



ROUTLEDGE

# *Healing Sexually Betrayed Men and Boys*

Treatment for Sexual Abuse,  
Assault, and Trauma

Edited by **Richard B. Gartner**



# **A requiem for a men's trauma organization**

**The Men's Project 1998–2015 R.I.P.**

*Rick Goodwin*

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This is the saddest story I ever have told. That being said, it is also an analysis of a community-based service organization dedicated to trauma recovery for male survivors, of one of the first outposts of free-standing trauma service agencies for men and their families in the world,<sup>1</sup> and of a potential harbinger for future efforts to build places of healing for men.

I don't want to get ahead of myself.

This is the story of the rise and fall of The Men's Project/Le Projet pour hommes, an Ottawa, Canada initiative to serve male survivors and their families. I co-founded the organization and served as its Executive Director until near the end. It is the organization's story, but it is also my story. And, as such, I take full responsibility for the personal lens to this chapter – it is the only way I can see.

### **Prologue**

The Men's Project was born out of friendship. Here is the backstory: I lived in Ottawa for most of the 1980s – worked in residential treatment services for vulnerable youth (I think we called them emotionally disturbed back then), worked my way through a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, and then on to a Master's degree in Social Work. Along the way, I encountered leaders and agencies that impressed me mightily about the strides the women's and peace movements were making for their constituents. I determined to actively pursue efforts to end men's

1 It sounds like I am exaggerating. Being modest by nature, I often haven't stated that. But it's true. More on that later.

violence toward women in my new social work career. Out of a social work internship, I initiated a community-based service to work with men who were assaultive to their partners.

The year was 1985, and little was known at the time on how to engage with men who abuse their intimate partners.<sup>2</sup> This work was instrumental, though, in developing my chops as a practicing social worker. The era of radical feminism was just coming to the forefront, and there was lots of ideology to explain men's violence toward women – much more so than effective ways to intervene.

My soon-to-be-new-pal Larry Gauthier came to that initiative as an intern. I resigned from the program, as did he, as did others, when the service imploded over allegations of a colleague's abusiveness became known. I subsequently shifted my career identity and became a college instructor in social sciences – first in Aboriginal social services, then in the mainstream college system. While I moved away from Ottawa for a few years, I gravitated back in 1993, and subsequently picked up my friendship with Larry.

Over evenings of cool drinks, we commiserated about the failed promise of men's services for domestic violence, and the general lack of community resources for men. Through his role as a social worker for the Board of Education, Larry had a keen eye on where men could and could not access support services. Despite the myriad of community services funded for women by different levels of government, men in crisis were often left stranded – much like it is today.

After a period of necessary griping, we envisioned a community-based mental health practice focusing on the needs of men first and foremost. At his kitchen table, the genesis of The Men's Project (TMP) was formed. From our work with men who have been assaultive, we understood that to achieve success in men's anti-violence initiatives we had to first address old wounds in men's lives and then build resources to sustain their violence-free future. We planned three points of entry: services for male survivors of childhood trauma; a community-based resource for men with issues of rage and violence; and a personal growth program to support men in their lives.

We pictured ourselves running a group or two each week – our voluntary community service. A hobby, if you will.

2 We still don't, sadly, but that is another story.

The name “The Men’s Project” struck us a useful framework of service. We wanted a “shame-free” name that would not label men as they entered its doors – as victims, offenders, or anything in between. After a period of reflection, we decided this service should be located in a broader institution that would be the most “guy-friendly” – not a hospital, not something labelled as “mental health,” not as an adjunct of a women’s service. To this end, we thought the YMCA-YWCA would be the perfect pick. For 18 years, it was.

When we first presented our concept to the Y’s management team, they expressed both interest and caution concerning this unheard-of notion of community services for men. In other words, they wanted proof. Being the good college professor I was, I got a group of students to conduct a community needs assessment and environmental scan of the proposed service areas. Their report was presented to Y management. It provided a strong case statement for TMP.<sup>3</sup> To make a long story short, the Y concurred with the report’s findings of systemic gaps in community-based services for men, and formally supported the initiative by granting us a singular office space to start the initiative. Larry and I threw in \$1,000 each to buy business cards and brochures and to get a phone line in. In July 1998 we were in business, and by the fall we started with the first individual and group services. By the fall TMP fulfilled its mandate by offering full group programming in trauma recovery (Men & Healing), anger management/ending abuse, and emotional intelligence. In its first calendar year, we served about 50 men.

We started off as a therapist-cooperative in those early years, with an arrangement with the Y to “front” proposals and other work. In essence, they acted as a go-between for our services, the community, and potential funders. While this was a great first step arrangement, it soon became clear that this structure would not be able to sustain the growth, service demand, and maturation of the agency. In May 2001, the cooperative closed, and the next day TMP became incorporated as a non-profit organization, with our charitable licence coming a year later.

In 1999, we received our first provincial funding to engage with male survivors of a multi-victim, multi-offender sexual abuse crisis in the city of Cornwall.<sup>4</sup> Despite an existing sexual assault center in that town, men

3 They got an A for that paper.

4 Cornwall, Ontario, has often been referred to as Canada’s Boston, given the parallels of child sexual abuse of boys, in part by Roman Catholic clergy.

were not being served because the center's mandate only served women survivors – a story we would be hearing again and again. Now, with some government funding, we were truly in business and fulfilling our mandate. This funding success also was a provincial first – the first agency dedicated to serve male survivors of sexual abuse. We were cooking.

So, out of friendship a notion was born.<sup>5</sup> Out of what was supposed to be a plan to volunteer an evening or two a week became a full-time social enterprise.<sup>6</sup> And this fledgling agency became one of the first faces of an emerging social sector, a movement of community-based service agencies supporting the healing of men. How to sustain the initiative would, in time, become our fundamental challenge over the years.

### **Building the case statement**

Perhaps one of the most demanding steps for any new organization is the process of telling the world its purpose. As we shifted from a back-of-the-envelope type of organization to now being a provincially registered non-profit with national charitable status, we had to get serious about who we were. We had to grow up in a hurry.

Over the course of long-suffering meetings and retreats that focused on our self-definition, the formulations of our mission, vision, and values statement began to take place. We had to take this seriously – we came to realize that, sadly, women's services were suspicious of us (the overt concern that we seemed like a misogynist men's rights organization always was present, yet seldom voiced directly to us).<sup>7</sup> Equally disturbing was the incessant bad-mouthing of our work by family service agencies that perceived us as competition for their funding dollars (they frequently stated that they always served men in their mandate, so funders did not need to fund TMP). The whispering campaigns against us were increasingly active, and we had to assert ourselves accordingly.

5 And we are still friends! Larry and I have been working out lately. He is good at nagging me when I say I am too busy!

6 No lie! Larry's partner at the time called The Men's Project a "hobby gone bad!" It was a perfect analogy for our modest expectations of the service. The intention of a volunteer initiative was quickly eclipsed by the full-time demands it was making in our lives.

7 The first "feedback" we received from the women's community was that we should establish a "women's advisory committee" to oversee the agency!

## **The mission statement**

The first task we had to undertake was defining our mission – the overall purpose of the organization. We needed words to describe why we provide counseling (or therapy)<sup>8</sup> – in other words, what we were already doing. This proved to be a tough haul.

Here is the mission statement we came up with:

The Men's Project strives to support men, in a process of change, with structure and integrity.

Integrity became a big theme for us, so we had to explore that a bit more in our values statement as I will discuss below.

Despite the flowery language in our opening line, we needed to get concrete about what we did. So, our next line evolved:

We provide mental health services to men and their families in the areas of childhood trauma recovery, recent sexual assault, emotional integrity, and anger management, among other service areas.

This line was our multifaceted presentation to the community: on one hand, we were a men's mental health center with a broad mandate. This served us well, giving us a broad perch from which our service mandate could operate. On the other hand, as with our name, we asserted our role as a men's sexual trauma recovery center without overtly identifying as a place with "sexual abuse" or "sexual assault" in its name. The last thing we wanted was for men to stay clear of our services, even if they fit our mandate, given the inherent shame many male survivors carry. Thus, we could morph easily, depending on who our audience was.

With that task complete, we moved onto defining the organization. Even in the early years, we were a complex entity. Our clinical services group was comprised of at least four mental health disciplines. We hired an office manager to keep us all in line. There were various unpaid folks working with us too – some because they supported our cause and some because they were interns and wanted experience in our clinical work.

8 This reminds me of an old joke: What's the difference between a flutist and a flautist? \$30/hour!

Of course, we also had our newly minted board members to recognize as well. We came up with:

We are a charitable non-profit organization with a diverse team of professionals supported by a roster of volunteers.

Next on tap was describing *how* we did our work. This became a source of debate. While most psychologists and therapists would assert that the focus of therapy should be cognitive and emotional intervention, we knew that trauma work requires a much broader and deeper engagement. How can one heal without embodying the physical realm of being? How could one heal without addressing the spiritual or ontological realm? Were we fooling ourselves in thinking we could meaningfully engage in this broader way? We wrote:

We address men's psychological, emotional, physical and spiritual needs within a community-based framework.

Lastly, we needed to refer to our philosophy and approach to our work. Again, language proved to be difficult. If we wanted a parallel term to feminism that would speak to men in ways that depicted men's reality, then the term "masculinism" made sense. However, this wording was almost arcane in common parlance, and would likely have the connotation of misogynist – at least where it was used. Eventually we settled on the term "male-centered" as a way to describe our approach of working:

The Men's Project provides innovative counselling and educational services through a male-centred approach that honours and respects the experiences of men.

Other challenges arose in developing our self-description. We wanted to assert our openness and inclusion of men of all sexual orientations, so including "gay and bisexual" into our mission was important.<sup>9</sup> Inclusion of other cultures was critical too – so we borrowed from the Y's mission statement for this part of the mission statement:

9 The term "queer friendly" was not in usage then.

Our programs are open to straight, gay and bisexual men regardless of race, religion, creed or culture.

Lastly, we knew our task in life was more than psychotherapy – as good social workers, we wanted to change the world.<sup>10</sup> We had to take on the broader structures that govern the identity of men, and the systems in place that confine and restrict gender mores. Community presentations and workshops were not enough – our role had to be bigger. In this regard, we took on the role of advocacy:

We are committed to education and advocacy for men through engaged communication with the wider community.

This identity of advocate became one of the core strengths of our “small yet mighty organization.”<sup>11</sup> Advocacy eventually became one of the death knells of the shop. But I am getting ahead of myself again.

### **Core values statement**

We believed we had to keep drilling away about who we were. Perhaps it was the whispering campaign in the community or perhaps it was out of our own fledgling organizational self-esteem, but regardless we wanted to define our values – both about who we were, but also who we served.

The broadest statement was the easiest statement to compile – perhaps something resembling apple pie to all:

The Men's Project invites all men to live their lives with integrity. In a sanctuary of transparency, tranquility and safety, the professional services of the Men's Project provide insight and hope, offering men:

- Compassionate, nurturing, and healing experiences;
- Respectful, affordable, and confidential services;
- Innovative, courageous, and inspiring programs;
- Integrity and validity to speak as witnesses on behalf of men to the wider community.

10 MSW = Must Save the World!

11 This became my favourite expression in framing the mandate of The Men's Project.

It was then imperative for us to define integrity – for the organization, the staffing group, our working dynamic, and what would be the consistent glue of all of our services. We knew, intrinsically, that integrity was as great an aspiration for a man struggling in his trauma wounds as it was for a man struggling in his attempt to live violence-free. This core value had to be built into our identity. So we wrote:

Out of the many interpretations of the concept of integrity, The Men’s Project promotes emotional integrity in both its programming as well as a core organizational value. We define emotional integrity as living one’s life and conducting oneself in relationships of significance based on the following three premises:

- Being profoundly honest with oneself.
- Owning one’s own feelings and behaviour (taking responsibility).
- Closing the emotional space with others.

It also seemed imperative to define our relationship to feminism. Despite our professional creds from years of working with offenders to end domestic violence, we had to assert our position to the broader community. Even our sponsoring organization, the Y, would report back on criticism they received from women-identified services asking why they supported a men’s organization. While this in no way silenced those whispers, here is how we articulated it:

How We Define Gender Equality:

- The Men’s Project uses the term “gender-just” to describe our dedication to building a world of equality between men and women.
- We believe it is the responsibility of both sexes to take the necessary steps in this process of change. As an organization, we adhere to the principle of justice – that is, the fair treatment of all peoples involved.
- We are shaped by many of the principles of feminism in guiding us to this place of understanding in terms of gender equality.

Despite our self-congratulations about coming to agreement with this tricky statement of gender equality, we managed to piss off some segments of both the women’s community and the men’s rights groups.

The criticism from the “violence against women” (VAW) community was hard to fathom. Of course, TMP reflected “men” as a whole. With men

being the primary aggressors of women around the world, some projection must have been at play. Also, the perception (and reality) of competition for funding dollars creates deep distrust in the non-profit sector – and this seemed entrenched for both them and us. There was also an implicit politic that men speaking about sexual violence need to be deferential to the existing (read women's) services community. Still, as a Dad of two girls, I could not have been more supportive of a robust women's services sector – TMP even raised money as an agency for a women's sexual assault center in our early days. Ultimately though, support could not overcome distrust between TMP and many VAW organizations.

The disdain from the men's rights activist (MRA) community was more predictable, even if TMP would seem to be on their side of the page. While we were advocating positions like “funding for essential services should not be based on the gender of the victim,” our core service to men was essentially therapy, not advocacy. This was seen by many MRAs as a convenient cop-out – we weren't standing up to government, or to women's services, in any kind of loud and public way. We were accused of being apologists for the women's community. Harsh words were said. Ultimately, we truly had no wish to align with the MRA movement, given the depths of anger and misogyny that seemed to be part of their discourse.

After eventually developing some thick skin, we took it that we were doing the right thing if we were hit with criticism from both sides.<sup>12</sup>

### **The building years**

The 2000s provided much growth for the agency despite precarious (yet continued) project funding from the province. It was a juggling act of small grants, small donations, and time-limited projects that built the agency in terms of competency and stature.

Some of these highlights included:

- Delivering Canada's first gay-identified trauma recovery group program. In 2001, understanding that gay men often wish to pursue their healing in the safety and identity of a gay men's circle, we started this service. After announcing it in the local LGBT paper, we had 11 men sign up in two weeks.

12 Like standing in the middle of the street and getting whacked by traffic either way!

- Developing a pan-Canadian training service. As men's services were just starting to take hold in Canada,<sup>13</sup> we found ourselves in the niche of providing clinical training to community agencies, government services, and First Nations on how to work with male survivors. By the time of closure, TMP had provided training to most provinces, the United States, and Great Britain.
- Training, clinical supervision, and evaluation services of a cross-cultural men's healing program for the M'Wikwedong Native Cultural Resource Centre in Owen Sound, Ontario. The program, entitled Hearing, Healing, Hope, was the first program we knew of that blended Western psychology (our Men & Healing clinical model) with traditional Aboriginal ways of healing for men.
- The agency's clinical services were assessed through an Aboriginal lens and they were documented as a "Promising Healing Practice" in the Final Report of the *Aboriginal Healing Foundation Report, Volume III*.
- We developed a collaborative service with the Canadian Mental Health Association regarding a new group treatment program for male survivors who have concurrent disorder diagnoses.
- As Executive Director of TMP, I became active with MaleSurvivor<sup>14</sup> – speaking on a regular basis at its biannual conferences. From 2002 to 2004, I served on its Board of Directors, including a term as Board Secretary. Involvement with MaleSurvivor led me to engage with numerous international colleagues in this field – many connections I still cherish today.
- Further group program development occurred over this time – a therapeutic "Fathering" program<sup>15</sup> as well as the "Sexual Integrity" program for men with issues of compulsive or problematic sexual expression.<sup>16</sup>

13 To my knowledge, the first free-standing agency in the world dedicated to male survivor services was founded by colleague Don Wright at the British Columbia Society for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse (BCSMSSA). In 2015, they celebrated their 25th anniversary.

14 See MaleSurvivor.org.

15 The program was conceived around the statement that "all fathers are sons," and explored ways to strengthen fathers' attachment with their children.

16 The model utilized by Sexual Integrity operated in contrast to a "sex addiction" model of understanding.

- The agency won a slew of awards and recognitions: the inaugural Attorney General's Victim Services Award of Distinction (for innovative service programming), the Canadian Mental Health Association's Mental Health Award, the United Way's Community Builder Award, and a similar one from Crime Prevention Ottawa.
- In 2008, the agency hosted the first provincial conference on male sexual trauma in Toronto. *Men of Courage* was a sold-out event for 325+ service providers and survivors, and included keynote speakers, such as Fred Mathews, Andy Fisher, Jim Clemente, Richard Gartner, Steve Sullivan, Sheldon Kennedy, and Art Lockhart. Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Phil Fontaine was the keynote at a special lunch. Our Aboriginal Elder for the Men of Courage conference was Verne Roote.
- Also in 2008, TMP engaged in its first international partnership with 1in6, Inc., a new Los Angeles-based national non-profit organization whose mission "is to help men who have had unwanted or abusive sexual experiences in childhood live healthier, happier lives."<sup>17</sup> One of the first steps in this collaboration was their recognition of our Men & Healing model as part of their conceptual base of service provision. I was invited to serve on their Advisory Committee – a position I still serve today. A further international partnership was later built with Living Well in Australia.<sup>18</sup>
- We excelled in two peer-reviewed evaluations of our Men & Healing services. Our funder, the Ministry of the Attorney General, commissioned an outside evaluation of our services, which concluded that, in their eyes, the service was "highly successful" (Herring & Associates, 2002). Later, through research headed by Jennifer Hopton of the University of Ottawa (Hopton & Huta, 2013), a published quantitative study demonstrated the program's clinical success in reducing both clinical depression and post-trauma behaviours of its participants. Sadly, despite what we believe were the only two peer-reviewed studies of their kind concerning treatment outcomes of male survivors, the funders stated they "weren't convinced." They didn't elaborate.

17 See 1in6.org.

18 See livingwell.org.au.

## The Cornwall Public Inquiry

To address the long-standing issues of the multi-victim, multi-offender child sexual abuse crisis in Cornwall, and the abject failure of the criminal justice system in bringing these crimes to justice,<sup>19</sup> the province (after much prodding) called for a provincial inquiry into the affair. In 2005, TMP succeeded in gaining official standing in the Cornwall Public Inquiry (Special Standing for Part I, Full Standing for Part II).

Our involvement, as the only victim treatment agency with standing at the event and the only men's agency in the province, gave us a unique perspective and voice in the Inquiry. Our involvement was robust, and achieved a number of objectives:

- We successfully advocated for all witnesses in the Inquiry, along with Inquiry staff, to have access to professional counseling services in order to address issues of both historical and vicarious trauma.
- We were successful in receiving granted monies to research and write a handbook on service delivery for male survivors (Fisher, Goodwin, & Patton, 2008).
- A similar research project was funded for an investigation into safe peer support services for survivors of sexual violence, as well as a concept paper on an ombudsman for victims of sexual violence (Goodwin & Patton, 2007).
- We requested a research grant to investigate whether the Ontario government was in violation of the Canadian Charter of Human Rights by not providing funding for victim services on the basis of gender (i.e., men's services as compared to their female counterparts). However, the request was denied.
- We consulted on a research project led by Circles of Support and Accountability Ottawa (COASA) on the provision of trauma recovery services to "victim/perpetrators" of sexual abuse (men who were sexually abused as children and who have sexually offended as adults).<sup>20</sup>
- We delivered nine training conferences for service professionals in Eastern Ontario through the support of the Inquiry.

19 In 1997, the Ontario Provincial Police established Project Truth, which eventually laid 114 charges against 15 people, but found no evidence of a pedophile ring. Only one person was convicted.

20 Editor's note: See Chapters 14 by Greif and 15 by MacDonell and Bolton in this volume for a discussion of treatment of survivor/offenders.

Over the course of the Inquiry, we challenged representatives of the provincial government in their assertion that they were addressing issues of sexual violence for all Ontarians. In our closing submission to Commissioner Normand Glaude, we made a slew of recommendations to the Inquiry, chiefly that services for male survivors of sexual violence, much like women's services, need to be made available on a province-wide basis (for many years, we were the *only* funded service for men in the province).

About a year after the close of the Inquiry, the Ontario government announced, for the first time ever, a competition for funding for services for male survivors – on a province-wide basis. We were ecstatic with this news – the first jurisdiction in North America with this mandate. You could hear the whoops from our office a block away. Apart from regional service mechanisms, there would also be a provincial 1-800 line established for referrals for men. So much the better.

## **The Fall**

To make a long story short, despite vigorous proposals by TMP for both regional services and the provincial 1-800 service, TMP was shut out of all funding announcements! We were collectively flabbergasted by this news; however, the more cynical ones in our agency had predicted just this – that there was no way the province would fund an agency that advocated so hard for an emerging sector, for a sector that truly did not exist in free-standing form apart from TMP. The case statement for the agency was thus closed.

Instead, the province gave funding to a collection of family service agencies and women's centers to take on the work.<sup>21</sup> Not one men's organization was funded! To make matters more abhorrent, local funding went to a Catholic charity!<sup>22</sup> The Church is perhaps the largest institution in the world that has aided and abetted the sexual abuse of thousands of children, primarily boys, and the Ontario government granted a Catholic organization funding! As one articulate letter to the editor said, "Edgar Allan Poe could not have written a better outcome for this story."

21 Funding that was "a mile wide, but an inch thick," according to one bureaucrat who shared this in private correspondence.

22 I recall facilitating our Cornwall program at a time when half the clients in our group services had been abused or assaulted by priests.

Some intense lobbying during this time only delayed the inevitable. Pursuing other funding streams helped but could not erase the writing on the wall. Increasing client fees, laying off staff, taking on more national work – none of these could turn the page either.

In the span of four years, we watched our money crumble to a third of our original funding basis. Then, after 16 years of project (aka “temporary”) funding, the Ministry ended the funding for TMP in 2015.<sup>23</sup> Despite the many awards, the Attorney General’s Award of Distinction, two peer-reviewed, evidence-based outcome studies, and TMP’s status as a leader in this emerging sector, this was their stance. On October 30, 2015, the agency closed its doors. The “small yet mighty” organization was no longer.

### **The exposed underbelly of men’s survivor services**

Before we move onto the wake of TMP and get maudlin, I want to reflect on a few issues that plague organizations like TMP in the hopes that they can be attended to as the male survivor movement grows.

### ***Unintegrated survivors in leadership positions***

First, while the prevalence of sexual abuse in the broad population is well known, little is said about the high prevalence of victimization among helping professionals. Yet this, I believe, is a given. These “survivor-therapists” or “survivor-activists” bring inherent strengths to the work, yet they often have inevitable attendant vulnerabilities. There is variability in the extent that they have dealt with their own trauma, and so an unspoken given in the field is the presence of service providers and advocates who are relatively unwell, often un-integrated in their trauma and spreading their own dis-ease in their work and in the community, thereby often contributing to adverse consequences.<sup>24</sup>

Other survivors are active in the movement, often with great effect but sometimes to their own and the movement’s detriment: Famous celebrities

23 The Ministry did not have to say why it was not renewing its funding – given our “project funding” status. They did comment about the provincial deficit – less money plus other bureaucratise – only to announce “new” money for women’s sexual assault centers six months later.

24 Full disclosure: I experienced sexual abuse as a child.

making erroneous statements based on anecdotal experiences. Folks who demonstrate their rage, paranoia, or pain while wearing the guise of a professional. The damage they can do is consequential. Much like some 12-step advocates who see the world solely through abstinence-lenses, these folks, both male and female, often take up more than their share of space. From an ardent “violence against women” counselor who freaked out when I spoke of the linkage between men’s victimization and subsequent partner violence, to leaders in the field publicly stating they felt “raped” when they experienced an organizational loss,<sup>25</sup> we collectively trip over ourselves as we walk hip deep in this dysfunction.

### ***Dysfunction in the ranks***

The broader field of trauma recovery is rife with problems due to troubles in the sector itself. While many service providers *say* they are trauma-informed, the nature of service delivery exposes their weaknesses. It could be funding parameters created by well-intentioned but ill-informed bureaucrats who believe a 12-week period of engagement is fine, despite every indication that childhood sexual trauma is complex and requires a sustained period of treatment. It could be therapists who, despite their knowledge of abuse in a client’s life, choose not to attend to the issue, perhaps out of their own discomfort. It could be service providers with sloppy boundaries who are willing to see their ethical breaches in shades of gray. Or, it could be a well-meaning but totally inappropriate decision about what will heal. There was, for example, one agency that focused its “counseling” work with survivors on making crafts – no lie! While these stories generally don’t make headlines, I can appreciate why many survivors lose faith that their wounds will be treated effectively – too often, they have been re-injured in their efforts at finding help.

### ***Women’s services are not necessarily allies***

Could the development of men’s trauma services like TMP have been different if the women’s movement were indeed supportive of men? I am not convinced that the women’s sector, or at least the “violence against

25 Raped? You’d think that of all people they would know the difference between feeling angry and being raped.

women” sector, is always an ally of this developing field. At first blush, one would think we should be close collaborators. But we are men – the same gender seen as having privilege, power, and control, not to mention the gender most often to blame for women’s suffering. But how can society ever overcome abuse and violence if women and men cannot work together? TMP as a male-serving organization met closed doors in sexual assault networks, regional coordinating committees, and provincial coalitions simply due to our mission. It all was a bit too much.

While we have had strong women supporters over the years, and some great partnerships with women’s services as well, the doors of the existing networks for victim service providers, including those focusing on sexual and domestic violence, remain tightly guarded. Some of these barriers are a product of government policy, and some exist because some women want to “own” the issues (the discourse of “rape culture” or “take back the night” would be such examples) and the funding dollars they contain. Men’s services generally are not given a place at the table; instead they are too often met with hostility, suspicion, and indifference. (Mind you, in some cases this exclusion might have been warranted – see the discussion concerning “men’s rights” organizations.) Yet, collectively, we fail both ourselves and the change we all want to see made.

### **Broader issues of governance**

I think our sector – particularly community-based services and non-profit organizations – faces a variety of challenges. Some are possibly unique to male survivor serving organizations; others may have application to the wider sector.

Here are some reflections on those concerns and how they manifested with TMP and elsewhere.

### ***Leaders who still need healing***

Male survivors, or, more properly stated, partially healed (or unintegrated) male survivors are a bane to the functioning of healthy male-oriented anti-violence organizations. Sometimes these men inhabit Boards of Directors – often with devastating results. As with many community-based services (HIV/AIDS organizations are one such example) there is a history and

expectation that service users, either present or past, can and should serve on Boards of Directors. When service users serve as Board members, they naturally are often advocates for the services they still need and/or continue to access; yet these services may not be what the larger community needs most. While TMP never had active clients on its Board, it did at times have past clients. This was, essentially, a mistake, despite the gems that some contributed. Having ex-clients on the Board of Directors is unhealthy to all parties – whether because of their personal take on service provision as seen from their new position, or because they themselves are unwell. Additionally, when implosions occur for such Board members, should the organization see them as loose cannons or as clients who need to return to care?

Apart from past clients, we need to examine the parallel issue of the presence in this sector of male survivors on Boards of Directors – period. As organizations generally cannot screen for the emotional well-being of such volunteers as a ticket to entry, the organization can be plagued by their dysregulated, dysfunctional thoughts and behavior of (some of) these wounded souls – adding to the malaise of such services. This is truly a catch-22 – how can these services be supported if it not from the male survivor community? – yet many of these individuals can pull down an organization given their unhealthy state of being. I have no solution to suggest here – just the need to have open and brutally honest conversation.

A frequent complaint by many non-profits is having Board members delve into operations – neglecting the fact that the purpose of serving on a Board is the nurturing of the vision of the organization and overseeing its financial well-being. The conceptual boundary between governance and operations becomes blurred – to the detriment of the organization. Poor personal boundaries are a common issue for trauma survivors, so there is often temptation to delve where the “action” is. Caveat is needed here – “non-survivors” are not always healthy, so this element of dysfunction cannot be avoided just by cursory Board candidate interviews.

### ***The inability to fundraise***

Men's issues are a hard sell. Think about it – do any organizations place the faces of men in their charitable pitch? And, despite the perennial quest

for finding the “pink ribbon” that would mobilize the men’s survivor cause, such a device remains elusive. But, while male sexual victimization is a difficult area for which to fundraise,<sup>26</sup> fundraising for services is the financial lifeline of small community-based agencies, particularly with the continued fraying of the social safety net. Despite this need, the TMP Board never fully acted on fundraising – with claims of not knowing how, not knowing why it was needed, and, perhaps most critically, not wanting to be the public face of the issue.

Organizationally, I am not sure we could have ever succeeded even if the Board of Directors gave it their best. But government funders frequently pointed out our failure – why weren’t we like women’s services, raising money on our own behalf? Again, unrealistic standards posed numerous challenges for ourselves, and, more broadly speaking, the movement. Nonetheless, significant privately raised monies – had we been able to obtain them - would have kept the doors of TMP open. This just did not occur.

### ***Dependency on funding***

While some readers of this chapter might be envious of TMP’s history of receiving government funding, the withdrawal of government funding led to its collapse, which should provide a warning to all. Of all forms of social services, victim services is perhaps the sector that has the most difficulty achieving financial independence. After all, you work with the most vulnerable people, and folks expect services should be free of charge while the organization is run on a shoestring with good-hearted volunteers. Finally, let’s be honest here: funding for victim services are the crumbs of the justice system – an afterthought, really – with little appetite for accredited professionals, sustainable funding, and service excellence.

Funding for non-profits creates dependency on government, and thereby generates substantial vulnerability for the viability of services. If the game plan is to develop a free-standing service, it should be a given that an organization avoids core government funding. Yet victim services cannot be run without core government funding. This is the catch-22 that TMP could not get out of.

26 Child-serving, pet-finding, and women’s services all appear to be easier subject areas for fundraising – because men aren’t accepted as victims, right?

**Founder's syndrome**

The last issue is a factor that I need to own. Yet, saying that, I am unsure in retrospect what I should have done differently. Let's let Wikipedia define this term:

*Founder's syndrome* . . . is a popular term for a difficulty faced by organizations where one or more founders maintain disproportionate power and influence following the effective initial establishment of the project, leading to a wide range of problems for both the organization and those involved in it. The passion and charisma of the founder or founders, which was such an important reason for the successful establishment of the organization, becomes a limiting and destructive force, rather than the creative and productive one it was in the early stages.<sup>27</sup>

Given that the agency started with my tenure as Executive Director from the beginning, I know I unduly shaped the organization. Given that my training was initially in community development and later as a clinical therapist, I viewed the Executive Director role through these lenses. For example, I was more drawn to discussions about clinical models of service than to talking about financial forecasts. I took on the lion's share of the training work for the agency because of my teaching background and because the income was sorely needed by the agency. However, this eroded my time spent managing the agency, let alone working with the Board. Frustrations were frequent. I could go on.

In reflection, I should have stepped away from the Executive Director role much earlier and focused on my strengths of clinical service management and training. But the opportunity to move laterally did not present itself, and the full-time pay (and prestige) of being an Executive Director kept me there. When my job duties became too much, and funds were cut, I offered the Board much less hand-holding. They unfortunately did not step up to the challenge of doing things for themselves, and the spiraling downward continued.

I bring this up here because I don't believe Founder's Syndrome was unique to TMP. This sector is replete with examples of initiatives that

27 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Founder%27s\\_syndrome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Founder%27s_syndrome). Retrieved May 9, 2016.

started from nothing but the good will of good hearted individuals stepping up and developing what was needed, often without regard to financial viability or even a sane work week. In so many organizations, this is a fact, and the resultant dynamic must be managed, not avoided.

TMP served approximately 3,400 male survivors over its 18-year history.

## Epilogue

I started out by saying this was the saddest story I have ever told. Here is the greater truth: I was only kidding!<sup>28</sup>

While the agency “The Men’s Project” may have died from gender bias, funder neglect, and a cultural disdain of supporting men’s mental health, its mandate and vision has continued in a different form. As Albert Einstein said: “Energy cannot be created or destroyed, it can only be changed from one form to another.” That applies to you and me, and even small yet mighty organizations.

Let me update this final section of the story.

As the agency limped toward ending its services in the fall of 2015, the staff was uniformly interested in ensuring the continuance of services. From this, the collaborative practice “Men & Healing” was born. Led by me, with the participation of all the therapists and our brilliant administrator (even our techie and bookkeeper!), we managed to pull a rabbit out of the hat: the day after TMP closed its doors, the new enterprise opened its doors.

As we replicated TMP programming in its entirety, the client group moved as a whole over to the new initiative. Low-income clients, who would not normally have been able to pay the near-market fees of the new service, were “grandfathered” into Men & Healing at fees they could afford. At this writing, nine months into the development of this new entity, the group programs we offer have expanded; we have taken on three new “purchase of services” of the program by community agencies (which ensure low-income men can access services free of charge); and our client

28 You gotta have a sense of humor doing this work!

numbers are rebuilding from where we were two years ago. This week alone, I am overseeing nine group programs as well as individual therapy.

It's a new chapter in the book.

This turn of events brings out some interesting questions in terms of community-based services for this sector. Is non-profit governance the best model for men's services? Our new social enterprise makes it impossible for us to receive government funding, as it is considered a for-profit enterprise.<sup>29</sup> Yet, given the paucity of funding available for men's trauma work, and the inherent dependency created by government backing, let alone the loss of autonomy and independence – should we even be bothered? When a Board of Directors has to spend \$6,000 to insure its own operation in order to be considered for government funding, then has to spend \$3,000 for audit fees, we must question which model of governance serves survivors best.

There are other advantages to this new model. Smaller, less administrative-heavy organizations can be nimble and quick. Whether taking on a new program area, a new collaboration, or a *pro bono* service, they are not tied by a dusty strategic plan, a self-absorbed Board of Directors, or a funder who may not approve of the new venture. Given that the work of developing community-based services for survivors is still in a pioneering stage, cumbersome models of engagement do not serve us well.

### ***The deepening of collaborations***

The partnerships developed with 1in6, Inc. and Living Well of Australia continued to deepen, despite the death of TMP.<sup>30</sup> This is not truly surprising – the nature of all partnerships rests with the souls who are doing this work – not the paper entities that were signed. With Living Well, we worked on a collaboration to co-write a treatment manual for male survivor services called “Foundations.” This was recently finished for the Australian edition. We believe this is the first international collaboration of its kind.

29 When people refer to it as a for-profit model (versus a non-profit model), I laugh!

30 I am deeply indebted to Mr. Steve Lepore, Executive Director of 1in6, Inc. and Dr. Gary Foster of Living Well, both of whom were my collegial anchors during the demise of TMP. I owe them my professional sanity. Thanks, guys!

My work with 1in6, Inc. has deepened immensely – and in ways I could not have anticipated as TMP was sinking. I am now its Director of Training in its efforts to strengthen the American service sector – including training engagements with the American military.<sup>31, 32</sup> I also facilitate their online group support program – a cutting-edge program for male survivors who can access these services from anywhere. After TMP concluded, I never expected to contribute to the male sexual trauma services sector again as vitally as I am today.

And broader issues of international collaboration continue. After the success of the second South-South Institute on Sexual Abuse of Men & Boys and Men (SSI) held in Cambodia in 2015, there are new efforts to expand the fledgling international network of service agencies in the emerging sector of men’s health issues. Systemic barriers to address the needs of boys and men who have experienced sexual trauma were documented at the conference, from conflict zone refugees in Uganda to the “dancing boys” of Afghanistan. These barriers paralleled in many ways obstacles to serving male survivors in First World countries. I have never met a finer, more courageous group of men and women, representing 40+ countries, than those I spent time with in Phnom Penh. I hope to assist in the next SSI gathering, scheduled for New Zealand in 2017.

So, you see, nothing really died – unless you call some bricks and mortar life. The phoenix does sometimes rise from the ashes. After trauma can come recovery. Good things, even careers, can be built over a kitchen table. This work has given my life great meaning, both personally and professionally. I believe that, modesty aside, TMP and its reincarnation have given hope and healing to many people. Of course, it is a team effort – no one is indispensable to making it all happen. My unsung heroes have been my mentors, my colleagues, my family, my friends, my staffers, our supporters, our Board members, and our volunteers – a list a mile long. Not an inch deep.

This, I know, is true: no survivor of sexual trauma should be *dispensable* – not for lack of services, lack of political will, or lack of money to pay for such services. Not for his (her, their) gender either. How we approach building places of healing for men in our communities remains a deep challenge for activists and professionals alike.

31 More men are sexually assaulted in the American military than women, but I digress.

32 Editor’s note: See Chapter 4 by Skidmore and Roy in this volume for discussion of sexual victimization of men in the military.

A shingle saying “men are welcome here” should be hung in every community. That would be a great start. Yet nothing comes easily, and there is no recipe that can be found.

This story was about one such effort in one community. My deepest wish is that it will inspire others to do what's necessary where they live – for their fathers, brothers, sons, neighbors, and community – and write their own story. For if we can tell a story of suffering, we can just as well transform it into a story of healing.

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