OVERVIEW OF REAP CURRICULUM

Providing Classes at your Program

The thought of adding REAP classes to your program's services might make you say, "I can't teach money management." Many advocates who are experienced support group and parent education group leaders are intimidated by the thought of facilitating economic advocacy materials. You may feel like you don't know anything about money, that money is a taboo subject, or that talking about money will make battered women depressed. Remember, as described above, economics is a major issue in the lives of battered women. Domestic violence advocates are best suited to assist battered women with gaining control of their finances because advocates understand the complex issues in the lives of the women with whom we work. In addition, the REAP curriculum clearly lays out the information facilitators need for each section and provides hands-on activities for participants. In the REAP classes, women practice what they learn through the various activities. The classes help make money management less punitive, more fun, and more rewarding. Therefore, domestic violence advocates who are committed to improving the lives of battered women can be wonderful REAP facilitators.

How-to Facilitate REAP Classes

To facilitate literally means to "make easy." Making it easy is the role of the facilitator who enables participants to confidently build on their current strengths around money issues and learn new strategies for dealing with their finances. Facilitators can be staff members, well training volunteers, and former program participants. Facilitators can "do it alone" or co-facilitate. Be creative - perhaps former participants can co-teach with a seasoned facilitator!!

Effective REAP facilitators are:

- Respectful of participant's experiences,
- Knowledgeable about the dynamics of domestic violence,
- Understanding about how domestic violence affects women's financial situations,
- Open, well-prepared, honest, warm, assuring, confident,
- Able to say, "I don't know, but I can find out" and then follow-up on their promise
- Aware of group dynamics and effective group techniques,
- Flexible with time agendas, yet able to move the class to new activities when necessary,
- Thoughtful about how the United States' economic system oppresses many groups of people,
- Resourceful, and
- Excited about teaching women important economic skills.

How-to Use the REAP Curriculum

The REAP curriculum is designed to be an easy to understand, active curriculum that builds on battered women's strengths. Each section of the curriculum is divided into sections including a facilitator introduction, section introductions, safety considerations and activities. The classes are designed to be 2 ½ hours in length, but can be modified for more or less time. In many sections, there are more activities included in the curriculum than can be accomplished during the allotted class time. In those cases, choose activities that best suit the needs of participants. Because all classes and groups of participants are different, you will also need to be flexible with the amount of time spent on each activity. For example, some women may need a longer period of time to discuss economic abuse. Give the class ample time to process the concept and shorten a later activity if necessary. At times, certain class members may be reluctant to leave an important subject. When this occurs, offer to discuss these issues at another time individually or after class with those participants.

REAP classes are most successful when there are 4 to 8 participants. Classes are possible with three participants, but some of the group interaction is lost. Groups with more than 8 participants make it difficult to have enough time to hear each participants strengths and needs.

The REAP classes were created to be offered in a series starting with class 1 and ending with class 4. However, at times women may want to join the class at section 2, 3, or 4 or may miss a class in the series. It is possible to start participants on a later section, but this deviation makes it necessary to fully explain the content of the class and the "expectations" participants agreed upon in Section 1. New participants may want to add their own expectations for the group, facilitator, and the class.

Offering the classes in shelter almost guarantees that many participants will not complete the series of all four classes. There are a few ways to deal with this special situation:

- **Offer classes twice a week**. This makes it more possible for women who will only be in shelter a short time to complete the classes. However, this can also be difficult for women searching for permanent housing, employment, or dealing with legal issues.

- **Offer each class as a "stand alone" piece of information.** Each class can be used alone as information on a certain topic. For example, Section 1 can be used as information about Money and Power. Women can take information from this class alone and use it as they move forward. Seeing each class as an individual piece may help the facilitator feel more successful in their work.

- **Provide make-up classes for women on a one-on-one basis**. Some women may really want to complete the class but may have been impeded by something out of their control. If time permits, you may want to complete one class with participants

one-on-one. One on one meetings can also be important for confidential material. Remember, discussing finances in a group is very difficult for many participants. Offering individual sessions may help women feel more comfortable opening up about their economic issues. Credit is a topic than can be especially personal. Never force a woman to discuss her economic situation with the group if she does not want to.

- **Offer the classes on a rotating schedule**. By offering classes continually on a schedule, women can wait until "the next time around" to pick up a class or two that they missed previously.

- **Offer classes out in the community**. Teach classes at "off-site" locations where women who leave shelter are able to make up miss classes. This also allows non-residential women who are seeking services can complete classes. This also makes the classes open for women who remain living with their partner.

Economic Action Plan

Each participant is given an Economic Action Plan at the beginning of Section 1 to be completed during the course. Each section of the course is covered in the Economic Action Plan. This tool may be a useful guide as women continue to meet their financial goals. Like the curriculum, the Economic Action Plan emphasizes that safety is more important than money and that at times safety considerations may force women to deviate from their financial goals. The Economic Action Plan also provides a holistic picture of women's goals including their social support and ways that they want to be proud of themselves.

Individual Work with Women

While the REAP curriculum is designed for groups, it is frequently necessary to offer individual advocacy sessions with women participating in the classes. These sessions may be necessary to:

- Work on a budget work,
- Assist with employment searches,
- Review credit reports, create credit action plan, assist with correcting credit errors,
- Discuss experiences of economic abuse,
- Create economic safety plans,
- Review an Economic Action Plan,
- Assist women with low-level reading skills or learning issues comprehend the class material, and
- Discuss any other private economic issue.

Individual sessions are an essential component that often enhances and increases the success for many women in the REAP program.