Celebrating Solutions Award
Nomination Form

Legal name of organization: Alma Center, Inc.

Year established: 2003

Program being nominated for award (if different):

Year established: 2004

Address: 2821 North 4th Street, 4th Floor

City/State/ZIP code: Milwaukee, WI 53212

Agency phone number: 414.265.0100

Name and title of contact person: Terri Strodthoff, Founder & Executive Director

Phone number: 414.265.0100, ext. 107

E-mail address: terri@almacenter.org

Website address: www.almacenter.org

How did you learn about the Celebrating Solutions Award? Listserve notice of available funding for domestic violence programming.

Brief description of organization:
The Alma Center is a community based not-for-profit agency in Milwaukee, Wisconsin that works locally and nationally to provide pioneering, trauma-informed healing, education, supportive services and a positive peer community to promote lifestyle transformation for abusive men and break the cycle of domestic violence in families.

Working with over 500 men annually, the Alma Center's innovative program, focused on identifying and resolving trauma and teaching healthy masculinity, are successful. Alma Center graduates have a recidivism rate that is 86% lower than domestic violence offenders in general.

Geographical area served: Milwaukee metropolitan area, Wisconsin.

Is the organization tax-exempt under IRS 501 (c) (3) guidelines or a public agency/unit of government?

X Yes ___ No

Please check up to five descriptors that best apply to the program you are nominating:

X Batterer treatment
X Prison-based
X Prevention
X Public awareness/education
X Underserved population
Release of Information

As one of the goals of the Mary Byron Project is to disseminate information about cutting-edge programs and best practices, we wish to post exemplary Celebrating Solutions Award nominations on our website (www.marybyronproject.org).

Those posted will include the organization's website address, telephone number, and e-mail address. If you have concerns about this request, please address them to information@marybyronproject.org, prior to submitting a nomination.

By my signature on this letter, I grant the Mary Byron Project permission to use the contents of my nomination for the Celebrating Solutions Award in the manner and for the purposes set above. I further affirm that I am fully authorized to grant such permission to the Mary Byron Project.

Signature  

Date 11/22/13
Celebrating Solutions Award
Program Outline

1. Describe the work of the nominated program and explain how the mission of the program is accomplished.

The Alma Center works locally and nationally to provide pioneering, trauma-informed healing, education, supportive services and a positive peer community to promote lifestyle transformation for abusive men and break the cycle of domestic violence in families.

We are active participants in the movement to end violence against women and we celebrate the incredible progress and innovation which has been made across the nation in enhancing safety and thriving for victims and children. We also strongly believe that the next generation of our work must focus intently on implementing effective, research-based intervention strategies to change perpetrators.

We can incarcerate domestic violence perpetrators, but they will be released. We can house victims in shelters, issue protective orders and enhance our arrest rate and criminal justice response, but, as we have too frequently witnessed in Milwaukee and across the nation, if an abuser remains intent upon harming his victim, the interventions we currently utilize cannot truly guarantee the victim’s safety.

Most domestic violence victims and abusers live deeply interconnected lives—sharing children, residences and family resources. And more often than not, for varied and complicated reasons, the victim and abuser choose to continue in a relationship together despite the violence, and regardless arrest, imprisonment or other sanctions. Even if the current relationship ends, the abuser will still be a father and will be involved in new intimate relationships regardless whether he changes his behavior.

Given these realities, the uncomfortable and tragic truth of domestic violence is that there exists a 100% risk of repeat, ongoing and future violence, and always a risk of lethality. At the Alma Center we have come to believe that to create true safety for victims and children in violent families, and to break the cycle of violence—the abuser must change.

It is our vision that all men become positive agents of change in healing the trauma of domestic violence, changing the social norms and practices which tolerate it, and restoring hope to create respectful, nurturing and healthy intimate relationships, families and communities.

The Alma Center works toward this vision by providing comprehensive and multifaceted educational change and trauma resolution programming targeted to men with a history of domestic violence. Overall, the Alma Center program is designed to meet the following goals:

- Eliminate repeat domestic violence.
- Reduce the impact of children’s exposure to domestic violence.
- Prevent continuation of the cycle of violence from generation to generation.
- Promote healthy, responsible and self-sufficient relationships and families.

Our program has varied components that are combined to meet the specific needs of each individual man. Program components include:
• **Men Ending Violence (MEV):** A trauma resolution and education program that explores root causes of intimate partner violence, focuses on healing past trauma and developing attitudes and behavior that will support respectful intimate partner relationships in the future. *Methodology:* Minimum 7 month program; begins with a full-day orientation; ongoing class meets two times per week; 2 hours each session; capstone event is a full-day presentation of learning seminar; program co-facilitated with a male/female team.

• **Restorative Fatherhood:** A fatherhood education program exploring personal experiences of fathering to learn compassion, forgiveness, and responsibility, and to develop positive, developmentally appropriate nurturing fathering and co-parenting values, attitudes and skills. *Methodology:* Minimum 3 month program; all participants must complete MEV orientation (at least) before beginning; meets once per week; one hour each session; single male facilitator.

• **Wisdom Walk:** An intensive and integral trauma resolution program, pioneered by Jojopah Nsoroma an indigenous healer and shaman, which combines new discoveries in neurological science and proven therapeutic techniques with indigenous healing wisdom. The program is organized around the five basic elements of the Dagara medicine wheel (fire, water, earth, nature, mineral). Participants progress through the healing circle as if on a journey through the five elemental landscapes. Exercises, activities and rituals focus on cognitive, affective and behavioral recovery/restoration to transform the debility of trauma to a strength that can help man assume their full responsibilities in their families and communities. *Methodology:* Minimum 3 month program; all participants must complete MEV orientation (at least) before beginning; meets three times per week; two hours each session; co-facilitated with a male/female team.

• **Finding Work:** This component combines life skills and employment services into a targeted effort to overcome employment barriers, improve employability, build skills for job retention and success, and get men employed in jobs that will enable them to support themselves and their families. *Methodology:* One-on-one and small group work with Life Skills/Employment specialist. Individual case management provided.

Participation in our program begins with a comprehensive assessment to determine individual need and to design a customized intervention plan from the varied program components.

2. **Describe the most innovative aspects of the program you are nominating.**

The most innovative part of our program is our trauma and healing informed approach. While clearly men who have perpetrated domestic violence have caused harm to others in their adult life, it is also true that virtually all of the men who come to our program are themselves victims of extensive, prolonged and repeated violence exposure. We believe that in order for abusive men to change they must identify, understand, and make peace with the trauma they have experienced in their own lives – as children growing up and witnessing domestic violence in their own homes, having been the victims of child abuse and neglect, or living day to day in environments rife with violence, victimization, injury and death.
As the men begin to heal from their own trauma, the transformative effect ripples out to overall enhanced positive life functioning. It becomes possible, in a profoundly real way, for the men to trust, learn, grow and truly to transform their values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors from those which support and perpetrate violence/abuse to those which nurture, respect and create peace. Further, it becomes possible to address the specified practical needs on their individual plan in a way which is stable, responsible and sustainable.

Background. Nine years ago the Alma Center program was founded with a more traditional psycho-educational approach for working with abusive men focusing on issues of social learning and patriarchal/sexist belief systems. About three years into our program we conducted an evaluation which included data collection on prior violence exposure in the home and neighborhood. While we had long recognized that most of the men who came to our program grew up in violent or abusive families themselves, the evaluation results clearly documented the sobering levels of violence exposure as well as pointed to a significant program impact. The evidence indicated that men with the greatest levels of violence exposure were significantly more likely to drop-out of our program in the early stages when compared to men who had relatively less violence in their background.

The results caused us to take a more intensive and rigorous look at the developmental and long-term effects of violence/abuse exposure, and thus we found ourselves exploring trauma research, literature and evidence-based practice.

Compelling new research in psychology and neuroscience provided us with explanation and understanding of the means by which trauma that happens during the developmental history of a person, such as abandonment, physical abuse or assault, sexual abuse or assault, emotional abuse, witnessing violence or death, and/or coercion or betrayal, can create profound dysfunction and debility in childhood and adult life. Abundant research showed that people who experienced repeat, prolonged, or pervasive trauma during childhood have significant problems with attachment and authority, are unable to regulate their emotions and impulses, can experience cognitive impairment and attention deficits, and have severe difficulties in interpersonal relationships. Research further showed that the experience of developmental trauma has gender-specific manifestations, with women tending to express trauma debility through inner-directed symptoms and ongoing and repeat victimization, and men in external-directed symptoms of rage and perpetration of violence.

The new research, as well as our program experience, helped us to understand that it is the debilitating effects of violent trauma exposure on psycho-social development, far more than social learning from witnessing a violent parent, which fuels the insidious ‘cycle of violence.’ At the core, prolonged and repeated exposure to childhood trauma changes brain functioning from a curious and learning brain which trusts and embraces the world to a survival brain which fears and fights the world. It is the ‘survival brain’ which brings us domestic violence.

Both the research and experiences lead us to understand that if the men with complex and violent trauma exposure do not transform and resolve the pain they have experienced, their pain will simply be transferred to other people through perpetration or victimization.

Program Innovation. The Alma Center programs have changed significantly because of
our growing knowledge. From our program approach, intake and evaluation assessments, substance and content of our curriculum, intervention and educational methodology; to our recruitment, hiring, and training of staff members; to our governance, organization, and management style; and to practical choices we have made about where to locate and how to expand and enhance our program; everything has been transformed by our growing understanding of developmental trauma and the most effective intervention for healing the trauma and breaking the cycle of violence.

3. Describe your program's implementation. What barriers did your organization have to overcome? How did you marshal the necessary resources for implementation?

The biggest barrier for implementation of our program has been working against negative perceptions—among the public at large, some professionals and colleagues in the field, and the criminal justice system, that domestic violence perpetrators are unredeemable. The perception fuels the attitude that non-punitive efforts to create change are inappropriate and a siphoning of resources that should be spent on victim services.

To address this issue, we have continued to focus on the realities we know to be true: 1) violence is learned and can be unlearned; 2) the majority of men who come to our program are still with the same partner; 3) nearly all of the men are fathers. Everywhere and anywhere we can we propagate the message that healing abusive men and helping them learn to end their use of violence or abuse, addresses the essential need to create change in those who perpetrate the problem, and directly enhances victim and children's safety.

For eight years, the Alma Center conducted a unique annual fundraiser—the Men We Love Project. In this project we produced a beautiful hard-cover photo journal book in which friends and family purchased tribute pages for important male role models and influential men in their lives (e.g., father, partner, grandad, son, coach, rabbi, pastor, friend, and colleague). The Men We Love book was released with great fanfare on the Friday night kicking of Father’s Day weekend at the Milwaukee Brewers home field. We worked with our Mayor to have the event declared Milwaukee’s Official Father's Day Celebration by our Mayor.

Many of the people who participated in the book and attended the event did not even know who the Alma Center was or have any idea of the kind of work we do. In addition to being a fundraiser, we also used this event as our premier public awareness campaign.

We worked with local media to promote the event and the mission of the Alma Center. The evening included a keynote speech by one of our graduates which provided moving testimony for all in attendance to the learning and unlearning of values, attitudes and beliefs supporting domestic violence.

Over these eight years, we successfully used the Men We Love book, and positive public relations, to help open doors to other supporters and funders in our community. We took a year off from the event in 2013 to assess our use of staff time and resources from a work versus benefit. We have decided to transform the event in 2014 with a revised focus on recruiting the over 600 inspirational men featured in the books, as well as other influential men in the community, to headline a new men against domestic violence event: “Men We Love: The Legacy Builders.” The new event is still planned for Father’s Day weekend. In this effort we will
be developing opportunities for the men to take high profile, public stands supporting an end to violence against women, and advocating men’s involvement, support and leadership in the movement to end the violence.

Again, we will utilize this opportunity for multi-faceted goals: 1) public education; 2) fundraising; 3) marketing and public relations to help alleviate the barrier of negative public perception of our work.

4. How do you know your program works? Please site two examples. Although anecdotal examples are helpful, at least one example must include quantitative data.

We consider a successful intervention to be a man showing evidence of beginning the journey to understanding the roots of his violent, abusive and controlling values, attitudes and behavior, and to make the choice to continue to learn how to be a different kind of person. Evidence of success include the man being able to identify and report on actions which illustrate he understands and is capable and motivated to make different choices and/or by our staff witnessing such changes. The changes happen in relationship, so a successful intervention means more authentic, trusting, empathetic, respectful and compassionate relationships with children and/or partner.

To this point, the following selection is testimony from one of our recent graduate’s Presentation of Learning:

_In the past I have always felt alone and unable to connect with myself because of problems I faced earlier in my life. I dealt with these problems in ways I knew how to at the time, but to say the least, these ways were not helpful in my growth as a mature functioning emotionally responsible adult...._

_I joined the Alma Center’s intensive and extensive self-healing program, the Wisdom Walk. I have found a safe place to express feelings I could not reach without the carefully planned guidance of our healing teachers. They have never belittled us for our shortcomings or judged us as a burden to society, but views us as leaders without a working compass. Bless them for their insight into the human condition. We have been lead to the door of self-enlightenment, but not forced through upon false pretense..._

_I was previously unable to overcome anger issues or resolve conflicts in an openly healthy manner. I have learned how to transform myself from an emotionally arrested, traumatic survivor, whose actions were ruled by internal burdens of loss and fear, and turn into a person in a meditative state that is healing not hurting. I have learned to love myself more and believe it is okay to be loved by someone and return that love to them in a healthy way without fear, leading me to believe in a bad outcome –that I will be left for no reason, or treat a person poorly to keep my true self at a distance. Learning to finally reconnect the head with the heart; love without sabotage. “Willie._

In regard to our officially reported markers of 'success,' we evaluate program
participation/completion and recidivism, as indicated by repeat criminal charge. A recent outcome evaluation study of the Men Ending Violence (MEV) program conducted criminal record checks at 18 months from the date of program intake and compared recidivism rates for men who completed versus those who were terminated or dropped out of the program. 

Results show that completion of the MEV program is associated with an 86% decrease in recidivism rate for domestic violence related criminal offenses, and a 60% decrease in recidivism rate for all criminal offenses.

5. Who are your key community partners? What are their roles? Are there any other domestic violence resources available for clients in your community? If so, are they your partners?

1. Sojourner Family Peace Center (SFPC). SFPC is the largest domestic violence service agency in Milwaukee with a primary focus on working with women and children. We maintain a close working relationship with SFPC for the purposes of victim/partner outreach and family intervention. Through this partnership, we are able to make direct referrals to the Victim Advocacy Program for the purpose of proactive outreach and access to services.

2. Criminal justice partners: Wisconsin Department of Corrections, Milwaukee County District Attorney's Office, Milwaukee Circuit Court Judges-Domestic Violence Court. We meet monthly with our criminal justice partners to monitor and enhance coordination of services toward the goal of improved accountability and victim safety.

3. Milwaukee Commission on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (Commission). We are a partner in the Commission, our community coordinated response team and meet monthly.

8. Could/should your program be replicated in other areas of the country? Why?

Yes. The program could definitely be replicated in other parts of the country. Our innovation is to incorporate a comprehensive trauma informed approach to our intervention with abusive men. This approach can be taught to other professionals and organizations.

Our work is grounded in pioneering new research in neuroscience, human development and traumatic stress. The more we study and understand the research, the more passionate and committed we become for the replication of our work. A great deal of discussion is happening across the country regarding the “effectiveness” of batterer intervention programs. It is our opinion that trauma informed care has much to add to this discussion.

9. Does your agency have a workplace policy that addresses domestic violence? If so, please include a copy.

We have a workplace policy addressing domestic violence outlined in our employee handbook. The policy is included as an attachment.

10. Has the agency and/or nominated program received VAWA funding (yes or no is sufficient)? No.
8.9 **POLICY AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

It is the policy of the AC to use early prevention strategies in order to avoid or minimize the occurrence and effects of domestic violence in the workplace. The AC will provide available support and assistance to employees who are survivors of domestic violence. This support may include: confidential means for coming forward for help, resource and referral information, additional security at the workplace, work schedule adjustments or leave necessary to obtain medical, counseling, or legal assistance, and workplace relocation, where possible. Other appropriate assistance will be provided based on individual need. In all responses to domestic violence, the AC will respect the confidentiality and autonomy of the adult survivor to direct her or his own life, to the fullest extent permitted by law.

The AC will not tolerate acts of domestic violence by AC staff. This includes the display of any violent, aggressive, or threatening behavior (verbal or physical) that results in physical or emotional injury or otherwise places a person's safety and productivity at risk.

Any employee who is convicted in a court of law of threatening, harassing, or abusing an intimate partner will be subjected to corrective or disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.
Alma Center

Semi-finalist Information
Section 1
a) What is the approximate number of individuals served annually by the applicant or nominee?

In the fall of 2012, following an extensive review of trauma resolution methodology and our own program evaluation, we decided to re-design the Men Ending Violence Batterer Intervention Program (MEV) to be more responsive to the evidence. We increased MEV’s dosage intensity from 24 to 50 required sessions, moved from once per week to twice per week attendance, and incorporated more diverse and directed trauma resolution material.

We re-designed the program because we believed it was the right decision for best practice, however, it was a difficult decision because we did not have additional funding to increase staff. Increased intensity consequently meant a significant reduction in our capacity. Before the change, we worked with approximately 450 men per year. This year we anticipate providing services to approximately 250 men with a minimum of 4 hours of programming per week (range 4 – 10 hours) and a minimum of a 7-month program tenure.

b) How many paid staff and volunteers are used to administer the nominated program?

Currently, we have six paid staff (5 full-time, and 1 half-time) working in the nominated program. We anticipate hiring another ¼ time staff member at the start of the new year.

We have three graduates who are regular volunteers with the program, and we do not use any other volunteers in a regular capacity at this time. We anticipate having two volunteer interns working with the program in late January 2015.

c) Are there past awards, accolades, and grants furnished upon the applicant or nominee that would further exemplify its success in combating intimate partner violence?

In December 2012, Alma Center was selected in a competitive process by Futures without Violence, a leading national domestic violence agency, as one of the top ten most promising and innovative batterer intervention programs in the country. Alma Center will be featured in an on-line multi-media publication and book produced by Futures without Violence in late 2014.
Alma Center’s Executive Director currently holds one of four elected positions on the Executive Committee of the Milwaukee Commission on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (Commission). The Commission is Milwaukee’s organizing body for our community-coordinated response.

For the past nine years, the Alma Center has been the sole provider selected in a competitive process by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections to provide batterer intervention programming to domestic violence offenders on state supervision in Milwaukee. For the past seven years, the Alma Center has been the recipient of a competitive grant from the Wisconsin Department of Children and Family to deliver a specialized track of intimate partner violence and fatherhood services to male domestic violence offenders in Milwaukee County.

In June 2011 the Alma Center was awarded the only contract in the state for highly competitive Becky Young Innovation in Criminal Justice funding. With this funding we launched the Alma House—an innovative 24/7 trauma informed healing community providing an intensive 3-month residential intervention program to domestic violence ex-prisoners upon release from incarceration. The program operated for 1.5 years and received high accolades and support from our community including the Commission, Sojourner Family Peace Center, the Milwaukee County District Attorney’s office, the Milwaukee Police Department, and the Milwaukee delegation to our state legislature.

In response to the recent domestic violence incidents in the NFL, the Alma Center developed a Policy Statement submitted to the NFL, NFL Players Association and our hometown team the Green Bay Packers. We have been contacted by Teri Patterson, Deputy Managing Director of the NFL Players Association indicating they are reviewing the possibility of Alma Center’s assistance in their work on domestic violence. A copy of the Alma Center Policy Statement is included in Appendix A.

d) If funding were not an issue, what (if any) changes or additions would you make to your program in the future? What are the long-term goals for your program? We are interested in hearing both your practical goals in addition to any lofty dreams you might have for the future.

We are currently pursuing additional funding to achieve the following practical short-term goals:

*Enhanced, routine victim/partner outreach.* We believe that partner contact is an important component of our program for purposes of victim safety and access to advocacy/supportive services, and, as a means of enhancing offender accountability. We have long partnered with Sojourner Family Peace Center (SFC), our most comprehensive local domestic violence services provider, to implement our current partner contact services; however, we have not had the kind of success with this effort that we believe is possible. We are seeking funding to hire a full-time dedicated victim outreach/advocate staff member to implement partner contact programming. We would continue to partner with SFC for design, implementation, training, and possibly housing of the staff. The additional funding would provide the opportunity to enhance the program by establishing a full-time dedicated staff position with partner outreach/contact as the primary job responsibility.

*Enhanced peer network.* We recognize that change is a very difficult process, and we know that one among the many challenges is a person’s peer network, including some family members. Men who come to our program generally tend to be connected to social groups of other men who accept, tolerate and even condone their abusive attitudes and behavior toward women. Repeatedly over the years we
have heard clients express sincere frustration with the way their social networks can impede their process of change.

We have been able to create a more positive social network for graduates of the Wisdom Walk program by expanding peer outreach and support services for graduates. Graduates report a new sense of belonging and positive friendship which supports their ongoing process of change. With additional funding we would support staff time or a new position dedicated to expanding our efforts toward development of a positive peer network and community. This effort would include: routine phone or email contact with graduates; regular Alma Center sponsored social events for clients and graduates; ongoing opportunity to engage in support group services; and opportunities for participating in community projects.

Prevention. We are working to develop a program directed to fathers and sons to support the development of respectful attitudes and behaviors toward girls and women, and to heal any emotional pain in the relationship related to negative ideas about masculinity and how to be a “real man.” We are also seeking training on one of the evidence-based bystander engagement programs to enhance our ability to educate on these intervention principles. With additional funding we would hire a new position to implement this prevention programming.

Research and training. We have designed our data collection processes, at intake and throughout our program, with the goal of doing comprehensive research and analysis of client characteristics, correlates, relationships and outcomes. We have collected loads of data over the years; however, we have not had the staff time or resources appropriately to record and analyze the data. We are currently working with faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Social Welfare to develop a research program in which graduate interns could assist in data management and analysis while in turn gaining the opportunity to use some of the data in their professional research, writings and presentations. We are seeking additional funding to support Alma Center staff time to supervise the program, and provide leadership on writing and publication.

In the past year, the Alma Center staff has begun to be recruited and hired locally and nationally to provide training and consulting expertise to BIPs and related programming for the purpose of understanding/implementing trauma-focused intervention. We are currently working on developing a training institute program to enhance the quality and rigor of the trainings we provide, and begin very basic marketing strategies to expand the potential audience for trainings.

In terms of more long-term and lofty goals, we have the following ideas/dreams:

Alma Brothers grass-roots activism. If funding were truly not an issue, we would take our program to the street through the Alma Brothers-- a group of grass-roots activists who would be working in targeted neighborhoods and social groups to connect, engage and promote respectful change for dis-connected, un-mentored and hurt boys and men who are at-risk of domestic violence perpetration.

The Alma Brothers would be a group of carefully selected program graduates who would be verifiably violence-, abuse- and control-free for a minimum of two years, and who would be from the targeted neighborhoods and social groups. We imagine that prior to working in the grassroots-outreach, the Alma Brothers would be required to complete a year-long Alma Renaissance Fellowship program (also

www.almacenter.org
developed in our abundance of funding) in which they would continue to move through an intensive journey of healing, change and progressive learning fully to break free of patriarchal, sexist or misogynist attitudes and to restore emotional health.

We imagine this positive network of Alma Brother’s men growing exponentially, as each year another class of graduates would complete the Alma Renaissance Fellowship. Not all graduates would end-up formally working in the Alma Brothers program, but all would become positive agents of social change.

**Alma House – A Healing Community.** If funding were not an issue, we would once again open the Alma House 24/7 residential program. The program would provide residential healing and education services to domestic violence ex-prisoners upon return to the community; domestic violence offenders who are engaged in the change process but who are unable to live at their home due to a criminal no-contact order or their partner’s wishes; and men who are concerned about their behavior in their relationship and recognize a need to change prior to criminal justice intervention. A copy of the Alma House Program Summary is included in Appendix B. The proposed new program would incorporate many of these same ideas, but would not be an independent program with now contracting ties to the Department of Corrections and would expand the definition of eligible residents.

**Section 2**

1. **Are the majority of your clients court ordered to attend and complete your programs? What is the percentage of court ordered clients versus self-referrals?**

Yes. The majority of our clients are court ordered to attend and complete a batterer intervention program (BIP) as a condition of a criminal sentence. Some of the men are also required to complete a fatherhood program.

During the initial stages of program engagement, Alma Center staff works with each new client to complete a needs assessment and develop an intervention plan which best addresses needs. The intervention plan may include additional program requirements (e.g., fatherhood or Wisdom Walk programming) imposed by the Alma Center, but not mandated by the court.

The number of self-referrals has increased in 2014 relative to the previous year, but is still a relatively small proportion of clients, just 9% of the total men in the program.

2. **How is this batterers program different from those more typically used around the country, such as the Emerge Program?**

The Alma Center is a feminist-based, trauma-focused, culturally appropriate healing and education program.

As a feminist-based program we believe that gender matters. We believe men’s violence toward women and girls is predicated on sexist, patriarchal and misogynist attitudes toward women. Boys and men, and in fact all of us, continue to absorb gender lessons from multiple and varied sources—our social, cultural and religious norms, public policies, media and entertainment, and public and private.
institutions—lesson which bestow entitlement upon men and boys and undervalue, oppress, restrict and objectify women and girls. We are the fish, and patriarchy is the water we swim in.

We believe that it is our job critically to challenge men’s thinking about gender and to support the development of more respectful, humanitarian, egalitarian, and progressive (i.e., feminist) values and attitudes. In this way, the Alma Center is very similar to Emerge and other programs more typically used across the country.

From this core understanding, we ask why it is that in our patriarchal culture some boys and men grow-up to hold respectful, equitable and progressive ideas about girls and women, while other boys and men grow-up to hold extremely sexist, oppressive and misogynist attitudes. We can point to access to role models and mentors who challenge these ideas and provide alternatives to sexist ideology, or perhaps access to alternate information, or opportunity for critical education. But even within these contexts, for example in a high school classroom with an engaging and feminist male teacher, some young men will respond to the mentoring on more respectful attitudes while other young men will be repelled by it.

So we ask what kinds of things separate the group of men who accept and act upon sexist cultural teachings and those who do not? Our review of research and our program experience tell us that it is the unhealed reality of trauma and other adverse childhood experiences that distinguish between these groups. We believe that boys and men who grow-up with trauma and adversity are primed for de-humanization and oppression of others through their experiences, and are thereby the most vulnerable to accepting and embracing sexist, patriarchal and misogynist cultural teachings. These boys and men are also the most susceptible to embodying destructive myths of masculinity which continue to connect “manhood” with aggression, toughness, dominance over girls and women, and perpetration of violence. Why? Because these ideas fit their mindset—they make sense to their experiences in a world of violence, abuse, neglect, power and control.

Indeed, compelling new research in brain science and psychology has provided abundant and clear evidence that without healing intervention (professional or informal), trauma and other adverse childhood experiences have a profound and lasting impact on a person’s physical, emotional and psychological development. These experiences lead a child to adapt his or her worldview, attitudes and behaviors to survive the difficult or hostile environment in which they live and develop.

Here’s how we see it now: Babies are born into the world with no choice about who their parents or family will be—they are simply born. Babies learn everything they know about the world from their family. If the parent(s) are struggling with their own pain and trauma—substance abuse, physical, emotional, psychological, sexual or financial abuse—the infant/child will learn about the world through this lens. Such trauma and adverse experiences create a child’s view of the world as unsafe, uncaring and unprotected.

Research shows that in this context the child’s physical, emotional and cognitive development becomes more directly and singularly dedicated to surviving danger than to thriving. Some of the more typical adaptive strategies underlie very serious interpersonal relationship issues. For example, issues can develop with trust (e.g., if you cannot trust those required to love and care for you, who can you trust); feeling and expressing emotions (e.g., fear, sadness, abandonment, rejection are dangerous emotions which lead to more punishment or pain); personal boundaries (e.g., without successful experience of
establishing appropriate limits or protection for self, boundaries are unknown); respect for rules and authority (e.g., if neither rules or authority have kept a person safe, these things need not be respected); or focus and attention (e.g., the stress and anxiety of surviving the adversity overwhelm the capacity to direct or keep attention elsewhere).

Research further shows that childhood trauma has gender specific impact which correlates with sexist cultural norms/expectations. Girls and women tend toward internal symptoms leading to ongoing or repeat victimization, and boys and men tend toward external symptoms such as outward rage, aggression and violence. In this way, we see how trauma and gender socialization interplay.

Our study of trauma research and methodology has significantly broadened our understanding of domestic violence. We believe that people who use violence, abuse, or control toward their intimate partner, or other family, have a personal history of trauma or adversity and are acting from their own unresolved pain. It is hurt people, who hurt people. For men and boys who carry unresolved trauma, patriarchy, sexism and misogyny are kindred and supportive belief systems that resonate with their own pain and also justify the ongoing perpetration of dehumanizing and oppressive treatment of others—specifically girls and women. We believe that any pain that is not transformed will be transferred, and this is what we see happening in domestic violence.

It is in our trauma-focused approach that we differ from Emerge or other more typical BIPs across the country. As a trauma-focused program we believe that it is our job to support abusive men’s process of healing from their own traumatic past.

We have heard other experts in the field say that it is inappropriate to address a batterer’s change process through healing instead of changing his beliefs about violence and entitlement. We do not believe the change process should be framed as an either/or alternative, as we see the clear and pressing need for an integrative approach. We believe that patriarchal, sexist and misogynist attitudes are antithetical to the process of true healing. Challenging and transforming these dehumanizing ideas go hand-in-hand with healing. As a feminist-based, trauma-focused program we believe it is our job to support a process of healing AND change beliefs about violence and entitlement.

Trauma resolution programming is definitely not anger management, but here we reference the argument about anger management to provide illustration to our ideas and to underscore our belief in the need for more integrative trauma and feminist programming.

We have long heard the argument among BIP professionals that anger management is an inappropriate intervention for batterers because even if we can teach men to control their anger it does not address their attitudes and beliefs about women and so patriarchal and oppressive control can remain. We agree.

Rarely, however, do we hear the reverse of this argument, which we believe is also true. We can challenge men to change their beliefs about women so they develop a commitment to a more feminist belief system, but if we do not help them resolve their anger (particularly as an adaptive strategy to trauma), they will continue to use violent, abusive and controlling behaviors in their intimate relationships. We certainly know men who strongly embrace and are very active in their commitment to feminist ideology, but who in their private relationship remain abusive. The capacity for emotional
intimacy is not about thought or ideas, it is about emotional health, and emotional health is not possible within a context of unresolved trauma.

We understand that the idea of “healing for abusive men” raises red flags of concern for some of us active in the women’s movement. There is good historical reason for concern. The history of the “men’s movement” has plentiful examples of intervention approaches, wrapped in the cloak of healing, which purportedly engage men in a deep and thoughtful process of change only to arrive at the place where they have recovered their “true masculinity” and are ready to assume their rightful place as head of household and controlling dominion over women. This is not a healing approach we support, and in fact, such programs underscore the profound need for an integrative feminist and trauma-focused approach.

The Alma Center is also a culturally appropriate program. As such, we believe the entirety of who a person is raised and socialized to be matters - gender matters, race and ethnicity matter, sexual orientation matters, socio-economic status matters, religion matters, and geography matters. We believe that our programming must be grounded in the historical and present day experiences and realities of the population we serve.

We practice this first and foremost by listening carefully and respectfully to men’s life stories—to hearing their reality. We are conscious and proactive about working to have our physical environment, staff make-up, teaching methodologies, and classroom exercises grounded in and responsive to the men’s realities, including the personal experiences and realities they share, as well as the historical legacy, cultural teachings, and broader social context. The clients in our program in Milwaukee County are predominantly urban men of color. The vast majority of our clients are African American men who have grown-up in some of our city’s most segregated, economically challenged and violent neighborhoods (See Appendix C for a more complete demographic description). Across many measures, Milwaukee is one of the most challenging and destructive cities in the country for African-Americans. Our clients’ worldview is clearly grounded in this reality. We believe it is absolutely our job to work to acknowledge, understand, and respect the experiences in this the reality, as well as to challenge the idea that this experience is the whole or singular story.

We have recently begun to offer services in two municipalities outside of Milwaukee County, one suburban and one more rural. The programs we deliver in the surrounding counties have the same theoretical foundations and incorporate the same methodologies and processes of change as our program in Milwaukee, but we have a different staff and utilize material responsive to this population’s historical and present day experiences. We believe this is what it means to be culturally-appropriate.

While clearly many BIPs across the country are culturally appropriate, most research indicates that this approach is still not the norm. In our culturally appropriate approach we are the same as some programs and different from others.

Finally, as will be discussed further in answer to questions below, the Alma Center is actively engaged in our domestic violence community coordinated response (CCR). We believe our work to promote the change process for abusive men fulfills an important role in our community, but that our work gains meaning and impact through the coordinated response with our other CCR partners. In this way, the Alma Center is similar to other BIPs who follow the Duluth approach.
3. Please describe the enrollment process for a typical client, from initial referral to integration in one or more of your programs. How soon after referral may an individual begin a group? Is there a waiting list for the programs? How many programs may an individual participate in at one time? What criteria must be met for placement in the programs?

Our typical client is referred from the criminal justice system and follows four initial steps for program enrollment: 1) Central Screening and Referral; 2) Program Intake; 3) Orientation; and 4) Program Application. Clients who enroll outside of the criminal justice system do not participate in the central screening and referral process, otherwise they follow the same steps.

The following describes each of the four steps.

**Step 1. Central Screening and Referral.** In June of this year the Alma Center began implementation of a new central screening and referral process for the three Milwaukee county domestic violence courts. In the new system, domestic violence offenders meet with a BIP Intake Specialist in our courthouse office immediately following criminal sentencing. The Intake Specialist utilizes motivational interviewing strategies to: identify immediate risk for victim/children safety; listen to concerns and address questions regarding the criminal sentence; engage the offender in a process of change; conduct a brief screening assessment; and make a referral for a BIP intake with a community based program that matches needs.

In preparation for the new system, we organized a working committee of community based BIPs to collaborate in the process. The committee assisted in development of the screening tool and provided critical input for creating a referral process that was manageable across agencies with varying levels of administrative capacity. Through our collaborative work we have been able to design a process that can effectively and appropriately handle the volume of referrals coming from the criminal justice system in a very timely manner.

Prior to implementation of our new court-based central screening and referral system, criminal justice referrals were received from the offender’s probation agent of record after the probation orientation and intake were completed. In the old system, the BIP referral process could take up to three months from sentencing. Our new system has reduced the length of time from criminal sentencing to a BIP intake by over 75 days (from approximately 90 days to an average of 12 days). Further, the show-up rate for the first appointment has increased across all community based BIPs from a low of approximately 50% to an average of over 80%.

Under this new system over the past four months, the Alma Center has averaged 12 days from the date of criminal sentence to the BIP intake.

**Step 2. AC Intake.** All new referrals to the Alma Center begin services with an extensive intake assessment using motivational interviewing strategies. Intakes are conducted individually and typically last between one-and-one-half to two hours. The purposes of the intake include: identifying immediate red-flag risk to victim and children’s safety; assessing the client’s trauma history and other needs for intervention planning; building a positive relationship between the client and facilitator/agency; fostering intrinsic motivation for change and promoting participation; and collecting accurate information for partner contact, program records and evaluation purposes.
Step 3. Orientation. All clients, regardless whether they are referred for BIP or other programming, must complete a MEV Orientation. The Orientation is a one-day six-hour class that provides basic consciousness-raising and introductory information to conceptual foundations in feminist and trauma theories. Orientation groups are scheduled twice per month, including one Saturday to accommodate men who are working during the week.

Step 4. Program Application. As indicated, most of the men enter our programs as a mandated condition of their criminal sentence. In this context, many men report they feel they have “no choice” but to participate in the program. Research on the process of change indicates that an individual’s perception of mandated participation is a factor likely to impede change. Thus, one of our goals during the early involvement with new clients is to help facilitate a transformation in their understanding of participation from that of a mandated requirement to that of an opportunity to improve themselves, their relationship, or their life. The Program Application is a key mechanism in this process.

At the conclusion of orientation men are informed that regardless whether they have been mandated to MEV or any of our other programs, the Alma Center is not required to accept them into the program. They are further informed that the decision of whether or not we will accept them depends on how serious they are about trying to change their behavior.

The men are required to complete a Program Application that asks them to provide ten reasons (e.g., specific things they have done in the past or specific things they hope to learn for the future), which make them believe they should be admitted to MEV. None of the ten reasons can involve mandates for participation (e.g., the Judge is making me do it, I don’t want to go to jail), or blame toward their partner for their behavior or choices. A copy of the Program Application is included in Appendix D. The completed Program Application is reviewed and discussed in a one-on-one session with one of the MEV program facilitators.

Individuals who provide ten substantive reasons and are able to discuss the reasons with the MEV facilitator are admitted to the program. The reasons for participation become the basis for developing the client’s personal goals for their intervention plan.

In the vast majority of cases, when faced with the responsibility for choosing to engage in the program, clients are able and do readily provide ten reasons why they should be admitted. Less than twenty clients per year fail to meet this requirement. When the application is complete, the client and facilitator discuss the reasons and work to design an intervention plan that meets the client’s goals, needs, stage of change, and also allows a client to continue to meet employment or school obligations, if appropriate. The intervention plan may include additional Alma Center required (or recommended) programs.

Individuals who do not provide appropriate reasons or who provide reasons why they do not need the program, are not admitted. As such, the program facilitator would make immediate contact with the client’s probation agent reporting the client’s choice not to participate. In most cases, the probation agent will then impose additional criminal sanctions that typically include a probation review in front of the sentencing judge and the imposition of conditional jail time.
The primary goal of the Program Application is to help move clients toward personal responsibility for change, it is not simply to punish noncompliance. Thus, potential clients who initially claim they do not have reasons to be admitted to the program are allowed to schedule a new Program Application and re-apply should they reconsider their decision (which the majority do). In this way, the application process generally assists in helping to change the decisional balance away from denial and blame and toward personal responsibility and change.

More than one group. An individual may participate in more than one group at a time, with the most typical class combination being MEV and the Restorative Fatherhood Program. As the intervention plan is individualized, we do not have a standard protocol for when and how classes get combined. For example, some clients need to address their trauma debility before entering the MEV classes and are thus required to complete Wisdom Walk first. For other clients it is through their participation in MEV that they become open and ready for addressing issues of underlying trauma. In this case, the client would be referred to Wisdom Walk following completion of MEV.

4. How is the program funded? Do clients pay for the services? How much? If so, do you have any provisions for indigent clients, or are sliding scale fees available?

Our program is funded through government contracts (63%), foundation support (24%), individual/corporate donations (10%), and service fees (less than 1%).

We assess fees for program services on a sliding scale fee which ranges from $60-$1,200 based on income. Nearly 80% of our clients are indigent and assessed the lowest fee of $60 for the full 7-month program. Upon assessing the fee we have an extensive conversation with the client regarding the payment of program fees as a means of accepting responsibility and being accountable for their behavior.

While we believe that payment of program fees can be a component of accepting personal responsibility, we do not want financial ability to limit participation. Thus, we offer a “transportation waiver” for indigent clients who attend class at least two times per week. If a client is determined eligible for the waiver, we talk with him about program goals, and point out the obvious reality that we cannot work with him if he does not show-up. We tell the client that it is more important for him to dedicate the funds he has to securing transportation rather than paying program fees. We inform him that the transportation waiver will be reviewed if his financial circumstances change significantly.

5. How many individuals comprise a typical group? Do you offer any services for female violent offenders? If not at this time, would providing services to women be a future goal?

Our groups range in size from 8-14 participants, with most groups averaging 10 participants.

Our services are gender-specific for men because we believe that domestic violence is a gendered problem—meaning it has roots in patriarchal, sexist, and misogynist gender attitudes and socialization. Recognizing the extreme reach of gender socialization, we even take gender into consideration in creating the culture and feel of our physical space. We have worked to provide a comfortable environment for men which also provides messages about positive, healthy masculinity. So for example,
we have made very conscious choices about such things as the artwork on our walls, our paint choices, and even restroom capacity.

We believe that services for female violence offenders also must be gender specific (as well as trauma-focused and culturally appropriate). As such, we do not offer services for female violence offenders at this time, nor do we anticipate doing so in the immediate future.

6. In what ways are court ordered attendees held accountable? What is the process to notify the court if an individual becomes non-compliant? How many sessions may an individual miss before he is considered non-compliant?

We have heard some experts in the field argue that to recognize and address trauma is to give an excuse for battering which undermines offender accountability. We completely disagree with this opinion. Acknowledging trauma as a root cause of domestic violence provides insight for helping men change, it does not in any way mean their behavior is condoned, accepted, excused or tolerated.

Trauma may be one of the causes, but causality is different than responsibility. Of course a person is not to blame or responsible for the trauma they experienced at the hands of others. But the hard reality is that the responsibility for ongoing problematic attitudes and behaviors, even if they originated in trauma, lies absolutely with the person who has the ongoing issues. Though it is certainly not an easy undertaking, at any time a person can choose to heal, to change and to learn new respectful interpersonal skills. In this sense, the person who refuses to heal and change—who carries the unhealed emotional or psychological pain, dysfunctional thoughts and ideas, and maladaptive behaviors—whatever the reason—lack of awareness, blaming, fear of change, or a myriad of others, is responsible for their choice. Trauma happens to a person, but the person is not the trauma

Addressing trauma as a root cause is a strongly evidence-based understanding and a method of intervention, not an excuse. Regardless what happen to a person in the past, the choice to use violence or abuse in the present is entirely within the control of the perpetrator. No one can "make" or "provok" another person to violence. The perpetrator alone is responsible for his choices and decisions.

From our trauma-focused perspective, the Alma Center practices an approach we call compassionate accountability. It includes the following key elements:

1) Working with clients to explore what happen to them as root causes of their attitudes and behavior (e.g., childhood trauma, adverse experiences, sexist/patriarchal/misogynist socialization);
2) Expecting that every client who walks through our door can heal and change;
3) Acknowledging that change is very difficult;
4) Supporting, listening, educating and mentoring to promote the process of healing and change;
5) Celebrating clients' courage to choose to change;
6) Holding clients individually and personally responsible and accountable for their choices and decisions (past and present);
7) Working in partnership with the criminal justice or other referral sources to provide accurate and timely information and support immediate and real sanctions for choices and decisions which continue violent, abusive or controlling behavior;
8) Working with the client on learning to accept responsibility and practice accountability in the consequences for past behavior (e.g., partner may decide to leave, children may choose not to be involved with him, may lose his job, may go to jail), as well as accept future consequences if they choose to continue or repeat violent/abusive behavior in the future.

The following descriptions provide information on our specific means for working collaboratively on accountability with the criminal justice system or other referrals.

**Routine contact with referral source.** Alma Center keeps all program attendance records on a computerized database, which is updated by the end of each class. Instructors send routine email correspondence on attendance status to the referral source within 24-hours of class. More detailed attendance and progress reports are also provided: 1) for any domestic violence court probation review appearances; 2) when additionally reports are requested by the referral; 3) at program completion; and 4) at program termination (if applicable).

**Probation Reviews.** The Milwaukee County domestic violence courts utilize a probation review process in which all domestic violence offenders are required regularly to appear in front of the sentencing judge for a review of compliance with the conditions of probation. Domestic violence probationers are on community supervision in lieu of a jail sentence, and the sentence is structured such that a Judge is able to impose conditional jail time without imposing the full sentence. Offenders who violate conditions of probation, including not attending the BIP, are typically sanctioned with jail time. The Alma Center participates in the probation reviews through the submission of progress reports, and attendance at the reviews.

**Mandatory reporting.** Alma Center facilitators report alleged and confirmed knowledge of any recurrence of violence, or threats of violence to a client’s probation agent or other referral source on the day the information was received. In these situations, facilitators also make immediate contact with Sojourner Family Peace Center’s (SFPC) advocacy program to conduct a pro-active outreach contact and/or visit with the offender’s victim/partner. If an imminent threat is indicated in class or other interaction with the client, Alma Center facilitators will also contact the police and/or the Department of Corrections search unit.

**Attendance Policy.** Regular on-time attendance to program services is a requirement. In the 50-session two-times per week classes, and the Wisdom Walk 40-session three-times per week class, men are allowed six absences. In the 24-session one-time per week class, men are allowed four absences. A client must attend the required number of sessions to complete the program, meaning that absences add additional sessions to the length of the program.

Excused absences are given only for periods of incapacitation (i.e., jail time, hospitalization), so clients are encouraged to use their absences carefully and only in the case of real emergency or need. If absences are an issue, but the client does seem otherwise engaged in the program, we do offer the client an opportunity to reduce absences by completing additional assignments outside of class. Additional assignments do not make-up for missed classes (i.e., clients must attend the required number of classes regardless additional work), rather completion of additional work can be used to eliminate an absence.
Clients who arrive any time after the scheduled class start-time are considered late. If a client arrives late, he is allowed to stay and participate in the class and will not be marked absent, however he will not receive credit for the class and will add an additional session to the length of the program. Facilitators have regular ongoing conversations with clients about their attendance status and clients who struggle with their attendance are reminded of the opportunity to demonstrate engagement through additional work. Facilitators also have regular contact about attendance with the client’s probation agent or other referral source with the goal of working together to motivate and promote attendance before absences become an issue for termination.

Clients who exceed the number of allowable absences are terminated from the program and immediate notice is sent to their probation agent. If the client is demonstrating high risk for ongoing violence or other noncompliance with the criminal sentence, we stand in support conditional jail time or other increased sanctions. If the client is demonstrating engagement and signs of change, but is not functional enough to keep regular attendance, we work with the client and probation agent to promote re-enrollment. In the case of termination and re-enrollment, the client would have to start the program over.

7. Do you offer any substance abuse treatment? If not, to whom do you refer clients who also exhibit with chemical dependency issues?

The Alma Center does not at this time provide substance abuse treatment. Our offices occupy the fourth floor of an office building which houses a state licensed drug and alcohol treatment program on the fifth floor. We are able to make immediate referral of clients with chemical dependency issues to the drug and alcohol program.

8. In addition to the decrease in recidivism, what are signs that the participants of the program are actually growing and changing, rather than merely showing up because they were court ordered to do so?

The transtheoretical model of change (James Prochaska & Carlos Diclemente, In Search of How People Change, 1992) provides a well-researched and evidence-based understanding of the process of intentional change in problem behaviors. An essential construct in this theory is the idea of stages of change, which is a set of distinct attitudinal and motivational stages ordered along a continuum of readiness and actuality of change. We utilize this model in a variety of ways in our services; for example, to make appropriate program referrals from the central screening and to match an intervention plan to a client's stage of change. Most directly relevant to the question at hand, we utilize this model to help us assess and understand the extent to which clients are moving and engaging in the process of change. An understanding of the model is particularly important in the early stages of change, as the processes here center more around a person's thinking, feelings and decisional balance, rather than on behavior. In other words, the process of change can be happening even in the absence of discrete, measurable behavioral change.

To be clear, this is not to say that we tolerate ongoing violent, abusive or controlling behavior that may occur in the early stages of change, or at any time (as “relapse to problem behavior” is the unfortunate norm in intentional behavioral change, not the exception). No matter when or how such behavior happens, the perpetrator is responsible and must be held accountable. Rather, it is to say that the

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model of change helps us understand where a person is in the process, as well as to inform the kinds of intervention strategies that have the greatest efficacy for continuing to promote motivation and readiness for change.

The following provides some examples from classroom activities and discussions that illustrate movement through the process of change.

Our classes conclude with each participant having an opportunity to offer gratitude for something related to or experienced in class that day. In the early stages of change, the gratitude statements a client offers are typically something to the effect “I am grateful this class is over and I can leave,” or “I am grateful that I’m one day closer to being done with this crap.”

As the change process unfolds, gratitude statements become more substantive and more real. We begin to hear such things as, “I’m grateful for being able to open up to all of you and talk about how I’m feeling and for you to listen and help me understand why I do the things I do;” or “Man, I really saw myself in that conversation we just had, and I’m grateful that I’m beginning to see myself more clearly and understand my own problems;” or “I’m grateful that I’m starting to understand all this stuff is about me, this is my problem, not my partner’s, or my PO’s;” or, “I’m grateful that I’m beginning to get help with my problems, because I’m tired of the same old thing.”

Evidence of change comes not just in the opportunity for gratitude, but throughout the classroom discussion. The men are regularly exposed to new and challenging ideas about the core of who they are—their worldview, their self-understanding, their beliefs and attitudes, their behavior and choices, and their relationships. As in the case of most anybody confronted with new ideas and challenged to change, the men’s initial reactions are often close-minded to change. They may be resistant to new ideas and express strong attachment to their old ways of thinking and acting; or they may be baffled by the ideas in that the concepts are so foreign that they seem ludicrous and impossible to them. For many of the men, the program experience is the first time in their life they are being critically, but compassionately challenged to explore how and why they think and feel the way they do. In this experience their old ideas, which seemed rock solidly true, begin to seem shaky and questionable. As the men begin to open up to the process of change, we begin to hear more ambivalence and confusion about what it is they believe.

Shortly after confusion sets in, we generally begin to see epiphanies. These can be real “ah-ha” moments, or they can be gradually developing new awareness. The client may begin to use language such as, “I used to think...but now I think.” A client may report finding himself in an old familiar circumstance, but remembering classroom discussions and suddenly understanding the circumstance differently. The most important evidence of change we are looking for at this stage is a client recognizing that his thoughts and behaviors are choices, and understanding that he could make a different choice. Once this is achieved the decisional balance starts to move significantly, as clients begin to reassess the drawbacks and cons of their behavior, as well as the benefits and pros of change. As this point we may begin to hear about real behavioral change. A client may report attempting or using new ideas, attitudes, approaches, tools or skills discussed in the classroom in his real life.

Again using examples from the gratitude statement, clients begin to offer statements such as, “I’m grateful that I learned something new and tried it, and even though I felt stupid and ridiculous for doing
it, it turned out way better than normal;” or, “I’m grateful that when I was in a moment where the man-
box made tons of sense to me, I chose to stay out of it.”

We see other very tangible signs of change in clients demonstrating engagement in the program through
voluntary activity. They may stay after class for more discussion; or request an individual appointment
with the facilitator; they may voluntarily attend community events that we hold; they may voluntarily
sign-up for additional classes following completion of MEV; they may keep coming to class after they
officially completed.

Other evidence of change comes to us from their probation agent and partners, who either offer
evidence of change in our routine conversations, or contact us directly to report their experience of
change with the client.

9. How does the decrease in recidivism from your graduates compare to the state’s recidivism rate
for all violent offenders?

The Wisconsin Department of Corrections does not report recidivism rates by offender group, thus we
are unable to find a rate specific for violent offenders. The overall recidivism rate is 51.1%, at which
includes re-incarceration for new offenses as well as for technical violations while on probation/parole
(25% of re-incarcerations).

Wisconsin state statutes define domestic violence by the relationship between the perpetrator and
victim, not the crime itself. Just under 50% of issued domestic violence related charges in Milwaukee
County are considered “violent offenses,” such as battery, or pointing a firearm at another. While a
nonviolent charge does not necessarily indicate there was no violence in the specific criminal incident or
the relationship in general, the distribution between violent and non-violent charges is similar to the
overall criminal population and thereby a reasonable comparison for recidivism rate.

We use data from our most recent 12-month recidivism study as a point of comparison, as this study
includes the most rigorous measures of recidivism. The criminal record was checked 12 months from
the date of intake. Domestic violence arrests were coded as a repeat offense whether or not the charge
ended in conviction. Any new restraining order petitions against the client are also coded as a repeat
domestic violence offense. Violations of probation resulting in incarceration or revocation were
checked with probation agent to determine whether or not the violations were related to domestic
violence. Other criminal charges for the general recidivism rate were coded only if the charge ended in
a conviction.

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<th>Completed program</th>
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<td>Domestic Violence recidivism rate: 5%</td>
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<td>General recidivism rate (includes dv): 10%</td>
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<th>Did not complete program</th>
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<tr>
<td>Domestic violence recidivism rate: 27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>General recidivism rate (includes dv): 43%</td>
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10. How does the Wisdom Walk relate to the trauma-informed approach?
Wisdom Walk is our most intensive trauma resolution intervention. The program takes an integral approach combining trauma resolution strategies and methodologies from the new research in psychology and neuroscience with indigenous healing wisdom.

Alma Center worked in partnership with Jojopah Nsorama, a traditional healer/shaman and initiated Wisdom Keeper of the Dagara Tribe of Burkino Faso, West Africa, to develop the Wisdom Walk process specific to our target population of urban men of color, primarily African American men. Wisdom Walk draws from the Dagara understanding of trauma as the wounds and healing necessarily encountered along the life path to becoming a fully realized and initiated adult who is able to assume their responsible role in family and cultural empowerment. This ancient wisdom is placed in the context and historical grounding of the cultural realities and heritage of Blacks in the Western world, incorporating the historical trauma of slavery and cultural wounds from disempowerment and oppression, and the consequent realities of generational family violence and dysfunction. The program also specifically addresses the wounds of patriarchal, sexist and misogynist belief systems for individuals, families and community, with particular attention to the destructive interplay of all forms of oppressive ideologies including, most notably, racism and sexism.

Wisdom Walk is organized around the five basic elements of the Dagara medicine wheel (fire, water, earth, nature, mineral). Participants progress through the program as if on a personal journey through these elemental landscapes with exercises and activities focused on cognitive, affective and behavioral recovery/restoration and healthy development.

The cognitive component is centered on self-knowledge and healthy decision making, here exercises include: teachings on the nature of healing from an indigenous perspective; on self-mastery; conscious awareness and the mind-body-spirit connection.

The affective component is focused on self-awareness for emotional intelligence. To achieve this end exercises include: personal storytelling; group processing; relevant cinema; relevant poetry and music; rituals and ceremony based on indigenous healing wisdom.

The behavioral component is focused on self-achievement and interpersonal intelligence and includes exercises on anxiety reduction (meditation, qi gong, breath work, yoga); individual and collective creation of shrines/totems; preparatory tasks and participation in ritual and ceremony; preparatory tasks and delivery of the Presentation of Learning; conscious awareness exercises as weekly homework.

While Wisdom Walk provides psycho-education through each of these components, the program also incorporates the understanding that people can not think their way out of severe trauma. As indicated in trauma resolution research, Wisdom Walk is soul recovery work, and includes meditative practice and healing community/individual rituals to move energy stuck through trauma. While based in the Dagara medicine wheel and incorporating components of spiritual growth, the Wisdom Walk is non-denominational (open to all faiths and agnostics), open to men from any cultural group and respectful of the incredible diversity of individual personal experiences.

Appendix E includes samples of recent Presentation of Learning essays from Wisdom Walk graduates which provide greater detail about the change process supported in this programming.
11. Do you have any contact with the victims of your clients? What is the protocol if a client makes a statement threatening the safety of a current or former intimate partner?

We believe that partner contact is a critical component for enhancing offender accountability as well as for ensuring safety of victims. We further believe that the contact should be conducted through a collaborative partnership with victim advocates. We have worked in the past with SFPC to implement a partner contact/education program, but have had very limited success in reaching victims/partners and retaining contact, or engaging women in supportive services.

The launching of our new central screening and referral process for the three Milwaukee county domestic violence courts has given us an opportunity to implement an enhanced approach for victim contact for criminal justice system referrals. As part of the central screening we are collecting up-to-date victim/partner contact information for all offenders sentenced in the domestic violence court. We are working collaboratively with SFPC to design and implement a system for proactive outreach to victims immediately following sentencing. The outreach would provide basic information on the BIPs, process and likelihood of change, as well as information on the specific program the offender will be attending. Many of the victims in the criminal justice process will have pre-existing relationships with court-based victim advocacy, and we are hopeful that the outreach will be more successful in promoting ongoing contact, as well as their ongoing engagement with advocacy and support.

We are currently in the planning stage and hope to launch this comprehensive effort by February of 2015.

As to protocol for response to threatening statements, please see the answer in regard to offender accountability.

12. Please explain some of the ways in which you partner with Sojourner Family Peace Center for the purposes of victim/partner outreach and family intervention.

Please see the answer above.

13. Do you have any additional statistics on the numbers of program component admission and completion rates? What percentage of individuals complete the entire program?

In our first seven years an average of 59% of the men who began program services (defined as attended and completed an intake interview) completed the full six-month 24-session program.

In 2012 we built upon new research on effective trauma resolution methodology significantly to enhance and re-design MEV as a far more intensive intervention - from 24 to 50 required sessions, attending a minimum of twice per week. We have used the increased number of sessions to incorporate more diverse and directed trauma resolution strategies.

We recently completed a 12-month recidivism study for the first group of clients who completed the 50-session program (in a six month period from January 2013-June 2013). The data indicates a completion rate for program services of 69% during this period.
In regard to outcome, completion of program services is associated with a decrease of twenty-two percentage points from 27% to 5% in recidivism rate for domestic violence offenses. This represents a 92% decrease in recidivism rate. Prior outcome studies showed and 87% decrease in recidivism; however, the studies are not exactly comparable as the current results reflect a 12-months and the prior was 18-months. We will be repeating the recidivism study at 18 months from the date of intake to be able to compare these results.

We are incredibly pleased with the results from our current study, but to be honest we are also somewhat surprised. Our completion rate increased significantly as we demanded much more, in terms of both time and substance, from our clients. We are continuing to talk with clients about their experiences and trying to understand the reasons so that we can continue to replicate the process and achieve these very positive results.

14. Does the Alma Center maintain a relationship with the graduates after they complete your program, and if so, in what ways?

As indicated, clients who complete MEV are regularly referred into the Restorative Fatherhood or Wisdom Walk programs. In this way we work to keep graduates engaged with agency services.

We have ongoing relationships with many of our graduates who continue to call us or stop into our offices on a very regular basis for listening, mentoring, advice or celebration of something they achieved. To date, however, the ongoing contact has been sustained through informal processes and largely reliant upon the self-initiative of the graduate.

The two exceptions to this are: 1) We host an annual holiday party which includes a toy-drive sponsored by Wisconsin Hospitality Group (the franchise owner of all Wisconsin Pizza Huts and Applebees). All of our current clients and graduates are invited to the celebration. The gifts arrive unwrapped and each man has the opportunity to choose gifts for his children, wrap the gift and write each child a personal note. The holiday party is also our annual opportunity to check in with graduates, talk with them about any issues they experienced during the year, and recruit them back to the program if there appears to be any concerns; 2) The Wisdom Walk facilitator maintains a minimum of monthly contact with all Wisdom Walk graduates, and the graduates are pro-actively invited back to the program on a monthly basis for a community meal. The Wisdom Walk graduates also frequently drop-in to class.

We believe the ongoing contact and peer outreach is an important component to support the journey and process of change. To date we simply have not had the funding to support time for staff members to initiate and sustain this contact across all programs. We were able to use funding for Wisdom Walk build in staff time for the facilitator to keep regular contact with graduates. The peer outreach component of Wisdom Walk is a pilot-test for us to integrate these services across all programs.

15. Is here a way to determine monetarily how much you save city and/or state government with your success of creating non-violent offenders?

We can calculate a monetary savings for the criminal justice system referrals.
For every man who successfully completes the Alma Center program and does not have a repeat criminal offense within 12 months of intake, the State of Wisconsin saves $33,251 annually in incarceration costs (based upon 2012 Wisconsin Department of Corrections’ operating cost of $91 a day per capita). In other words, our 7-month community based program costs approximately $2,400 per individual compared to $33,251 for one year in Wisconsin’s prison system.

16. Please feel free to briefly share any additional information about your program that may be helpful for our reviewers to know.

Oh my...we have written such lengthy answers to your questions. We believe we have covered the important elements in our program. We greatly appreciate the reviewer’s time in reading our full application and thank everyone for getting all of the way to this point!

We have included some additional information in appendices as follows:

Appendix A: A copy of the Alma Center’s Policy Statement: NFL and Domestic Violence
Appendix B: Alma House Program Summary
Appendix C: Select Demographics of Alma Center participants
Appendix D: Program Application
Appendix E: Samples of Presentation of Learning essays from Wisdom Walk graduates

We also encourage reviewers to visit our website www.almacenter.org and watch the Alma Center movie, Breaking the Cycle. The website also includes access to local news article on the Wisdom Walk and TEAM ALMA bike team’s fundraising bike ride across Iowa in RAGBRAI, and a “music video” of TEAM ALMA’s adventures.

17. Please provide copies of any assessments, screening tools or evaluations utilized.

Please see Appendix D for copies of the assessment and screening tools used in our program intake, including the following:

1) Survey 1: Pre/post attitudinal assessment, Perceived justification/responsibility for Intimate Partner Violence survey developed by the Alma Center, and Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory-AAPI-2 by Stephen Bavolek and Richard Keene;
2) Background and demographic assessments: Partner/Victim Information; Employment Information; Domestic Violence Intake Survey;
3) Trauma Assessments: Alma Center Trauma History screen; Adverse Childhood Experiences-ACE Survey; Structured Instrument for Disorders of Extreme Stress-van der Kolk 2013;
4) Domestic Violence Risk: AMMEND Violence Risk Inventory
October 21, 2014

The Mary Byron Project
10401 Linn Station Road
Louisville KY 40223

Re: Letter of Support for the Alma Center for the Mary Byron Celebrating Solutions Award

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to support the selection of the Alma Center for the Mary Byron Celebrating Solutions Award. The Alma Center has an exemplary reputation in the Milwaukee County criminal justice community. It takes on the very difficult job of advocating for domestic violence victims by changing the behavior of the offender. We know from experience and research that most domestic violence victims decide for varied and complicated reasons to continue in the relationship, thus the Alma Center’s work to transform the beliefs and behaviors of perpetrators is absolutely critical to ending domestic violence and making families in our community safe.

I have personally taken the opportunity to attend a panel discussion with graduates of the Alma Center’s Residential Program for the reintegration of domestic violence prisoners. Here I witnessed firsthand the transformation of the graduates after spending a mere three months in the intensive Alma Center program. The men were able to provide detailed substantive information about what they learned, how and why they changed, and the on-going support they receive in their current struggle to accomplish successful reintegration into our community. The Alma Center graduates had stable employment and were learning to be responsible community members as well as better partners and fathers.

The Alma Center’s innovative evidence based trauma informed approach to working with male perpetrators is strongly supported by a growing body of research. I am impressed with the impact of their programs, as indicated by the evaluation results showing a dramatic 86% decrease in the recidivism rate of program graduates as compared to domestic violence offenders who did not complete the program. The Alma Center’s success in working with domestic violence offenders enables
participants to identify and understand the trauma in their own lives so they are able to acquire the skills and understanding to change.

The criminal justice system is dedicated to prosecuting crime and holding those who break the law responsible, but we also hope to stop the cycle of violence in our community. The Alma Center is making this goal a reality. It is a unique asset for public safety in our community.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

John Chisholm
District Attorney
Milwaukee County

JTC/sks
October 29, 2014

Kathy Paulin
Celebrating Solutions Awards
Mary Byron Project, Inc.
10401 Linn Station Road, Suite 116
Louisville, Kentucky 40223

Dear Ms. Paulin:

The Milwaukee Commission on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (MCDVSA) fully supports the Alma Center’s application for a Mary Byron Celebrating Solutions Award.

Created by the City of Milwaukee Common Council in 1979, the Commission serves as our community’s Coordinated Community Response (CCR) to domestic and sexual violence by establishing a central focus point for the coordination and discussion of Milwaukee’s needs in monthly and sub-committee meetings. The CCR is comprised of a multidisciplinary team of system and community-based organizations, educators, healthcare providers, faith leaders, as well as survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. The Commission provides a centralized community conduit for program dissemination, development of community awareness activities, professional training, and policy and practice advocacy in the areas of abuse and assault.

The Alma Center has been an integral partner in the Commission’s efforts to end the generational cycle of domestic violence. Their agency is one of the few offender programs on our board, providing critical insight on issues relevant to batterers treatment and domestic violence as a whole. Representatives of the agency attend our monthly meetings. The Center’s Executive Director, Terri Strothoff, serves on the Executive Committee of the Commission, lending her expertise to give strategic direction and oversight for the Commission’s work. In addition to the MCDVSA, Alma Center contributes to wide variety of other domestic violence initiatives, including a partnership with Sojourner Family Peace Center, the Milwaukee County Court Processing team, and efforts of the statewide coalition, End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin.

Think Health. Act Now!
Milwaukee can only partially address domestic violence and sexual assault if our focus is solely on the needs of victims. To truly break the cycle of violence, we must also change the behavior of batterers. The Alma Center’s dedicated and knowledgeable staff work tirelessly to provide compassionate support for hundreds of men in our community each year. The agency employs rigorous evidence-based measures to continuously evaluate its approaches, allowing Center programming to evolve and meet the complex needs of their clients. While Alma Center boasts impressive research-based accomplishments, such as an 86% decrease in recidivism rate for domestic violence-related criminal offenses and a 60% decrease in recidivism rate for all criminal offenses among those who complete their Men Ending Violence program, it is perhaps the moving testimonies of The Alma Center’s clients, which truly speak to their great successes as a program.

The City of Milwaukee and its Commission are grateful for The Alma Center’s contributions to our board and to the community as a whole. Simply put, the Alma Center’s programs are effective and regarded as innovative, not only in our community, but throughout the country. We welcome the opportunity for Alma to receive recognition for their progressive work and to serve as a model for colleagues across the country.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (414) 286-2997 or eperkin@milwaukee.gov.

Respectfully,

Erin M. Perkins
Coordinator
Milwaukee Commission on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
Kathy Paulin
Celebrating Solutions Awards
Mary Byron Project, Inc.
10401 Linn Station Road, Suite 116
Louisville, KY 40223

Dear Ms. Paulin,

I am writing in support of the Alma Center and the work it does to promote offender accountability and peaceful change in our community. The Alma Center is an important collaborative partner and ally of Sojourner Family Peace Center (SFPC), the largest and most comprehensive domestic violence service agency in the Milwaukee community. SFPC and the Alma Center agree that domestic violence is a learned behavior, which can be changed. We believe that working to change abusive behavior is crucial to protecting victims and children, making families safer and breaking the cycle of domestic violence in our community. Together we continue to improve the ways that we serve families impacted by domestic abuse. We believe that transforming our community through partnerships is not only possible, but critical, and we continue to explore ways to work together towards this goal.

SFPC believes that the trauma resolution work that the Alma Center does is effective because the majority of domestic violence perpetrators have their own extensive history of witnessing and experiencing violence and abuse in their families of origin and streets of our community. The Alma Center’s innovative and evidence-based trauma-informed approach to working with perpetrators is strongly supported by experience and a growing body of research.

I have witnessed the profound and deep transformation of Alma Center graduates who readily acknowledged and took responsibility for their violent and abusive pasts and were different men because of their participation.

SFPC is actively engaged in working with the criminal justice system to enhance victim safety and offender accountability in the Milwaukee community. We believe the Alma Center is an essential component of an effective and coordinated criminal justice response. We sincerely appreciate all the Alma Center does to help us achieve this goal and hope that the agency continues to be supported for their good work.

Lastly, we believe that the approach that the Alma Center is using is worthy of replication in other communities. The Alma Center’s programs are successful.
because of a combination of a meaningful curriculum, responsiveness to the participants, and highly compassionate and skilled facilitators. In order to replicate this model elsewhere, these components should be closely adhered to.

If you would like to discuss this further, please feel free to contact me at 414-276-1911. I would be happy to talk with you more about the work we do with the Alma Center.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Carmen Pitre
Executive Director
Sojourner Family Peace Center

cc: Terri Strothoff
Dear Applicant:

Our letter dated October 2003, stated you would be exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and you would be treated as a public charity, rather than as a private foundation, during an advance ruling period.

Based on the information you submitted, you are classified as a public charity under the Code section listed in the heading of this letter. Since your exempt status was not under consideration, you continue to be classified as an organization exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Code.

Publication 557, Tax-Exempt Status for Your Organization, provides detailed information about your rights and responsibilities as an exempt organization. You may request a copy by calling the toll-free number for forms, (800) 829-3676. Information is also available on our Internet Web Site at www.irs.gov.

If you have general questions about exempt organizations, please call our toll-free number shown in the heading.

Please keep this letter in your permanent records.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Choi
Director, Exempt Organizations
Rulings and Agreements
## Budget 2014

### EXPENSES

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