



Education for Critical Thinking

Thank you Mr. Von Uexkull for the kind words, distinguished members of parliament, and distinguished guests. A sincere thanks to the Future Policy Award Team for presenting the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) with the Gold Future Policy Award.

I would like to acknowledge John Beyers, president of the Board of Directors of the DAIP and a retired deputy chief with the Duluth Police Department; and Amanda McCormick the partner of the late Dr. Ellen Pence, a co-founder of the DAIP who have come to Geneva for this event. My dear friend and colleague Ellen was the real visionary of our work. I know her spirit is with us today.

I never imagined the global impact the DAIP would have, but more importantly, how many lives it would save.

The success of the Duluth Model would not have been possible without the committed and courageous efforts of battered women's advocates in Minnesota who had the bravery to speak truth to power. Their words and actions influenced policymakers in the Minnesota Legislature to be one of the first states in the US to change its laws on domestic violence.

Once the laws were changed, a small group of committed activists in Duluth challenged key leaders in law enforcement and the criminal justice system to change their practices. Resistance was strong. It literally took two years of negotiations to reach agreements on policy changes. Why was this so difficult?

First, change is never easy. What made these changes even more difficult was the lack of understanding of the complex dynamics of domestic violence. Interveners didn't understand, or didn't acknowledge the power that a batterer has in an intimate relationship. Most interveners had their own beliefs about why the violence was happening and why victims wouldn't leave. These old myths die hard.

With incredible courage, battered women told their stories and a few key people in the criminal justice system heard their voices. A skeptical police chief was convinced that officer bias was influencing arrest decisions. He agreed to remove officer discretion—hence the first mandatory arrest policy in the US was adopted.

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A prosecutor, who couldn't understand why a victim wanted to drop charges, now realized that a survivor's decision-making was being influenced by threats of more violence, or losing her children.

A judge, who saw the impact of domestic violence on families, realized that without consequences, perpetrators would continue to batter with impunity.

In 1981, these leaders with new-found insights, agreed to change their policies under the umbrella of the DAIP. The changes have been institutionalized and are still embraced by today's leaders.

As you all know, laws and policies can easily be drafted and passed, but if they aren't put into practice, they are not only ineffective, but they compromise the very safety of survivors of domestic violence by emboldening abusers.

We often hear about victim safety. It is indeed a lofty goal, but how do we achieve it? A critical component of the Duluth model is ongoing engagement with the victim. Risk assessments are built into each stage of the intervention process from the first call for help, to the police investigation; to assisting survivors navigate an often complicated legal system.

Holding offenders accountable seems like a basic principle, but how does this happen? The Duluth Model ensures swift punishment. First time offenders are given jail sentences, but incarceration is stayed if the offender stays nonviolent and completes court-mandated classes.

It would be easy to demonize offenders. But, we believe each man ordered into our program has the capacity to change, if he chooses to. Men ordered into our groups do change. For those that continue to batter, the Duluth Model advocates for harsher sanctions, including jail.

The Duluth Model shines a bright light on the state, which I believe has an ethical obligation to protect its citizens. On behalf of the DAIP and the City of Duluth, I thank you for this award.

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