PERFORMING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A needs assessment can be a nonthreatening way to glean information about co-occurring issues that may need intervention or referrals. The goal of a needs assessment is to ascertain ways your program can better serve an individual rather than to screen a person in or out of the program. When conducting the assessment:

• The needs assessment should be done after individuals have been admitted to your program. Emphasize that the assessment will have no impact on shelter status or ability to stay in the program.

• “Normalize” questions and find a way to discuss co-occurring issues that is comfortable for both of you. “Normalize” responses to traumatic situations, rather than pathologize the individual (Ferencik & Ramirez-Hammon, 2011).

• Allow people who seek our services to tell us what they need and when, rather than assuming the “expert” role and telling them what they need. “When you’re working with people, allow them to take the lead,” says Olga Trujillo, Director of Programs at Casa de Esperanza in St. Paul, MN. “So when they come to you, they might be in a place to be able to deal with a certain issue, or they may not be in a place to be able to deal with it. They might just need crisis management. Or they might need something more than that. And they’re going to let you know” (Trujillo, 2009).

• Ensure that people impacted by both interpersonal violence and co-occurring issues know about available resources. Explore options such as transitional housing, counseling, gender specific substance abuse treatment, support groups addressing multiple problems, children’s services, safety planning and linkage to other providers.

• If lack of appropriate training or credentials prevents you from answering a question or providing a certain kind of assistance, explain this to the individual seeking your help. Make it clear you will help them figure out who can provide the needed help and are happy to explore options with them.

• Use an interpreter when necessary. However, avoid using children, relatives of the abuser or people who do not understand confidentiality and domestic violence, sexual abuse and stalking issues.

• An individual’s decision to decline treatment, advocacy, shelter or other services should not be viewed as failure. Supporting people through their process of change requires an understanding that motivation comes from within. Making changes is both an option and a process that can take time.

• Understand the courage required to seek services. Convey to the people you serve that
you appreciate their courage: “With all the stuff that’s going on for you, you still managed to do this. That’s fantastic” (Obtinario, 2010).

References

