

CULTURAL/LINGUISTIC COMPETENCY POLICY STATEMENT

The Women's Shelter Program of San Luis Obispo County (WSP) is committed to the goal of providing cultural and linguistic competency in the provision of its domestic violence services through the following principles or actions. The following actions (undertaken by all employees, volunteers, and board members) will ensure this outcome:

- 1) Understanding cultural competency as constituting both individual and agency practices characterized by the acceptance of (and respect for) differences
- 2) Recognition that cultural competency is a method to increase access to quality services for all battered women and their children as well as being a business imperative to respond to diverse populations and to attract new clients to shelter-based domestic violence services
- 3) Acknowledging the existence of "intersectionality" in the lives of the clients we serve. This view holds that the classical models of oppression within a society, such as those based on race/ethnicity; gender, religion, sexuality, class, disability and other markers of difference do not act independent of one another. Instead, these forms of oppression interrelate, based on which markers apply to a given individual. For instance, according to intersectionality, domestic violence counselors in the United States that urged all women to report their abusers to police would be of little use to women of color due to the history of racially-motivated police brutality in that population, and those counselors should therefore develop a different approach appropriate for women of color.
- 4) Recognizing the prevalence of racial, ethnic and cultural disparities in society at large, as well as within the victim population which the agency serves.
- 5) Acknowledging that, by definition, domestic violence victims are often at a marked disadvantage in society, particularly when such victims have already been "victimized" through larger societal forces (e.g. racism, discrimination, class or other institutional barriers).
- 6) Recognizing the importance of ensuring that the cultural and linguistic differences of employees, volunteers and board members are recognized and celebrated and that these differences constitute a cohesive system of resources which ultimately increase the ability of the agency to appropriately assist domestic violence victims.
- 7) Belief that an understanding of victims' diverse cultures is not a matter of political correctness or an act undertaken to fulfill funding requirements. "Lip service" or conveyed platitudes ultimately do a disservice to the fundamental need to conduct a sincere, ongoing self-assessment and to tailor services accordingly. Honesty,

openness and constructive feedback are a necessity to ensure that these outcomes are reached.

- 8) Acknowledgment that culture shapes individuals' experiences, perceptions, decisions and relationships to others and that domestic violence advocates need to increase their recognition and understanding of how client populations may view the assistance and services of an agency.
- 9) Encouraging clients to utilize their innate differences as strengths to be celebrated, while also being cognizant of the risks of engendering dependency or other negative consequences,
- 10) Providing all employees, volunteers and board members shall have the opportunity (through workshops, continuing education and monthly Cultural Competency Advisory Committee meetings) to examine self-bias, gain increased cultural understanding, and look at ways of utilizing this new knowledge and understanding in a constructive fashion.