

## **Tubman's Effecting Positive Change (EPC) program**

### **Summary of focus group results**

#### ***Effecting Positive Change program***

The Effecting Positive Change (EPC) program, operated by Tubman, provides treatment support and recovery maintenance services to facilitate improved treatment outcomes for women and to assist them in achieving on-going sobriety and stability for the long-term benefit of themselves, their children, and the community. The goals of the project are to decrease barriers to treatment completion and to provide appropriate and customized services to women and children served through the program.

Services focus on meeting the needs of each individual participant and include: case management, chemical treatment and/or treatment support, parent education, individual and group counseling, acupuncture, financial education, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) education and screening, mental health screening and referral, and child care.

The program is an expansion of current services provided by Tubman, funded by a grant through the Minnesota Department of Human Services that began in 2007.

#### ***Description of focus groups***

In order to collect in-depth information about the impact of the program on women and their children, two focus groups were conducted with current and former EPC participants in May and June, 2009. The two groups were comprised of a total of seven participants, including one participant who was present for both focus groups. Participants received a \$20 gift card to Target as a thank you for their participation.

According to participants, they were referred to EPC for continued support and parenting.

Several participants reported that a therapist or treatment counselor referred them to the EPC program, primarily as a relapse prevention effort and a way to provide continued support after treatment had ended. Two participants also noted that they became involved with EPC in order to help facilitate legal issues with child custody and child protection.

The seven participating mothers had between one and five children each. They had participated in the EPC program for between two and eight months, although several participants had previously been in the program during different points in their treatment and recovery.

The following is a summary of the major themes that emerged from both focus groups.

#### ***Program impact***

##### **Program staff provided a broad array of resources for mothers and families**

Participants discussed a number of different ways in which the program had helped them and their families, by providing support, skills and resources that not only helped prevent relapse, but also helped them build parenting skills and other daily living skills.

“Their goal is to prevent relapse, but really, they give us resources to make our lives easier, so we don't have to use.”

“[EPC] provided for me in every single way that someone with nothing needs help.”

*continued*

## Participants found the parenting component of the program beneficial

Participants reported that the parenting classes increased their patience with their children and taught them appropriate discipline strategies, as well as other positive parenting skills. They felt the parenting classes and support also helped them improve their communication with their children and helped participants establish boundaries with their children and others in their lives. They also reported that program staff helped them explore new, healthy activities that families could do together.

“I’m learning about time outs, sober ways to cope.”

“I’ve learned to take my child away from the situation, instead of saying “no” all the time.”

## Participants gained support from one another

Participants reported that they felt supported by other participants in the program. They felt that the other women in the group respected them, understood their struggles, and provided needed support and advice. Several participants reported that this type of support was different than what they had experienced in more



traditional aftercare settings or meetings like NA and AA. One participant noted that it was helpful that EPC was women-only, which allowed for a different level of intimacy than she had experienced in other support groups. Participants felt that they were able to support one another and share resources among themselves. Additionally, several participants noted that they had referred others in their lives to the EPC program and to Tubman services in general.

“In [AA or NA] meetings, you don’t always relate to other people. Here we can talk about the ugly things, and people understand.”

“My friends on the outside don’t know what I’m going through. But everyone here gets it.”

## Impact on children

### Participants felt that program staff understood the needs of their children

Nearly all of the participants reported that their children had benefitted from the support they received from EPC staff. Participants noted that staff had helped their children cope during periods of separation from their parents, had helped children and parents communicate more openly, and were a constant source of support and safety for their children. Participants also felt that program staff had helped explain substance abuse to their children in a non-frightening way, and had helped navigate and foster relationships between participants, their children, and their children’s schools.

“This is the only place where she [child] is comfortable...it’s just like family.”

“She [staff] is one of those people that knows how to handle children and she is very patient.”

### **Participants felt that their children benefitted from being with other kids in the program**

Several participants discussed how much their children enjoy spending time with the other children in the EPC program. Participants felt that it was important for their children to spend time with other children who were living with or separated from parents with substance abuse problems. They noted that their kids sometimes feel isolated from other children in school who have not had the same experiences in their families. Childcare at EPC provided their children with an opportunity to talk with other children who have similar experiences and openly share their feelings.



### ***Feedback about EPC structure***

#### **Participants were generally satisfied with the program structure and two available programming tracks**

Participants from both the evening track and daytime track were satisfied with the structure of the program, and that the support group and parenting groups were held on the same day. Participants liked that participants in both tracks were involved with EPC overall and that they were a single cohort.

Participants of the daytime track did express a desire for the program to be on a different day; one request was for any day other than Monday or Friday. They felt that it was sometimes difficult to ‘get going’ on Monday mornings, although they were satisfied with the four-hour session. One participant was not aware that an evening track was available.

#### **Participants appreciated the flexibility of the program and staff.**

Several participants shared their appreciation for not being penalized for missing a session. They felt that staff trusted them and understood when they were unable to make a session because of a sick child or another conflict. Participants felt cared for when

staff called to check in with them after they had missed a session, rather than feeling staff were upset because they had missed a session. One participant compared missing sessions with EPC to missing sessions with treatment.

“In treatment, if you miss three sessions you can’t come back. Here they don’t assume you’re out doing something wrong.”

Participants also expressed interest in being able to attend additional sessions within the other tracks of the program. They felt that sometimes they needed additional support during the week, and thought attending additional sessions on the opposite track could provide that additional support.

#### **Participants were somewhat frustrated by staff changes and the check-in structure.**

Participants reported some frustration with recent staff changes that have resulted in a change in the structure of the check-in period after lunch, which results in the same group of participants doing a “check-in” with one another twice during the day. The participants remarked that the second check-in was somewhat redundant for the participants themselves, although

they did acknowledge that both sets of program staff needed to hear what was happening in their lives. They suggested that all program staff attend the first check-in period during the parenting group to avoid redundancy, and instead use the second check-in period for a discussion of resources, or an opportunity for participants to talk about themselves, rather than focusing on their children as they do during the first check-in.

### **Participants offered suggestions for improving the program.**

Participants suggested a few improvements to the EPC program, including more offsite activities for the mothers themselves and for their families. Some participants also suggested a partner component to the EPC program tailored to men in need of similar services. Finally, participants suggested that the Chrysalis Center at Tubman open their childcare in the evenings for mothers to attend AA/NA meetings, or perhaps that Tubman partner with groups that would be willing to hold meetings at the Chrysalis Center.



Tubman helps women, children, and families struggling with relationship violence, substance abuse, and mental health issues. Tubman provides safe shelter, legal advocacy, and counseling services across the Twin Cities, guiding and sustaining individuals and families on the journey from chaos and fear to healing and restoration.

Tubman serves families in need throughout the Twin Cities and beyond. They respond to crises through safe shelters and a 24-hour helpline. They also support long-term healing and help clients overcome their barriers through six core service areas:

- Residential services
- Counseling and therapy services
- Legal services
- Youth and family services
- Life enrichment and skill building
- Community education

For more information about Tubman, call 612-825-3333 or go to [www.tubman.org](http://www.tubman.org). For more information about the Effecting Positive Change program, contact Darcy Young at 612-870-2455 or [dyoung@tubman.org](mailto:dyoung@tubman.org).

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### **For more information**

This summary presents highlights of *The Tubman Effecting Positive Change Program annual evaluation report*. This report and other reports on related topics are available at [www.wilderresearch.org](http://www.wilderresearch.org)

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AUGUST 2009