

Korina Barry ([00:18](#)):

Boozhoo>Hello everyone. Thank you for tuning into the cashew podcast. In today's episode, I chat with Tracy Sjoberg of the battered women's justice project located here in Minnesota during our conversation, Tracy shares what we know about intimate partner violence and domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, Tracy shares more about the work of the battered women's justice project and how some of that work has shifted during the pandemic. She also shares resources and suggestions for supporting survivors and those at risk of abuse. During these times, we hope you enjoy the episode and find it helpful. And also just a heads up that we will be taking a break and we will return in a couple of weeks with new content. That's not specifically focused on the pandemic, so we hope you continue to take care and be well.

Korina Barry ([01:21](#)):

Thank you everyone for tuning into the CASCW podcast today. I am chatting with Tracy Shoberg. Hi, Tracy. How are you?

Tracy Shoberg ([01:29](#)):

How are you? Thanks for having me.

Korina Barry ([01:31](#)):

I'm good. Could you share a little bit more about yourself with our listeners?

Tracy Shoberg ([01:36](#)):

I would love to. So my role at the battered women's justice project (BWJP) is the safer project deputy director. Um, so I work primarily with family court issues and child custody, and specifically with our safer approach. Um, and so that is really our approach to making decisions in intimate partner violence related to family law matters so safer is actually an acronym if people haven't heard of it before. Um, and that stands for screening for intimate partner violence, assessing the nature and context, focusing on the effects of intimate partner violence and responding to the lived experience of intimate partner violence. So it really promotes informed decision making, um, on a very individualized case by case basis. And it's a whole system developed with tools and resources to help craft child centered decisions. Um, and a little bit more about me before I came to BWJP, I was practicing family law, um, at a legal aid organization here in Minnesota. Um, so I was serving low income clients, primarily survivors of domestic violence and intimate partner violence and civil matters. So a lot of orders for protection, harassment, restraining orders, divorce, and child custody matters.

Korina Barry ([03:16](#)):

Thank you so much. And how are you doing just generally, you know, it has been quite a year and we are, I believe in month four, maybe going into month five then of pandemic life here in Minnesota. And there's also an uprising happening all around us. And just, how are you, how are you doing? How are you adjusting with everything that's been happening this year?

Tracy Shoberg ([03:39](#)):

Yeah, it's been, been quite a year and we're only in June. Um, and I think just like everyone else, I'm, you know, taking one day at a time, as you said, we're still in a global pandemic. We have a lot of civil unrest, um, in our entire country following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. And I think it's, it's really

important. I think now more than ever to engage members of our communities and get active and know what's happening, but also taking time to take care for yourself. So I'm doing a lot of walks with my dog these days.

Korina Barry ([04:21](#)):

I'm glad you've got, I call them my fur babies. I'm thankful to have fur babies. And in all of this that's happening this year, yes,

Tracy Shoberg ([04:29](#)):

The walks are crucial.

Korina Barry ([04:32](#)):

Could you share a little bit more with our listeners about the battered women's justice project as a whole, and even if you want to share how some of your work and the way you all do your work, how it's been impacted in pandemic, if at all, or

Tracy Shoberg ([04:47](#)):

Yes. So the battered women's justice project is a national training and technical assistance organization. So primarily we provide training and technical assistance services to professionals and those engaged in criminal and civil legal systems. So I like to explain it, like, think about everyone who touches those legal systems. We want to help support their work and how we can best support their work is by training, giving them tools and resources. So that's primarily what we do. Um, so we work a lot with advocates, attorneys, mental health professionals. We also do judicial trainings for judges. Um, it kind of runs the gamut of people that, um, we reach out to, and certainly with being a national organization, typically in a normal year, we do a lot of traveling for trainings. Um, a lot of site visits if we're helping, um, certain counties implement safer, for example, and with the pandemic, of course, all of our travel is paused.

Tracy Shoberg ([06:05](#)):

So BWJP has really had to rethink a lot of how we reach people. How do we train and provide resources in a way that's accessible, um, and in a way that people aren't going to get some of that video conference fatigue that I'm sure we're all experiencing. And particularly right now, BWJP is based in Minneapolis. And so, um, just like a lot of other organizations were, you know, starting to look at these large institutions that we work with, like the courts and seeing how racism is an underpinning to the courts. They were built by the dominant white culture for members of the dominant white culture. So a lot of the problems they were built to address and the solutions that they offer to those problems don't work for the majority of people. Um, and we're, you know, looking at the need for, you know, some big structural shifts and some transformation there as well. So our work has definitely shifted from previous years, but in a necessary shift, I think

Korina Barry ([07:21](#)):

Now is the best time for everyone to be really reflective and digging deep and looking at policies and practices and identifying, you know, are we really working towards anti-racism and are we being responsive to the communities we serve and support? Thank you for sharing that. That's good to hear. And as we talk about intimate partner violence, could you share with listeners like what we know so far of how the pandemic and even the stress, the trauma related to the uprising and everything happening here in Minneapolis, but also, you know, if you're, if you're seeing changes in impact nationally, how is

all of this impacting intimate partner violence? Are we seeing increases? Are we seeing different types of intimate partner violence, anything that would be helpful for our listeners to be aware of?

Tracy Shoberg ([08:12](#)):

Yeah, sure. That's a good, a good question. So I think the first thing to be aware of is that we are seeing increases in domestic violence and intimate partner violence on a global scale. So certainly throughout our country, but also worldwide we're seeing increases. And these increases really stem from a number of things that we're seeing. So we like to think about the pandemic as this very enabling environment. There's a lot of triggers for conflict. So for example, there's a lot of restricted movements, self isolation. And of course we had some government mandated stay at home orders, which some are in place and some are being lifted, but all of these things create increased exposure to abusers and families. We've also seen increased unemployment. A lot of people lost their jobs. A lot of people are furloughed, so they're not going to work. And this has increased financial stress, certainly, um, all over the country.

Tracy Shoberg ([09:21](#)):

And generally, I think we've also seen just a scarcity of community resources. So access to health care certainly looks different access to food. And of course, when we think about accessing resources, they are limited if the buildings are physically closed and not open to the public. So access to things like the courts have been impacted. And just like we were talking about generally, there's more stress and anxiety right now, right. Um, we have, you know, anxiety over our own health and wellbeing. We're worrying about the safety of family and friends, and if they're being smart and safe and we're just living in, in this new reality of full of unknowns, it's unpredictable, it's uncertain. And we know that all of these things together, again are triggers for conflict. And in times like these people use really poor coping mechanisms and sometimes that is violence. So we're certainly seeing increases in domestic violence and intimate partner violence right now, in addition to just the increases you asked about, you know, has that changed abuse or abusive behaviors.

Tracy Shoberg ([10:40](#)):

And we have listened to a lot of attorneys and advocates on the ground these last few months. And what we've really discovered is that COVID-19 has created these new avenues for abusive behavior. Um, so there's these, you know, new power and control tactics, this new coercive, controlling behaviors that have come from this enabling environment. And that's, that's tricky, right? Because coercive control is already one of those very nuanced things. It can be hard for people to see and understand. And now that can look a little bit different. So we're seeing things like forced excessive hand washing or the opposite limiting someone's use of soap or hand sanitizer, another example, threatening to expose the family or telling the family you've been exposed. Um, so there's just these new tactics that we haven't seen before and new avenues for abusers and BWJP actually, man, a short video on this that really goes in depth about coercive control and what that can look like right now in the COVID-19 era. Um, so I encourage listeners if they're interested to go, um, take a look at that it's on our website. Um, and that's pretty easy. It's www.bwjp.org. And it's based off the power and control wheel that was originally developed in the eighties and by the domestic abuse intervention programs up in Duluth. So it's a nice visual and an easy way to take some of that information in use in your other professions or use to help someone, you know,

Korina Barry ([12:39](#)):

We can link to your website to the video in our description and on the website to make it a lot easier too, for folks to find that. And I know for listeners who may not, where if we're in different States, this could be looking different as far as reopening and the phases we're at and if we're reopening and if we're going back, you know, like it's related to the pandemic. And so everyone's in different places, as far as if folks are still hunkered down or if it's like, Oh, people are feeling like this is over and we can, you know, kind of resume whatever new normal is. And I'm just thinking of the, like the spectrum of where folks are at, whether they're someone who is a loved, one of someone who may be in an abusive, violent situation that they're, you know, maybe unsure of or worried about and trying to do some of that identification and trying to know when to step in how to support.

Korina Barry ([13:31](#)):

And then even the professionals like, so we have our listeners, our audience tends to be a mix of frontline, social workers, supervisors, County, state, community leaders, um, you know, advocates, guardian ad litem, attorneys, you know, so it's, it's also a mix of people kind of professional supporting individuals and families in different parts of systems involvement who are maybe also like, you know, when resources are harder to access right now, or they just look so different, you know, maybe you're not seeing, or maybe people aren't even clear like our anger management groups taking place are, you know, what does therapy look like in a pandemic?

Korina Barry ([14:10](#)):

Um, so there's so many unknowns and questions for people, but I'm wondering, and maybe that's a two part question for the different positions people are in. Cause I know they're, like I said, there are people who are probably sitting at home and maybe they are hunkered down and connecting with family, friends by phone or zoom or FaceTime, whatever it is. And maybe they're concerned about someone in their life. And if you have any advice or suggestions on how to navigate those concerns, um, cause I'm sure it's complex and you have to really consider safety of someone and knowing where people are at. So maybe that question first before professionals, but yeah,

Tracy Shoberg ([14:45](#)):

So you're exactly right. It is, you know, I think everyone right now is in a state of confusion. We see things right now happening on a very County by County basis, a very state specific basis. And so that's led to a lot of confusion. Um, and certainly if, you know, you're looking to help support those impacted by domestic violence or intimate partner, violence, family, friends, those in the community, thinking about doing those small things that can help ease stress, make that environment a little bit less stressful, a little bit less anxiety. So really small acts of support can be helpful, whether that's, you know, dropping off a casserole for your friend dropping off coloring books or other kids' activities to help take some of that parenting stress away. Um, and certainly like you said, make use of technology. One of the things I think everyone has realized is that need for those virtual check-ins.

Tracy Shoberg ([15:55](#)):

If we can't see people in person, we still need some human contact and you can still be a, a sympathetic ear through phone calls or through video conferences like zoom or WebEx. Um, I would also say, you know, you can look for signs of distress, you know, hear it in their voice and making sure you're reliable presence. Maybe have a check in time every week to see how they're doing, um, you know, talk about safety planning with them and know that that probably looks a little bit different right now than it did in, in January. Um, and so we like to say social distancing doesn't mean emotional distancing. Um, and so

continuing to build those connections and just like you said, these things are going to continue to shift. As things start to reopen. We're seeing now States start to pull back from reopening and really just understanding that we need to be aware that how the things were the day before might not be how they are tomorrow.

Tracy Shoberg ([17:08](#)):

Always remember too, that you can always report concerns to child protective services. If you think that is a safe thing to do. Um, and right now there's a lot of pros and cons to different things, certainly with our communities of color, um, knowing that that's not always helpful and can certainly be harmful in some situations. So just really thinking through everything very carefully, always putting safety as your number one priority. Even if you know your best intentions you want to help, you also have to think of the impact that those actions will have on individuals.

Korina Barry ([17:48](#)):

Right. And when we think of.. That's a big discussion to get into. But We're hearing, you know, or we are seeing more and more conversations about defunding the police and defunding systems and that there's this really important parallel or, and, or like conversation we need to be having about the child welfare system about social work in general, you know, when the response is send more social workers in, well, we have, we have to dissect that a little bit and remember this painful history with social work and communities of color. And so we could go on and on about that for sure. But I do think that's a great point because especially right now in pandemic during this uprising, whether it's community side or it's focused on the system side and they may be struggling with how to navigate and how to support, and maybe having that worry of, if I make that call to child protection, this could be, this could really negatively change the course of this family's lives, or maybe it is very, it's very high risk and there is a lot of great concern. And so I think that's really important to remember. And like you said, kind of really think through that and be thoughtful and intentional. And do you have specific advice or suggestions for the workers, advocates, you know, guardians, other folks who are kind of on the system side that are supporting individuals and families right now, and, you know, trying to do their best to be supportive, to be helpful, to keep individuals safe, keep families together, all of those things during really stressful, challenging time.

Tracy Shoberg ([19:17](#)):

Yeah. This is a great question. And first and foremost, what we have been telling professionals webinar after webinar is to number one, remember that you know how to do your job. Um, I think it's really easy right now in this chaos, this time of heightened stress and anxiety to really feel frazzled and panicked and feel a little frozen. And so it's really important to, you know, remember that you are rooted and your, you know, jobs, basic principles, those core tenants of your job, and you know what you're doing, even if, sometimes it doesn't feel like it. Um, and even if the world looks a little bit different, second, some advice or suggestions, I think as we previously mentioned, we do have concerns about unreported or under-reported child abuse, neglect and maltreatment right now. And one of the biggest contributing factors is I'm sure the child welfare professionals have seen as that children aren't having regular contact with those typical mandated reporters.

Tracy Shoberg ([20:30](#)):

So when you think about life, you know, pre pandemic people were having pretty routine doctor's appointments. Kids were going to school and they were seeing teachers and school nurses and

counselors, and they're not seeing those individuals anymore on a regular basis. And so we know that people like teachers and school nurses account for 20% of reports of neglect. And so just being Oh, aware of that, even though there aren't, those reports come in, it doesn't mean that abuse isn't happening. And I think that also so goes to this concern that we've been seeing, something we anticipate as the evidence of abuse has really shifted dead and in some circumstances disappeared altogether. So when you think about the child welfare professionals typically go to different sources to gather information, um, they're looking for that corroborating evidence and that might not be there anymore. So they might not have school records.

Tracy Shoberg ([21:42](#)):

They might not have doctor visit notes, certainly less than less people are making phone calls to the police for help, if there's a domestic violence incident. So there's not going to be reports of calls to the police, no incident reports, no arrests coming from someone in the home. And so again, just because they're not seeing that corroborating evidence doesn't mean the abuse isn't happening. And with that, we think that which are the pandemic, the isolating child welfare professionals might be the first set of eyes on a child outside of the family. And what we do with safer is it's all about understanding the nature and the context of the abuse. There's no premature judgment, it's a very systematic approach. And you really have to understand how the behaviors, including abusive behaviors contribute to the fight of the family. So we see a lot of fusion looking at the protective parent and seeing that as an abusive behavior.

Tracy Shoberg ([22:57](#)):

So for example, we've seen discipline as a protective action. So if mom doesn't do the discipline, dad will do it and hold do it a lot worse. So therefore mom is taking that role of the disciplinarian. Well, without doing any of that digging it sure looks like some of those discipline behaviors by a mom are, you know, could be considered abusive when that's not happening. And certainly now, if families are, you know, hunker down, stuck in their house, we've seen survivors not being cooperative, not wanting to talk to people outside the home. And that could be a protective measure because again, their resources are limited. There's not a lot of options, you know, right now certainly leaving the home right. Is more dangerous than ever. So really trying to understand again, how those behaviors are contributing to the function of the family as a whole. And this is all, you know, really easy to say. Of course, when, when at the end we know that child welfare professionals, they have to make a judgment, they have to do an assessment, but we're seeing this as maybe a time to just slow down, gather that information, ask those questions and have your ears open and your eyes open for a bit longer, knowing that they're in the positions to discern if there's intimate partner violence, domestic violence, and, and what that means in the individual circumstances,

Korina Barry ([24:32](#)):

I'm thinking of support. And, you know, you mentioned, uh, some suggestions previously for ways individuals can support, um, loved ones and, and, and people in their lives. And then I also think of everything that's happened. That's been happening in the pandemic and has, has increased so much following the uprising around like mutual aid and like collective community support. And when I say mutual aid and collective support, like food distribution, um, hygiene and other household supplies, the way, you know, following, I know even before that folks had done like pop set up, pop up food shelves, all over cities, um, with food insecurity and just the financial impact of the pandemic on families and make trying to make sure families and individuals have food and other necessary supplies. And then following, you know, the uprising where, you know, especially here in Minneapolis, we see it and, and st

Paul where their school communities without grocery stores and pharmacies or stores that they would go buy important household supplies and items for.

Korina Barry ([25:31](#)):

And so then community quickly rallied, and that's just really grown and expanded and really includes to our unhoused neighbors and relatives and community, and such as seeing lots of mutual aid efforts. And it makes me wonder if I'm sure some of that plays a part and is helpful to individuals and families that may be at risk of intimate partner violence or actively experiencing that, but have you seen other collective ways community has come together or ways that community can be supportive, um, in preventing or getting resources to those who may be especially needed right now that are experiencing intimate partner violence?

Tracy Shoberg ([26:05](#)):

Yeah, we've definitely seen in the last few months, more community engagement more collaboration's, um, there's a very, you know, I always like to say we don't know what we don't know. And so sometimes the best sources of information are, you know, your neighbors, your community members. So really focusing on, you know, this organization does this very well. What does your organization do very well and coming together? And we've certainly seen that with, you know, the uprisings specifically in Minneapolis and also with domestic violence organizations coming together, sharing resources, you know, talking about what kind of safety planning is working for you, what kind of innovative creative strategies are you doing? And an example of that we're really seeing is that survivors need more short term help right now. So what we're hearing from advocates and attorneys on the ground is that they're getting calls and they're, you know, survivors are saying, I need help right now for today, here is my problem.

Tracy Shoberg ([27:13](#)):

And then figuring out, you know, that short term need, um, and kind of making that switch in your brain of, okay, you need, you know, public transit from your house to the health care, you know, on the other side of the city to get your free COVID-19 test, how can we make that happen for you today? Um, and safety planning around that. Um, we've also seen a shift in different types of programming. So you mentioned earlier years are things like therapy happening, our groups meeting. Um, and again, that's varying by program by program, by state, by state, but we are seeing similarly a shift in programming, um, in the batterer intervention programming, again, that shift to immediate crisis management, um, as opposed to longterm goals. So as we're in the pandemic, the uprising is happening. There's a lot of increased stress triggers for violence. And what we're seeing specifically with batter intervention programs is that people are actually engaging more with their group leaders because it's easier and they're making those phone calls in the moment when they need them. And so just being more open and more accessible via technology, um, has really helped, um, with that engagement with both survivors and with perpetrators in the domestic violence field.

Korina Barry ([28:48](#)):

And do you have suggestions for resources, whether that's locally, you know, nationally, whether it's like the videos or just like programming or hubs of information that you think would be helpful for folks on all sides of wanting to get more information and identify.

Tracy Shoberg ([29:05](#)):

Yeah, of course. So again, BWJP, you know, we exist to provide training and technical assistance so we could get that website too. We also have a technical assistance email for any questions that pop up. Um, I always say, call us, email us. We are here to help our website has, again, that COVID-19 video. All of our safer materials are on there as well as a lot of other free resources. So anything from webinars to articles, to, you know, safety planning tools, a lot is on there.

Tracy Shoberg ([29:43](#)):

Um, and we also suggest to that national coalition against domestic violence, they have a ton of resources and specifically, you know, a whole page of COVID-19 resources. And if you know, someone is looking for something very specific, again, give us a call or an email. And part of our job is to, you know, do the work and find that for you and make everything easier and get you what you need to do your job, or to help that family or friend in need.

Korina Barry ([30:11](#)):

Well, thank you so much, Tracy. I really appreciate you taking time to share with us a little bit more about how you're doing and more about your work and how it's shifted and changing and just how we can all kind of show up and be good neighbors and community members and do good work and the roles that we are in for, you know, our professional roles to, to better support community.

Tracy Shoberg ([30:34](#)):

Yes. Thank you for having me

Korina Barry ([30:35](#)):

This podcast was brought to you by the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare. This podcast was produced by Korina Barry. Our series editors were Denise Cooper and Cliff Dahlberg music was composed by Big Cats. And this podcast was supported in part by a grant from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Children and Family Services Division. For more information, please visit the CASCW website cascw.umn.edu. Thank you for listening and stay well everyone.