it, or change it; based on progress (or lack of it), during the week. I observed how this encouraged personal ownership, responsibility and reflective thinking skills

When it comes to the turn of the bubbly, dark haired girl, she reports being on the Respect Wheel, all week *'for the 3rd week in a row!'* Her mother beams to confirm that her daughter has reported accurately.

She adds, *'things are brilliant at home. We have had an amazing week of getting on together.'*

The daughter returns her mum's beam. Mother and daughter's eyes meet, to share a celebratory glance. This is teen/parent relationship at its best, and working as a team. There's celebratory group applause, and even teens join in, thus validating the progress. Further reinforcement and learning comes when Hans flips the use of restorative questions and asks:

Who benefitted from you being on the respect wheel all week?

In what way did they benefit?

What specific skills learnt in this group, did you use to stay non-violent?

In this way other teens get to hear, straight from the mouth of another teen what's working for them.

The group takes a short break, the teens head out to rest rooms, and a few parents take a coffee. Amy, (a facilitator) moves quickly to sit with the 'red eyed mum'. It sounds a heavy conversation, with a very upset mum, discouraged by negative events of the week. Amy's calm and supportive approach appears to give mum space to vent frustrations and share disappointments and distress. It's not a quick fix conversation, and more tears of frustration flow. Amy offers an individual appointment before the next group; mum accepts and begins to gather her fragile emotions together.

In the break I talk with the mother whose daughter reported so well. I am curious to hear how long they have been on the programme and pleasantly surprised to hear it's only their 5th or 6th week. The mother is keen to share her own delight in this rapid progress and comments that they have: *'Tried lots of different programmes and therapies and things have been bad for a couple of years'.*

She tells me that Step Up is the only thing that has worked, and attributes their joint participation as key to this.

'It was fine for my daughter to go and offload to psychologists and counsellors in her appointments but none of that improved things at home.'

She comments on her own learning at Step Up, as well as her daughter, *'learning to listen, and how to handle difficult behaviours and my need to stay on the Respect Wheel too!'*

One mum asks me, *'do parents in England have these problems, or is it just us?'*

I realised then, that I am witnessing first hand, American parents with a range of parenting challenges almost identical to those back home in the UK. Like defiance, and disrespect and difficulty in negotiating boundaries or consequences with teens. Of peer pressure, fears around drug and alcohol misuse, problems with school based

issues, the challenge of blended families, lone parenting, and unsupportive ex-s, and on and on.

I relayed this back to the mum by my side; and other parents in the group pick up their ears and listen to my response. It seemed reassuring to them that this is a shared problem for other parents in other places; and not just them. I could have spoken longer, but the group was reconvening and moving on.

Parent and teen were now requested to sit together (some more reluctantly than others!) for the skills part of the session, (made more interesting by the visual power point, ice-breaker games and fun presentation.

Tonight it's about communication, and is the first part of two sessions on problem solving skills. Each stage was clearly explained, and demonstrated, then parent and teens practice (very woodenly and unsure, at first) the first step of problem solving together. This involves identifying a feeling and communicating it through an 'I' Statement that included a '*feeling*' word. In Stage 2, they were encouraged to reflect back to the other what they heard them say (to let them know they were listening). Everyone gives it a go –even the troubled mum and her daughter, (with some support) and there is an obvious willingness to try, even though respectful communication and getting in touch with feelings are both tall orders!

STEP-UP IN ACTION – KING COUNTY, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

It's Wednesday evening and I have driven with Step Up facilitators, Lily and Greg to a leafy suburb of Seattle to hold Step Up in a government building; within a community setting. Boys (and girls) begin arriving, both separately and with parents, (some meet up at the venue). They pick up workbooks on their way in, and the room soon fills with gentle chatter; as those who have been coming a while, converse together.

This group is very diverse in composition; and a big group with around 25 members.

There is a single dad here with his 15 year old son. Its mainly single mums with sons, but the range also includes single mums with daughters, couples with teens (plus a dad, his new wife and ex wife too!).

The group starts and teens begin their check-in. Once more I hear teens describe their behaviour that week, through locating them on the abuse or respect wheel; then wait to hear if parent(s) verify or negates their self-reporting, Once again, I hear a wide range of behaviours reported, with many good reports.

One girl announces she's had a drug free week, and rates herself a 10/10. Her mother agrees about the no drugs, but seems reluctant to endorse the 10. She wants to focus on negatives, despite the drug achievement; and the girl's face looks downcast. Greg gently probes mum's version of the week and after exploring it, she agrees, *'yes, I guess there have been positives - as well as her disobeying some house rules!'* It's clear the girl feels she's really tried, and the mother is finding it hard to give positive recognition. Another parent in the group, unexpectedly steps in to fill this void, when he says, *'well I think it deserves a round of applause for not using drugs all week...'*

I watch the downcast girl's face lift, as encouraging claps follow from other sources.

Round and round we go family after family. Story after story, once again, so alike to similar stories of those I heard whilst working in UK families. Yet, here, in this room,

common parent/teen issues, that often escalate out of hand, are being aired within a facilitated framework of respectful communication and here, real practical, and preventative solution focused, problem solving skills are being learnt. These groups seems to operate like an extended family and support network, assisting both parents and teens to problem solve around their own family issues and encouraging teens to take ownership and responsibility for behaviour and change. Many parents report the violence stops (or reduces significantly almost straight away), on entry to this programme. Possibly because it offers a safe place to explore family 'angst' and learn skills to de-escalate issues, both through skilled facilitation, and a restorative framework to repair and restore crucial relationships within.

Time and time again, I am amazed at the sensibility, responsibility and emerging maturity of teens who set their own behaviour goals; often without assistance or resistance. For those finding it difficult, facilitators invite the wider group to offer suggestions, and other adults or teen make suggestions; usually around a goal related to behaviours they reported on the previous week.

I am sitting next to the parents of a 10yr old son and 14 yr old daughter (who has lots of attitude!) I later learn this family have come voluntarily; (not through the courts) and the mother is a professional who works in the legal system.

At break time, I ask the father what he thinks of Step Up, and he's full of compliments, saying how much it's helped his family.

'She (the daughter) still has attitude – but without violence now! Because she's changed, her little brother has seen this and it's affected his behaviour in a positive way too.'

He goes on to say,

'we parents can tell them what we want them to change- till we're blue in the face, but when a kid decides it for themselves, and reports on it – then they have more ownership of it and take responsibility for it.'

He's keen to tell me that even though this is a big group (14 teens); and all are here for being violent at home; in all the 18 weeks he's come, he has never seen any show of aggression or violence.

One step-father of a 16 yr old boy, on the programme told me;

'This has been phenomenal in encouraging accountability in him and him learning from the other kids. They (teens) don't let on always in the group that they are listening, but we talk in the car on the way home and he comments on what he has heard in the group about other kids behaviours and I have gotten help, from hearing other parents and the common problems we share.'

In my entire 6 week stay, I could not find one parent or teen who spoke negatively of this programme.

TWO MORE GROUPS IN SEATTLE

It's Tuesday night, in another suburb of Seattle. Two Step-up Groups are scheduled to run concurrently tonight. The group in this area of town has grown so big that Lily and Greg have decided to break it up into two.

The first group runs at 5pm and is made up of all males between 14 and 17, (with one or two parent/carers). One of them is 15 year old K. He has a diagnosis of ADHD and mild Aspergers with a reading age of 10. When he first came to the group, K's

violence at home was on a daily basis, and towards all family members. Although progress is slower for K, it is still happening. He has recently completed the 20 sessions and will now repeat some sessions.

K volunteers to start the Check-in. Speaking slowly, he reports on an incident at home in which he refused to leave his brother's bedroom and the situation escalated. Both parents contribute to the report, building the picture from their own perspective. K, (despite his clearly immature language and body language) listens carefully, and uses new skills of respectful communication and self regulation; despite his diagnostic labels.

Previous to this 'blip', the family had reported a (rare) week of zero violence. Last week he had set his personal behavioural goal, as a *2nd violence free week*.

It's obvious from K's sad face, as he listens to his father talk with real heart feelings, about the 'bedroom incident', that he is remorseful. Despite K's failure at meeting his goal, his mother still manages to recall positives, and cites how he had walked away from other potential incidents.

Lily takes K through the restorative questions:

Who has been affected by your behaviour?

K appears to make use of these in a meaningful way, (assisted by his parents) to be able to put right, his wrong doings. He starts to look less sad.

Lily assists the learning further when she stretches the restorative questions into 'What *behaviours on the respect wheel* could you have used instead, K?

Ninety minutes later, the second group convenes, and a 'new starter' struts into the room, eyeing up the other teens around the room, cautiously. He looks unsure as to what's expected of him here; and well out of his comfort zone. Lily hands him (and his worried looking mum) a workbook, smiles, and invites him to observe what happens here, and to listen to how other young people do their check in. Lily reminds him gently, what he will be expected to do. (She and Greg have previously gone over this at his intake session). He now looks more reassured, and nods.

The group commences with a 16 year old boy reporting on an excellent week. It has been prom week at school and it could have been a difficult week especially as his goal was not to drink alcohol all week! The teen proudly announces to the group that he achieved his goal and there are looks of surprise and admiration around the room. Yes, even on prom night, he did not drink alcohol; both his mum and dad agree. Mum is smiling as she confirms '*the week's been really good*', and adds that because of the prom, '*he has had a lot of things riding on his behaviour! Like the hire of his tuxedo, and share in the limo ride etc., but yes, he reports correctly*', she has no reason to suspect he drank alcohol, at the Prom, as she picked him up after. (This is a teen from a very affluent family, whose father is a surgeon). The youth gives a 10/10 and both parents agree. Lily and Greg add their own congratulations; and the boy sets his next behavioural goal, and check in moves on to another teen.

Two brothers take their turns next; their young looking mother sits quietly between them. The older boy's report is positive, but her younger son, seems to be finding it hard to put de-escalation skills of 'time out', into practice. He's also having trouble with behaviours at school. The mother seems almost afraid to speak, glancing anxiously, back at her sons, as she tries to give an honest check-in report.

(On my last week in Seattle I video interview this mother and her youngest son, and learn of their past experience of extreme DV, and the boy's diagnosis, first of ADHD,

then later with PTSD: post traumatic stress disorder) It's hard to believe that some of the parents and teens, that I meet week on week in these groups have serious DV pasts; as they are making such good progress. Once again I am reminded of the power of Step Up, to engage with diverse needs and its ability to facilitate real change, even for families with many complex needs.

* Since my U.S visit, I hear that both boys have successfully graduated from Step Up. Their mother wrote a letter of gratitude and support for the programme (along with 75 other Step Up families), when recent budget restraints threatened to axe it, this autumn.

This courageous woman's story is extremely powerful. She gives permission for me to use her letter, here in my report. (see next page).

I feel no greater evidence can be given of the value of Step Up, both in its effectiveness to address TVAP, and its potential to arrest generations of family violence, than powerful testimonies of change such as this.

The (not uncommon story) but often 'hidden' voice of a post DV single parent, whose families unmet needs can sometimes be misunderstood, or misinterpreted by magistrates, educators, professionals and family service providers.

I reflect back to the many TVAP within my own past caseloads; struggling with the aftermath of the effects of domestic violence, as they tried desperately to regain a normal family life. The many common themes I heard so often, are all mentioned here; within this mother's letter.

And how, for UK families there has been no specialist programme available like Step Up to effectively support them with this challenging area of change, whilst diverting their children away from the often damaging effects of a juvenile justice system.

Letter from mother of 2 Step Up graduates (personal information removed)

This letter is to address the King County Council concerning the continuation of the Step Up Program; which to me is a foundation of what change has grown upon.

I am a single mother of 2 boys and currently protected under the Address Confidentiality Program managed by the secretary of the State of Washington.

I first contacted the Domestic Violence Network after the 11th violent assault of my husband leaving me with a torn vocal cord from surviving strangulation injuries. My journey through divorce was long and the violence inflicted upon my life, contrary to my belief did not cease, but to my surprise was then inflicted upon my children during visitation.

My children and I found ourselves homeless, without income due to the Domestic Violence that was inflicted upon them while with their father. Both children were scared to tell me about what was occurring during visits with Dad, and to add to my confusion; their behavior was causing me to be completely unable to attain steady employment or attend school.

My youngest son struggled with running away, physical violence, stealing, telling stories to get his own way, being expelled from school, suspended from transportation services to school. Finally we were able to once again have him re-evaluated for ADHD, I had him first evaluated at age 4 and due to PTSD symptoms being similar to that of ADHD symptoms, I was encouraged to continue receiving support from Family Counseling and the Domestic Violence Network. Last year my son was diagnosed with ADHD and put on medication. My Family despite all my efforts to heal by this time was heartbreaking. I was on my knees, hopeless, numb, desperate. My oldest son believed that if his Little brother wouldn't listen and stop cussing in public, lying and interfering with friendships, name calling, stopping me from working, interfering with homework and his success that maybe physical violence was ok to handle it. My household had become a yelling, wall punching, door slamming, hitting, slapping emotionally abusive, financially abusive i.e. theft from my purse, destructive environment. My arm would be slammed in the front door leaving it bruised, for asking my son to wear his winter coat, he would threaten to break things, scream horrible things at me in public, call my place of employment and leave unethical, rude messages on the voice mail, stop me or my other family members from family plans or social events, steal from his friends, or while we were at mine. I had become once again nearly isolated with the exception of my extended family. Most of my other relations I maintained via internet. I had to hide going on interviews as he would take my bus money, hide bills and the money for them as utilities were beginning to threaten disconnect or had been due to the past abuse he had survived, his misunderstanding, hurt and theft. Our Counselor shared a resource with me one afternoon and asked me if I might be willing to give them a call and attend their group. I had police showing at my home and work, calls from my son's school due to his behavior preventing me from my temporary job as we were still in process of ADHD diagnosis.

We began attending Step Up, its coordinators provided a support system, a curriculum, an understanding and an opportunity for personal growth in a compassionate, educated, structured environment. They provided individual Family sessions if the need arose, a chance to learn how to be functional, respectful, consider how actions or words might affect those around you, advocacy with the justice system if your youth had been involved with the Juvenile Courts.

The program provides the Children opportunity and knowledge of how to identify the difference between abusive behavior and respectful behavior and talk about it, listen to others, provide ideas about how to be more respectful. It slowed down the rushing statement of "Stop the Abuse" and taught what respect is and what abuse is. Children do what they have witnessed, if all they know is violence the way to change that is to help them witness the respect and compassion, to become a part of it, to learn, implement and provide a kinder, loving way.

After attending the Step Up Group, our family disagrees respectfully, slams a door on occasion, communicates frustrations or hurts or misunderstandings in a respectful conversation without all the yelling, it respects others goals, space, the physical violence has nearly ceased (what happened everyday started to happen a couple times a week then maybe once, soon not at all) It resembles a family that agrees we are all individuals, whom agree that we will disagree sometimes but that we Love each other enough to be respectful of others and ourselves. We are stronger now because of what we experienced within the Step Up Program and we have the curriculum of Step Up that we practiced in group as life skills embedded in our every day thoughts, choices and actions. We have inspiration to continue to move forward in life and be a positive influence in this world because of what we have survived and learned.

This Program is a large answer to a large problem in our society today.

Yours sincerely

(Name removed)

NON COMPLIANCE

Step Up; although, high on support is also high on accountability, (like restorative justice) it is not a soft option. Part of its effectiveness seems to lie in that it does things WITH, (not TO) teens (and parents), offering a journey of change, (often as an alternative to courts or custody). However, accountability and responsibility, and the development of empathy are personal journeys that can be encouraged, but not forced; as a Western punitive response to 'wrong doing', has shown. For teens reluctant/or not ready to get on the cycle of change; those on court orders (or diversionary programmes) are gently reminded that if they want to get out of the system, it could be a good idea to begin to engage, or they will be back in court.

Facilitators discuss engagement and progress of teens and families, on a weekly basis. If a teen consistently fails to make changes or show enough motivation to change, they are (after various attempts to address barriers to engagement), removed from the programme and put back into the court process.

Both in Seattle and Toledo this does happen, but not often. Both programmes have over an 85% success rate, in engagement and completion. In all my weeks observing the programme, I only saw one boy making an attempt to seriously disrupt a group. Mentioning this to Lily and Greg later, they informed me that the 'disruptive teen' had been re-arrested that week and was to appear in court the following week, where his future on the programme would be discussed. (I later observe this hearing)

Most teens are given one warning and a 2nd chance, as sometimes personal issues at home or in the community, take them temporary off track. The 'disruptive boy' had engaged positively in previous sessions, and both facilitators expressed confusion over recent non engagement. Importantly, here, facilitators demonstrate empathy, concern and a willingness to understand the issues, and make time for a mid-week family session to try and discover the reason behind such a change.

*This session brings new awareness of new risk factors that are likely contributors to his disengagement, and re-offending. Referrals are then made to other services, and further inform his court hearing.

PROGRAMME COMPLETION REQUIREMENTS

There are clear criteria's to assess progress for a young person to be able to graduate from the Step Up programme. These are:

- Be able to identify the difference between abusive and mutually respectful behaviours.
- Be able to evidence the use of Time out and problem solving skills.
- Have consistently demonstrated respectful communication at home
- Completed Responsibility and Empathy Letters to one or more 'harmed person'.

Behaviour check-lists are completed again, at the end of the programme, thereby allowing pre and post comparison measurement. This programme is flexible enough to allow teens who make rapid progress on the cycle of change, to graduate sooner than the 20 weeks, whilst others, may stay longer than the 20 weeks; if evidence of ongoing behaviour change is noticeable. The information reported at check – in gives facilitators an ongoing assessment tool as to the young person (and parents) progress towards non-abusive behaviours and positive relationship change.

SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW OF IMPACT AND EFFECT OF STEP UP MODEL

CHECK IN

- The process of self reporting at the start of each session is seen as the key stone of the programme and the main reason for its success. it appears to promote personal responsibility and accountability in teens for abusive behaviour in the family context.
- Check -in was observed as empowering for parents. Giving them a 'voice', and safe arena to share views and versions on family conflict, and express their needs and feelings (as victims). Skilled facilitation supported the process. In this safe space, teens hear publicly, from their parent about the effects of their behaviours (positive or negative) on others family members. I saw how good facilitation can navigate between parent and teen communications, to get a fairly accurate account. This sometimes meant the teen needed to adjust their 'version', and sense of reality around an incident!
- Having the opportunity to self-scale and self-assess how well they have done in managing their behaviour that week, and achieving personal goal, appears to contribute to empowerment, and the development of self regulating behaviours; rather than the young person always looking for external approval.
- The opportunity during Check In, for the wider group to add encouragement, validation/applause of their own, for successes that are reported on, can create extra reinforcement. Both parent and teen enjoy acknowledgement / positive attention for efforts, from an extended family (appreciation for effort that parents of teens rarely get!)

ABUSE AND RESPECT WHEELS

- These two wheels provided an educational framework for check-in reports. Not only were these a visual aid, (for visual learners) but also a very specific way that teens (and parents) became clear on what actual behaviours are respectful and what are abusive. (I think that professionals often may not realise, that many teens simply do not know which behaviours belong to which wheel and need to actually learn this step, first)!
- The Wheels seemed to help parents learn the difference too, and were useful for over anxious parents, who benefit from locating the difference between much minor, (but irritating) teen behaviour and those that are clearly abusive.
- The Wheels offered a 'third party' neutral tool to invite 'safer' discussions around conflict. They assisted the learning around behaviours of abusive and respectful behaviours, and for each party to be clear on the benefits/harm to others when using specific behaviours.
- For parents and teens with poor literary skills, I think these tools might need adapting, (as the full wheel version is very dense in word content). However, I believe that literary difficulties are screened for in assessment and that within the initial orientation session; an explanation of wheel contents is given.

PERSONAL GOAL SETTING

- Again, because teens set their own goal, (not someone else's) this encouraged self-motivation and empowerment from being invited to contribute to the pace

of his or her own behavioural priorities and area for change. Each teen has an opportunity for self- reflection on what worked/not worked over the week and why a goal has or has not been achieved. There is the chance to build on success. All this, encourages the development of increased self regulating behaviours and the ability to self assess and set relevant goal setting for more likely success. I observed most teens setting sensible goals and even saw some set really hard goals that they were determined to achieve, simply because they owned them; and thereby motivated to work for change.

- Inviting a parental contribution to this process was seen as important. It helped parent's feel involved, whilst also supporting parents learn how to assist their teen set relevant and useful behavioural goals for the family context. The majority of parents agreed with their teen's personal goal and this itself helped give both parent a feeling of still having parental control as well as encouraging cooperation, shared satisfaction and a collaborative experience of working together for change. Where there were areas of disagreements, the patient, and neutral mediation skills of facilitators could usually support this process.

VALUE OF RESTORATIVE TOOLS AND COMPONENTS

- The check-in procedure sometimes brought up strong residues of emotions still present from unresolved incidents at home. If not resolved, these can create hurt on top of hurt, and affect motivation for change. Facilitators used restorative questions to gain both parent and teen version of events, assisted mutual empathy and understanding, along with giving important opportunities for retribution, forgiveness and a shared decision as to how teens could put right their 'wrong doing' in meaningful ways.
- The 5 core restorative questions appeared to have a range of restorative benefits and effects for both teens as 'wrongdoers and parent (often the harmed person). The reverse use of these questions, were used as another valuable way to validate behaviours and embed changes/ overlay learning, when teens used non-violent and respectful behaviours.
- Occasionally, when serious incidents were not able to be resolved in the check-in, an extra family appointment was offered, for families to work through the issue, in more depth. This flexible response allowed families extra support; often enough to prevent further deterioration in relationships, avert family breakdown, or possibly the need to access crisis support services.
- Not only did the restorative framework allow teens to repair self-worth or disillusionment following 'slip backs' as they moved forward on the cycle of change, it allowed parents to forgive and renew their motivation to support a teen with change, as well as acting as an empowerment tool to support parents in their assessment over when to (or not to) call out police, helping them to make more informed and empowered decisions around family safety.

*Time and again, I saw the application of the restorative tools, when check-in unearthed incidents causing harm and offence to family members. It was very illuminating to see how the questions, assisted the families to move through any strong feelings of anger, shame and frustration, towards peaceful resolution and closure.

IN CONSIDERATION OF A UK RESPONSE

After observing the Step Up group work model intensively over a six week period, in two U.S. States, I believe that this programme could become an effective model for change within our own service provision in the UK.

- The common characteristics present in many TVAP cases, make Step Up a very culturally transferable model that requires little adaptation for use in the UK.
- Whilst its applications and adaptations are wide and varied, it is my conclusion that (as in America)) our starting point lies within a response from our Youth Justice system, who: a) have an important window of opportunity to screen and assess for TVAP, b) can engage teens through both diversionary programmes and mandatory court disposals. c) Have a remit to engage with parents/carers in voluntarily (and statutory) interventions, and d) work restoratively with victims.
- YOT s offer a key lead agency; in what could be a much wider, multi-agency funded or supported, service delivery and good practice model.
- Step Up offers a low budget, cost effect, evaluated programme, whose main resource is dedicated facilitator time. Whilst in the U.S. facilitators are usually domestic violence counsellors, and the term counselling is more widely used; it is my own opinion that strong facilitation skills, a solid awareness of DV and parenting issues, and the 3 day Step Up Facilitator training, are the key ingredients here and counselling qualifications are not essential.
- Savings across a range of public services and family support agencies have the potential to be significant. Those that are not so immediately evident, will be seen after families begin to use non-violent communication and respectful ways to deal with family conflict, along with being empowered to heal their own hurts; rather than calling on agencies or professionals to do so. The long term saving implications for a whole range of family service providers, and benefit to families and our society as a whole, are immense.
- Step Up offers a specialist victim support service provision to a marginalised group of victims. The programme could offer (an often isolated group of parents) a way to have their needs as 'victim' met, whilst learning key parenting and family safety skills, in a supportive environment. This model assists the development of victim empathy and increased empathy has been seen as a key factor in the behavioural change of adult perpetrators and other violent offenders.
- Restorative responses that are high both on accountability and support are widely evidenced not only for their culturally transferability but their ability to achieve high engagement, ownership and accountability, and empower individuals to change. Step Up is a model that could also be adapted for use in schools, preventative services and a range of family service providers.

2:1 SAFETY PLAN INTERVENTIONS – (SEATTLE AND TOLEDO)

This section looks at the use of Safety Plans in Seattle, as stand alone responses (as well as tools from the Step Up Programme), and as a brief Intervention within The Family Violence Programme (Toledo), to support family safety, and teen retention within the family home; following TVAP offences and court appearance.

SAFETY PLAN PROJECT - SEATTLE

The 2006 Safety Plan Project was developed in partnership with Social Care agencies, in King County, Seattle, to provide assistance with the growing problem of parents/guardians refusing to have teens home because of violent behaviours. Its overall goal was for teens to return home with a Safety Plan to prevent the re-occurrence of violence.

Safety Plans give an opportunity to assess safety concerns, to discuss options and provide resources to help parents make informed decisions about their youth's release. They assist parents with developing a plan for safety to reduce risk of harm to family members and assist teens to develop and 'own' a personal 'Safety Plan' to prevent their use of violence and abuse.

Safety Plan Procedure

Step-Up receives referrals from Victim Advocates or other juvenile court staff that identify parents concerned about safety if a teen is released, or ordered by the judge as condition of release. Step-Up staff meets with parent/guardian to assess safety concerns before a hearing, or sometimes before teens are released from detention. Based on assessment results, Step-Up staff will then develop a safety plan with parent/guardians regarding how to respond to violence at home, and meet with both teen and parent together to develop a Safety Plan.

The Plan includes steps the teen will take when s/he begins to escalate to prevent harmful behaviour. Before release, teens sign the agreement to follow the Safety Plan and remain non-violent. Parent signs agreement to also remain non-violent and support them in following the Safety Plan. A copy of the Safety Plan is given court staff as appropriate. Family are invited to engage in Step-Up program (if appropriate).

EXAMPLE OF SEATTLE SAFETY PLAN

Name _____

I agree to the following plan to prevent abuse or violence:

1. I will separate from my family member/s when

- I start to feel angry or upset and might become hurtful
- I start to use any hurtful behaviours including the following:
Yelling, Name-calling, profanity. Threats, Intimidating behaviour, Property damage,
Unwanted physical contact, such as hitting, punching, pushing, kicking,
Slapping, grabbing, choking or other unwanted contact

2. I will tell the person I am separating by saying:

3. I will separate from the person and go to one of the following Places:

4. While I am separated I will do something to calm myself down,

Such as: _____

5. I will stay away from others for _____ minutes, or until I can be respectful to everyone in the house.

I agree to the following rules:

- I will not use this to plan as an excuse to leave the house, get out of chores or things I'm supposed to do.
- After my separation time I will return and make a plan with the other person about what to do next, (i.e., finish the discussion, plan a time later to talk about it, or let it go).
- If the other person separates from me I will respect their time alone and not bother them.
- I will stay away from the other person until they are ready to talk again.

I understand if I am violent the consequences will be:

I agree to be non-violent at home.

Youth Signature:

Date:

Parent Agreement: I also agree to be non-violent and to support my youth in:

Summary of Seattle Safety Plan Intervention

Teens learn a preventative de-escalation technique and leave detention with a specific, step by step plan about what they will do to prevent using violence or abuse with family members. They receive clear messages from the court, Step-Up staff and parents that violent behaviour is unacceptable and must not be repeated. Engaging with parents often gives teens the opportunity to go home, and change; with the message that they are able to do so.

High risk teens and parents can be offered added support with Safety Plans and learn new skills for violence prevention through a Step Up referral. Without Safety Plan interventions, many teens would be held in detention longer when parents are afraid to have them home or assessed as high risk to re-offend. Most teens leave detention, (on any charge), without the opportunity to sit down with parents (before release) to discuss how they can prevent repeating the offense. The majority of teens walk out of court without considering this for weeks or months, (if ever).

The Safety Plan Project provides an early prevention intervention to families, and gives parents a way to keep themselves and family members safe. Many parents feel more in control with a plan of action; if further violence occurs. They have the opportunity to talk with teen during safety plan meeting about concerns and expectations, and hear how they will respond if there is violent behaviour again. The parent and youth are able to problem solve regarding the youth's safety plan with guidance of a Step-Up facilitator. Parents 'who participated in the Safety Plan process, report Safety Plans help their teens remain non-violent.

Teens are less likely to return to court for DV re-offenses, and there has been considerable reductions in referrals to Social Care for homeless teens.

Safety Plan Demographics for 2009 (recorded in Seattle):

Gender: 64% male 36% are female.

Race/Ethnicity: 72% White, 15% African American,

7% Hispanic/Latino, 5% Asian, and 1% Native American.

2:2 FAMILY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION PROGRAMME (FVIP) - TOLEDO

Lucas County Court services and staff are all housed in a large, modern building that contain both the Youth Courts and the Youth Detention Centre on floors above Youth Probation offices and Mediation Services.

Here in Toledo, their response to juvenile domestic violence has been developing since 2007. They have recently received funding to pilot a Family Violence screening programme and are developing a range of responses, (with Step up Programme as their top tier). A programme co-ordinator is employed full time, with the aim of offering a swift, targeted and preventative response to all teens, arrested with violence against family members.

As in Seattle, they have also extended and utilised the Safety Plan model, but include this in the FVIP as a parent-teen brief intervention.

PERSONAL OBSERVATION OF FVIP

Its 8.30 am, Monday morning and 6 new Juvenile DV cases have come in over the weekend. I am spending the morning, shadowing the Family Violence Intervention Programme Co-ordinator, Debbie Lipson Kaplan.

Case involving teens charged with DV are referred straight to the FVIP.

All teens are detained in the detention centre (above the courts), when arrested, and stay there until a decision is made for charge or release. Males and females are in separate, adjacent sections. Hands cuffed behind their bodies (when moved between courts and other buildings), a juvenile's experience here, is much firmer than the English system, but respectful handling and a compassionate approach was observed at all times, throughout my visit.

At 11.00, all DV detainees are shown a Family Safety film, (together) around the unacceptability of DV. It aims to teach basic understanding and self awareness about their own triggers and 'red flag' signals. The film demonstrates '*How to take a 'Time Out'*', a conflict de-escalation technique.

After the film each teen has their own session, to create individual Family Safety Plans on how to manage their anger on return home.

Most of the youths I saw, responded well, engaged and completed a 'Plan' that identified their personal 'red flag signs and body signal when angry, Some even came up with self calming thoughts to think, to try and prevent violence escalating. The majority, identified places in their home where they could 'take a timeout', to calm down and remove themselves from volatile situations. A couple of boys, however, struggled with this so it's clearly not that simple for all teens. One boy says, '*how can I agree to not hit, when my older brother hits me first and yet my mum does nothing*'? Two others seemed less convinced that the plan would work in their home and struggled to find meaningful answers. One felt there was nowhere to go in his home, due to overcrowding and lack of personal space. A young Afro – American girl shook her head and said '*it won't work; my mother follows me wherever I go in our house, and continues the argument*'.

At 12 o'clock, all parents/guardians are required to attend, and meet with the Co-ordinator to complete initial safety assessments (baseline assessment of DV concerns) and watch the family safety video (together).

The co-ordinator explains the family safety package, then meets each parents and teens individually with the youth's own family safety plan, to talk through ways that parents can utilise de-escalation techniques shown in the video and discuss family safety in general. The court process is explained, along with the completion of any community services referrals, as required. Some parents are given details of Step Up, to consider a voluntary referral to. Where appropriate, victims and youth mediation meetings start at 12.30pm, to begin repairing parent/teen relationships and assist reintegration back into the home. (Freelance mediators carry out this part).

At 1.00 pm (or after mediation), the coordinator attend detention/arrangement hearings with parents, and makes recommendations to magistrates and judges regarding victim safety and detention; using information gained during assessment over the current situation. There may be an option of 3-5 day respite care or further detention if a teen refuses to go home or parent refuse to have teens home; after court. (During this time, further mediation work is usually done with the family.)

Debbie, the co-ordinator presents Family Safety Plan agreements and /or mediation agreement to magistrates who may then decide to make them part of a court order. Where appropriate (with serious offences) the co-ordinator makes recommendations for family violence court pre-trials or trial. A subsequent hearing date is set and the teen is either detained or released from detention.

At the next court hearing, follow up safety information is obtained from parents to see how things are at home and provides support to parent/victim, prosecutor and youth attorney to determine eligibility of the case to go into the specialist family violence court. Assessments are made on home safety (post hearings for those who went home). If parents report satisfactorily, then usually court proceedings will cease. There will be a review of The Safety plan and a discharge, with safety assessment follow ups within thirty days of release.

If the case is referred to the family violence court then the case will be automatically screened for suitability for referral to Step up. Sometimes a short parent-teen tailored counselling intervention, with the Family Counsellor, Tom Perzynski, (also supervisor of Step Up staff) may be offered as an alternative, brief intervention.

EXAMPLE OF CONTENT OF SAFETY PLAN – TOLEDO**Lucas County Juvenile Court****Toledo, Ohio****1. Name**

I will separate from my family member/s when

- I start to feel angry or upset and might become hurtful
- I start to use any hurtful behaviours, including the following:
 1. Screaming/Yelling
 2. Name-calling/profanity
 3. Threats
 4. Intimidating behaviours
 5. Unwanted physical contact, such as,
 - hitting, punching, pushing, kicking
 - slapping, grabbing, choking
 6. Property damage

2. I will tell the person I am separating by saying:

I AM TAKING A TIME OUT

3. I will separate from the person and go to one of the following

Places:

4. While I am separated, I will do something to calm myself down,

Such as:

5. I will stay away from others for up to 60 minutes, or until I can be respectful.**I agree to the following:**

- I will not use this to plan as an excuse to leave the house, get out of chores or things I'm supposed to do.
- After my separation time I will return and make a plan with the other person about what to do next, (i.e., finish the discussion, plan a time later to talk about it, or let it go).
- If the other person separates from me I will respect their time alone and not bother them.
- I will stay away from the other person until they are ready to talk again.

I understand if I am violent the consequences will be:**I agree to be non-violent at home.**

Youth Signature

Date: _____

Parent Agreement:

I also agree to be non-violent and to support my youth in the following this plan.

Parent Signature(s)

A SPECIALIST JUVENILE VIOLENCE COURT MODEL

As part of their joined up response to teen violence, Lucas County have developed a juvenile violence court, (based on their youth drug court model). It meets once a fortnight, and reviews cases of teens at various stages of the Family Violence Programme. All professionals involved, (and the same Judge each time), meet beforehand, and hold a multiagency 'Staffing' meeting, whereby progress is discussed and recommendations made to the Judge, on how to proceed with each case.

All the families sit together at the back of a large airy, court room, whilst up front is the judge.

A large sign above her reads, *'IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD'*.

Bright banners with the words *RESPECT* and *INTEGRITY* adorn the court walls.

The judge begins by calling each youth to step up to a microphone to self-report on progress since last in court. Mirroring the Step Up check in, parents then confirm if teens have reported accurately or not. Professionals follow on, with information that confirms progress and effort, or adds weight to concerns.

The judge listens carefully, making regular and personal dialogue with the teen, around themes of personal responsibility and accountability.

A 17 yr old boy reads his Responsibility Letter out loud (part of the requirements of the Step Up programme for graduation). His words speak of the responsibility he now takes for hitting his mother, (the behaviour that brought him here).

Everyone listens carefully to the boy, (who only a month ago), stood angrily in the same court; his mum sobbing as she spoke. The Judge gives personal commendation to him and says how proud she is to hear of his progress and notes the changes in appearance and attitude. The youth beams.

The judge invites his mum to respond:

'I'm really proud of him. He's a different boy and without the Step Up programme I don't think we could have made it'.

They move back to their seats together, and another family are called. This time the outcome is not so good. Mother and son's stories don't add up. Professionals involved confirm her reports as correct. He is missing appointments, missing school and behaviours at home are not improving. The Judge frowns and looks over at the youth. She reminds him that this is the second time she has heard this kind of report and it can't go on. The message of accountability and unacceptability are clearly endorsed as she rules the teen be admitted to detention overnight and released back home, the next day with a Level 2 In-House Arrest, (electronic tag/ monitor and curfew). To come off house-arrest he must show signs of following his programme. It's as simple and swift as that. A guard moves over snaps cuffs on hands behind back, and takes him away from his mother, to a seat where he can listen to other cases, before going into detention. Here again, I see the strength of the immediacy of response in the US system, that give teens a strong, clear message and direct consequence for non engagement; that often can take weeks (or longer) in our UK system - quite likely reducing its effect.

All families are listening to each other's cases, and although this means a lengthy time commitment, it is felt to benefit both teen and parent. Parents gain support, and teens can learn, again, from others who are further on the cycle of change.

A surly adolescent makes her way to the desk, with an elderly woman close behind her. It's her first time here. The judge asks her to introduce herself, and explain why she is here.

She reads from her Accountability Sheet that she has worked on completing, before coming today. *'I'm having some problems with my grandmother.... She has had to call the police on me. ... I don't follow house rules.... I stay out with permission and won't accept 'no'.*

The judge pauses for a moment, and then invites the grandmother to step up to the microphone and speak. It a tired grandmother that voices the difficulties she experiences in parenting her head strong granddaughter. *'She goes into houses without adult supervision and drug use. I don't want her to go there, but she won't listen to me...'* Her voice trails off.

The judge speaks with them both for a while, before ordering the case to be directed for assessment with Step Up.

SUMMARY OF FAMILY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION PROGRAMME

- My observation is that the FVIP has considerable value, as an early prevention and brief intervention programme.
- Tier 1, alone may not meet the needs of complex needs teens and families, but definitely contain a range of self-awareness and de-escalation skills education, safety planning and family empowerment tools, alongside clear messages of the unacceptability of DV; that has the potential to support many families.
- Both States uses of the Safety Plan have their own value, as cost effect interventions within Youth Justice and other agencies that work to support Family Safety.
- This is yet again, a restorative and empowering family safety model that is high in accountability; although it would need to sit within services/referrals etc that can offer ongoing support to the family and teen, rather than seeking it back through courts, if brief interventions fail to work.
- As summarised in the Seattle model, Safety Plans have clearly worked to support U.S Juvenile justice services in helping families feel supported and safe enough to have teens home following violent incidents, thereby reducing social care input and adolescent homelessness; thus increasing vital protective factors around vulnerable teens.
- The use of a specialist family violence court is another innovative model that offers important consistency with the same magistrate seeing the same teens and families, and quite likely fostering similarly powerful effects that Specialist Drug Courts have seen.
- Specialist courts can be seen as an expensive provision and their effectiveness can only be measured after a period of implementation and review. Toledo is not yet far enough on to offer any firm evaluation of outcomes or statistics, in this area. A tiered approach specifically to TVAP cases is seen to be of value.
- It was my conclusion that Toledo had a strong understanding of the needs and issues around TVAP and a compassionate and comprehensive range of provisions that compliment and work well together both preventatively and to assist the reduction of recidivism; whilst increasing family safety.