

Relationships Between Abused, Homeless Women and Their Case Managers in the FBC Program

The case managers at Families Building Community wanted to know if their clients found them helpful and supportive about issues regarding the domestic violence the women had experienced. Almost all participants gave positive feedback about their case managers' responses to the domestic violence and also spontaneously mentioned examples of their case managers' supportiveness throughout the interviews. Some women had to be prompted to give specific examples about how their case manager was supportive in terms of domestic violence, but most women provided examples of the support and help they received from their case managers before the question was asked. Overall, the majority of the fourteen women involved in this study agreed that the case managers were accommodating, sympathetic, and helpful.

Supportive Relationships with Case Managers

Ten participants had supportive relationships with their case managers. Many participants felt cared for because of their case managers' initiative to find resources and their ability to listen to and help resolve the issues with which the participants were dealing. Often times, participants thought of their case managers as a kind of therapist, who would not only listen to their problems but also ask deeper questions that some participants had been trying to block out of their thoughts. This relationship helped both the participants and the case managers deal with and resolve the issues. Case managers provided participants with a stable, personal relationship.

Case Manager as a Therapist:

The participants had been through so much hardship, but they often had not processed or spoken about their struggles. Speaking to their case managers allowed participants to talk about the problems they faced during and before the FBC program with someone they trusted and who cared for them. These women relied on their case managers to be an outlet of emotional support, especially for the abuse they experienced. The participants understood that their case managers were there to help with a variety of situations, and the women saw their case managers as safe people to talk to about an issue as traumatic as abuse. They also viewed their case managers as people who could also help them gain access to resources for recovering from domestic abuse.

Examples:

"Some people need to talk to somebody sometimes. You know it makes all the difference in the world."

"She was like my therapist."

"When I was talking to [my case manager] she got weird and I was like 'Do we have to go there? We got to go there?' but I got a lot of things worked out there. So I can finally let it rest."

“We haven’t talked a whole lot about it [DV] but when we did talk she asked about how long ago it was, did the children see it, do I feel or would I like services as far as counseling or counseling for the kids.”

“You know friends. Even my case manager she talked to me for a while the other day because I was- it’s just some days I just think about him and I get sad and crying.”

Case Manager as a Friend:

Participants found their case managers supportive not only in domestic violence situations but also in other aspects of the FBC program. While the case managers helped set the women up in their new housing and provided them with resources, they also showed the participants that they cared and wanted the women to succeed by acting as friends and mentors. Many case managers provided support outside of their professional meeting times.

Examples:

“My case manager went downtown with me and everything [to get my record expunged]. It was cool.”

“It was like 4 to 5 hour drive, we [my case manager and I] went all the way somewhere, and I was able to go into this big warehouse, where I went and picked out this living room set.”

“And I was calling her some nights after he beat me up and weekend on her cell phone telling her about in the street eleven and twelve o’clock at night.”

“She said I’ve accomplished so much. Sometimes I don’t see it. I’m like, ‘What the hell have I accomplished? I still don’t have no job. I still haven’t gotten my GED’ so I feel like I haven’t accomplished anything. But I, I have. You know. I’ve accomplished a lot of things.”

“She was very supportive towards me, and I love that woman so much.”

Case Manager as a Professional:

Naturally, case managers had specific professional roles that they needed to carry out, including providing resources for these participants. They seemed very in tune with the needs and wants of their clients, trying to give them as many opportunities and resources as possible to succeed and become self-sufficient.

Examples:

“She had connected me with counselors because coming from [a domestic violence shelter], I was losing my counseling. So you know there were some things that we did talk about, and she did you know, refer me to a few places.”

“And then afterwards, like every three months when I do a follow-up with her, they give you a Jewel gift certificate, and one month I really needed that, you know”

“She gave me referrals to computer classes when I told her [...] I want to, you know, enhance my skills in computers.”

“She also gave me referrals to the budgeting classes [...], managing your money classes, and stuff.”

“...the next time we had met, and she had a whole bunch of information for me. Different CNA programs, different places that offered it. She told me about the grants that were offered to pay for the schooling.”

“When she found out I was pregnant, she called a women’s center to help me get baby clothing. And not only that, they gave me clothing for my [older] children.”

Positive Feedback for FBC and Case Managers:

In addition to talking about their positive experiences with their case managers, participants also had positive feedback for the FBC program in general. Overall, they felt that they were given plenty of resources and opportunities that helped them build confidence and work on building a successful future.

“Because, they had a lot of focus groups. You know, they had a lot of focus groups at [a domestic violence center], but they didn’t do that until toward the end of it.”

“I felt confident. I felt very confident that I [was accepted into the FBC program]. I’d been through everything, and I didn’t feel like, ‘How am I going to pay the rent now that they are no longer paying my rent? How I’m going to make ends meet?’ and I was glad to have them. It really came in handy.”

“They give you so much, even during Christmastime for the kids you know- gift certificates and things.”

“[My case manager] definitely talked signs [of abuse]. Like if they hit you one time, they definitely going to keep on so... so, when I go with somebody, and they hit one time, then I’ll know how to get up out the situation.”

“Because I like the meetings. Because if I had the days off when they had those meetings I’d make every one of them.”

“I think the program [promotes self-sufficiency]. I felt confident.”

During their time in the FBC program, two participants were still in abusive relationships. One participant did not talk about the abuse with her case manager, and the other participant did not feel that her case manager cared about the domestic abuse she experienced. In

the case of the second participant, her abusive partner was in the FBC program with her, and his name was also on the lease. The approved cohabitation led to problems for the participant, and she did not think that her case manager helped her find a way to stay in the FBC program while also avoiding abuse from her partner. This led to a weakened relationship between the participant and her case manager, and the participant stopped telling her case manager about the abuse.

“That’s why I stopped telling [my case manager] when he was jumping on me [...] She was just sitting there and killing time until it was time for her to take her ass back to the office.”

Less Supportive Relationships with Case Managers in Regards to Domestic Violence

Four participants did not discuss with their case manager the domestic violence they had experienced. These participants did not speak about their abuse for a variety of reasons. One participant had stopped experiencing domestic abuse six years prior to her time in the FBC program, and she was trying to move forward and rebuild her life instead of looking back at the abuse. Two of the women did not discuss their abuse because they were afraid of stigma and judgment. Therefore, they did not bring up the subject with their case manager. These women could have used extra support in regards to their abuse.

Examples:

“I don’t want anybody to judge me and say, ‘why did you allow that to happen?’”

“[I] didn’t want to be labeled under ‘domestic violence.’”

“I didn’t want to be a lady that, make it seem like I bowed down to a man.”

“We haven’t talked about it because I’ve been domestic violence free of relationships or any type of verbal [abuse] for the last six years.”

The first woman who was still in an abusive relationship during her time with the FBC did not talk to her case manager because she wanted to keep her family together. She knew that her case manager would not be supportive of her decision to stay in the abusive relationship and did not want to jeopardize her children’s relationship with their father.

Examples:

“I told her that I’m in counseling, I tell her about my ADD, but my personal relationship I just wouldn’t share that information with her.”

“I don’t tell her personal... They’re helping enough, and I know the areas in my life where I need to go out and do my own footwork and perform my own efforts.”

Conclusion:

Case managers played numerous roles in their work with abused, homeless women. They acted as therapists, friends, and professionals. The women felt supported and cared for by their case managers and were satisfied with the amount and quality of resources and opportunities their case managers provided. While other aspects of homelessness and poverty took precedence for the women, they did discuss domestic violence with their case managers and found the support they needed. Case managers generally responded with a therapeutic approach to the domestic violence, and the women were also grateful when they received referrals to classes or other forms of support for abused women.

Suggestions:

Some of the women did not want to offer the information about the abuse to their case managers because they felt that their case managers were already doing so much to help them. Even though these participants were grateful for what the case managers were doing, they also noticed how busy their case managers were while helping them and did not want burden them anymore. Because domestic violence did not always directly affect their children and seemed like a more private matter than being homeless or not having food, the participants pushed the abuse to the bottom of their priorities. In the future, if the participant does not bring up the domestic violence information, the case manager might want to offer them a chance to talk about it or offer other services pertaining to domestic violence without bringing it up directly.

Two of the women experienced domestic violence while in the FBC program. One woman had cosigned the lease with her abusive partner. Her case manager told her that she would not be able to leave her partner and stay in the FBC program because she would have broken her lease. While this situation only happened to one of the fourteen participants, it could happen again and hold the women back from becoming self-sufficient. A policy addressing this issue could help avoid situations like this in the future.

Many of the women knew about opportunities to attend domestic violence classes or receive help, but some of those who needed to did not take advantage of them. It is possible that these women would have taken advantage of more of the resources available to them if their case manager had urged them to do so. When case managers did give participants referrals or offer additional opportunities, the women took advantage of the resources. The participants were unlikely to come across those resources on their own and needed the case managers' and FBC's networks to do so for them. The women seemed to enjoy the mandatory classes offered to them through FBC and seemed to want additional resources like the classes. Participants found the incentives earned through the mandatory classes to be very helpful in their daily lives. Overall, participants found their experience in FBC and with their case managers to be positive, and they gained hope and confidence.

Due in part to their experiences with their case managers and the FBC program, many of these women stated that they hope to give back to the community in their future. Some women wanted to become advocates or social workers. One woman explained, "I wouldn't mind going to share, you know, like telling my case manager or if it's a class or something. Sharing my experience with other females, younger females, younger than me. You know, you can help them out and give them a word of advice. I wouldn't mind doing that now." Many of the participants have the desire to share their stories and life experiences with current or future participants dealing with many of the same issues. These women want to be a part of a positive change.