



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS: Action for Social Change

Part II: Organizing and Communications

Developed by the

Domestic Violence Awareness Project

in collaboration with the

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

a project of the

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Funding

Funding provided by a grant from the
Administration for Children and Families,
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
Grant #90EV0374

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Domestic Violence Awareness Project
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
6400 Flank Drive, Suite 1300 ■ Harrisburg, PA 17112-2791
Phone: 800-537-2238 ■ TTY: 800-553-2508 ■ Fax: 717-545-9456

The Domestic Violence Awareness Project is a project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV), which is administered by the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV). The points of view expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position or policies of the NRCDV or PCADV.

Domestic Violence Awareness Project

Advisory Group

Bea Burgos

Connections for Abused Women and Their Children

Kim Fountain, Ph.D

National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs

C. Hermanex**Alice Lynch**

Women of Color Network

Nicole Lagace

Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Lisa Lederer

Family Violence Prevention Fund

Aleese Moore-Orbih

FaithTrust Institute

Barri Rosenbluth

SafePlace

Angie Rosser

West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Deb Spangler

National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life

Activists & Consultants

Debora Beck-Massey**Megan Daniels****Edna Frantela****Antonieta Gimeno****Brenda Hill****Alison Isler****Cheryl O'Donnell****Ivonne Ortiz****Patricia Perez****Deborah Shawver****Antonia Smith****Lisa Waddell**

Organizations

Domestic Violence Initiatives for Women with Disabilities**National Coalition Against Domestic Violence****National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence (Allianza)****Sacred Circle, National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women****National Network to End Domestic Violence****National Domestic Violence Hotline**

Domestic Violence Awareness Project

Staff

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

Patricia Lima Velame Branco

Kenya Fairley, Second Editor

Ana Hernández, First Editor

Anne Menard

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Kelly Eyer

Amy Gross

Judy Yupcavage

Special Thanks

The Domestic Violence Awareness Project extends special thanks to the many advisory group members and affiliated organization staff who contributed and reviewed text for this manual.

The project staff and advisory group members also thank the many individuals and organizations who contributed information about Domestic Violence Awareness Month events they have planned over the years.

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Domestic Violence Awareness Project

In 1995, the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV) convened several national domestic violence organizations – the Family Violence Prevention Fund, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the National Domestic Violence Hotline and later the National Network to End Domestic Violence – to launch a new effort to support domestic violence programs’ awareness and education efforts for Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM), observed annually in October. The collaborative effort became the Domestic Violence Awareness Project (DVAP).

Over the years, the project has evolved and today the DVAP is a diverse and unique partnership of local, tribal, state and national domestic violence organizations and networks. The DVAP collaborates to collect, develop and distribute resources and ideas relevant to advocates’ ongoing public and prevention awareness and education efforts not only in preparation for DVAM, but also throughout the year. The work of the DVAP strives to creatively bring to life its statement of purpose:

The Domestic Violence Awareness Project (DVAP) supports the rights of all women and girls to live in peace and dignity. Violence and all other forms of oppression against all communities of women and their children must be eliminated. To change belief systems and practices that support violence against all women, the DVAP recognizes and promotes the participation of the entire community in building social intolerance towards domestic violence.

The purpose of the DVAP is to support and promote the national, tribal, state and local advocacy networks in their ongoing public education efforts through public awareness campaigns, strategies, materials, resources, capacity-building and technical assistance. These strategies include campaigns that address the victimization of women throughout their lifespan. The voices, leadership and expertise of women who have been battered are acknowledged as critical and necessary components of these campaigns.

(Created April 2000)

Please visit us online at www.nrcdv.org/dvam or contact the Technical Assistance team of the NRCDV if you would like more information about the project or to be added to our mailing list. Our contact information is:

Domestic Violence Awareness Project
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
6400 Flank Drive, Suite 1300 ■ Harrisburg, PA 17112-2791
Phone: 800-537-2238 ■ TTY: 800-553-2508 ■ Fax: 717-545-9456

Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM) evolved from the “Day of Unity” in October 1981 conceived by the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV). The intent was to connect advocates across the nation who were working to end violence against women and their children. The Day of Unity soon became an entire week devoted to a range of activities conducted at the local, state, and national levels.

The activities conducted were as varied and diverse as the program sponsors but had common themes: mourning those who have died because of domestic violence, celebrating those who have survived, and connecting those who work to end violence.

In October 1987, the first Domestic Violence Awareness Month was observed. That same year marks the initiation of the first national domestic violence toll-free hotline. In 1989 the U.S. Congress passed Public Law 101-112 designating October of that year as National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Such legislation has passed every year since with NCADV providing key leadership in this effort. Each year, the Day of Unity is celebrated the first Monday of Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

– Adapted from the *1996 Domestic Violence Awareness Month Resource Manual* of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

Action for Social Change Parts I and II

Previously released in 2005, *Action for Social Change Part I* explored the topics of Violence Against Women & Social Change and Working Within Our Own Communities. At that time, the manual was intended to be dynamic and organic, as well as reflective of the diversity of perspective throughout the material as the source of its strength. The same holds true today with *Action for Social Change Part II* (2009). As evidenced by the diverse representation of the Domestic Violence Awareness Project Advisory Group members and the constituents each organization serves, both Parts I and II present “a tremendous array and scope of experience, priorities, approaches, analyses and opinions, always from an advocacy-based perspective” (Introduction, *Action for Social Change Part I*, 2005).

This second installment of the Action for Social Change manual intends to generate critical thinking and enhance dialogue regarding community organizing and partnerships, communications and engaging the media. Included in this manual are very practical examples of local events that can be replicated and improved upon to meet the needs of your individual community. Both publications are available for free from the NRCDV via download from the DVAM website at www.nrcdv.org/dvam or by request for a print or CD-ROM copy from the NRCDV Technical Assistance Team via the contact information listed on page vi.

A Note on Gender and Language

At the request of the DVAP Advisory Group, the NRC DV organized conversations in 2003 specifically devoted to exploring the use of gender in the language used to describe the work to end domestic violence: “battered woman” vs. “victims and survivors of domestic violence,” etc. There were, of course, varying perspectives and convictions – while Project Advisory Group members and staff may agree that domestic violence is a gendered phenomenon and part of the broader reality of violence against women that serves to maintain the patriarchy, we struggle with holding ourselves accountable to those we automatically exclude when we present the victim as female/mother and the batterer as male/father. We found that what we were really talking about were our conceptualizations of sex (biology) and gender (social norms) and how they must, at the same time, both converge and remain distinct. We were talking about how we have learned to see things as either/or, for example, pass/fail, guilty/innocent and, in this case, male/female, to identify and judge ourselves and others, and how this limits us and becomes its own means of power and control. We were talking about whether or not we can honestly say we respectfully serve and fully support all victims and survivors of domestic violence. We were talking about the possibility of our own collusion.

The flip side of the same coin, however, was that as we listened to each other – not to figure out how to build our defenses, but to stretch our own thinking – we were also beginning to articulate the enormous possibilities within reach to strengthen immeasurably the work we have already done. Consider the following and the weight it adds to the term, “violence against women”:

If the boundaries around ‘women’ become trenches, what happens to inter-sexual people? Can we really fix a policy that’s so clear about who was born ‘woman’? ... If we were going to decide who is a ‘real’ woman, who would we empower to decide, and how could the check-points be established? ... The modern trans liberation movement is redrawing the boundaries to show the depth and breadth of sex and gender oppression in this society.

(Feinberg, 1996)

We found, therefore, that the questions at hand – what defines woman and who decides – potentially constitute a paradigm shift for us in that they call into question what we define as “the work” and how we do it. We need more time and constant critical thought in order to acknowledge and reconcile the excellent work done by domestic violence programs and advocates with the continued movement that constitutes social change. At this point we have no consensus, we have no answers, we have only the agreement to hold ourselves accountable and listen to each other, question each other and proceed with the work each of us does in the manner that we deem most respectful and integrated. So in the manual you will find that different authors approach the issues differently; it is the hope of project advisory group members and staff to be able, in time to come, to further our analyses and share our “why’s” and “how’s” with you.

The NRC DV staff wish to thank Sujata Warriar for facilitating and contributing to these discussions.

Works Cited

Feinberg, L. (1996). *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Reader's Guide

Introduction

By Brenda Hill

Formerly with Sacred Circle, National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women

Note to the Reader:

The purpose of this study guide is to identify and highlight some of the information contained within the introduction to the second section of Action for Social Change (2008). The author includes points and questions that advocates can use to stimulate conversation and prompt reflective analysis. Our hope is that this guide (as well as the others) will prove useful as advocates and organizers engage in the processes of critical thinking. Feel free to expand the questions we ask, so that they are relevant to your education efforts and remember – there are no right or wrong answers! Like other study guides, the content and format can also work as a basic tool for organizing facilitated discussions. For instance, the author tells us, 'the process is [also] a product.' After you've read the Introduction chapter, spend some time talking and reflecting as a group. The discussion could be limited to, "what does this mean?," or the group could take it much deeper: "Do our belief systems affect how we answer the questions? Are these nuances reflected in our outreach work? How can the group use this information to enrich outreach and education efforts?"

Finally, to acknowledge the throngs of wise women among us, the author says, "Many women may find nothing new reading this Introduction, in which case, we hope you feel validated in what you know."

- Most advocates are women, and much of the power of advocates comes from this fact.
- Social change to end violence against women must be based on women's ways.
- Using women's ways, we validate the reality that every interaction we have is an educational, transforming experience on some level.
- We recognize the process is a "product," the means is the end.
- Preparation for predictable and unexpected responses is an integral part of advocacy and social change.
- Considering consequences and outcomes of educational activities means considering and preparing for people's reactions - politically, personally, emotionally. Key questions might include:
 - Are we prepared for possible backlash or ill-will from some community members?
 - Are we prepared for those who express a commitment to our mission and want to support our work?
 - Are we prepared for a child who discloses what's happening to her and/or at home?

-
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- Are we prepared for the woman who recalls or has a flashback or wants to go to shelter now?
 - Are we prepared even for people who simply want to volunteer?
 - Are we prepared for increased calls from women, from media, from organizations wanting more?

Follow-up question:

In conducting your public education and outreach efforts, have you encountered some of the reactions and issues highlighted by the author, such as backlash, increased calls for services and from media, etc.? How did they manifest in your program? How did you respond to these issues? How do you see your responses changing over time and across issues? Where do you see room for growth and what would it look like? Identify some concrete steps that will support and promote the long term goals of your program.

Introduction

By Brenda Hill

Formerly with Sacred Circle, National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native Women

“Domestic Violence Awareness: Action for Social Change” – it’s a huge, visionary concept. It carries expectations that can be overwhelming for advocates already stretched to the limit in their work to make women and their children safe. Advocacy programs often facilitate workshops and events during Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence Awareness Months, and do their best to distribute printed information throughout the year as standard operating procedure. The month before the “awareness months” usually brings a flurry of activity in preparation. The month after, exhaustion. Many advocates look back with a feeling of relief that “it’s done,” but also a feeling that it isn’t enough, that annual events can’t make the social change necessary to end violence against women.

They are correct. However, given the workload, continued under-funding, under-staffing and the commonly-held public expectation that domestic violence programs alone carry the responsibility for change, advocates should be applauded for all they accomplish. The purpose of the Domestic Violence Awareness Project is to assist advocates in facilitating ongoing educational campaigns that inspire individual and collective action and transformation, i.e, social change. To achieve that lofty goal it is important to consider at least two things: one, the reality of advocates’ lives, and two, the definition of education and how it is accomplished.

The reality of advocates’ lives is often described as “crisis management.” That certainly is true. It is also true that most advocates are women, and much of the power of advocates comes from this fact. This aspect of reality is often ignored or unrecognized, rather than nurtured and celebrated as the foundation of our work as individuals and in creating social change. As women we know that the most powerful support and change comes from our relationships and conversations with each other around a kitchen table. It’s a non-threatening, nurturing environment where we take the time to get to know each other, listen and be heard as equals – as women. We know instinctively how important it is to create a relationship – share space, time, food, feelings, experiences and get to know one another as individuals. We try to create and find trust. We call each other by name or relationship. We go to our women friends for reality checks, to be validated, find support, to learn and to grow. It may be one of the purest forms of “education.”

Social change to end violence against women must be based on women’s ways. “Women’s ways” is less about physically giving birth to children and more about using the power of the feminine. The power of the feminine includes the ability to nurture and take care of life; to accept and respond to others as they are; to value process and to prioritize relationships. The power of the feminine includes an innate spiritual connection. To say American society does not freely acknowledge or accept women’s ways or feminine power is

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an understatement. Therefore, many women (and men) are unaware, dismissive and/or scared of feminine power. As a result, that power lies dormant or becomes distorted.

Formal, institutionalized educational systems discount and undermine the “women’s way” of being and education. We go to work with an entirely different set of expectations for ourselves and others and how to get the job done. We are taught to be “objective,” unemotional and “professional” in a way that requires distancing ourselves from each other. We are taught to research and use resources that give models, samples, information, etc., “recipes,” if you will, for getting the job done. It’s not unusual for workshop facilitators who emphasize process and relationships to have a number of participants say with great frustration, “That’s fine, but when are you going to tell me what to do!” They want step-by-step, concrete information. That’s a valid point and need, however, individual transformation and social change demand more.

When we are in touch with our gifts of womanhood, we know we start with ourselves, with reflection about our own values, spirits, vision and lifeways. We prepare. We set the table, get ready for who and what is coming. We think and talk to each other about what’s going on. We consider the individual(s) and what they are about, who they are. We ponder together about what could or should happen, who’s most able to get something done. We consider everything in context. We consider timing. We consider what the possible consequences and outcomes are. We take our time. We recognize the process is a “product,” the means is the end.

Of course, as women we also know if the house is on fire, take action now, process later! Educational events are generally not dire emergencies. They are more like family holiday gatherings: They can be just a ritual to meet social expectations and something you hope to survive without harm, and you hope to return to your “real life” as soon as possible. Or they can be a celebration of relationships and connections that are nurtured throughout the year. Educational events can open doors of all sorts for people. In fact, that’s what we want. Considering consequences and outcomes of educational activities means considering and preparing for people’s reactions – politically, personally, emotionally.

Key questions might include:

- Are we prepared for the possible political backlash?
- Are we prepared for those who want to step up?
- Are we prepared for a child who discloses what’s happening to her and/or at home?
- Are we prepared for the woman who recalls or has a flashback or wants to go to shelter now?
- Are we prepared even for people who simply want to volunteer?
- Are we prepared for increased calls from women, from media, from organizations wanting more?

Preparation for predictable and unexpected responses is an integral part of advocacy and social change, because “preparation” requires critical thinking, making relationships and connections, and personal and programmatic responsibility. This aspect of educational campaigns and events is similar to working with individual women who have been battered and/or raped: when we hold ourselves up as “helpers,” asking women to trust us with their stories and lives, we’ve made a commitment to be trustworthy, to be ready to respond in an effective, respectful and timely manner.

... “preparation” requires critical thinking, making relationships and connections, and personal and programmatic responsibility.

Using women’s ways, we validate the reality that every interaction we have is an educational, transforming experience on some level. So those conversations at the grocery store or wherever, away from the official worksite, “count.” It’s relationship building. It’s a potential opportunity to share who we are, note what the other’s life is about in some way and exchange information that can inform our work. If we connect as individuals, then it’s more likely we can foster connections to our work. In other words, going out of our way to make a relationship with the people we want to have ownership in our work is a necessity. It can make us wiser and prevent the objectification that we know is destructive and, in the extreme, can be lethal.

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Objectification, i.e., seeing others as less than fully human, results in name-calling, gossiping, labeling, being judgmental and, ultimately, emotional, mental, spiritual and/or physical violence. Objectification isn’t possible when we invest ourselves in sharing and creating connections/relationships with others. That’s why purposefully creating “unofficial” visits, having coffee or lunch together, are strategic aspects of educational campaigns. They are opportunities to make a relationship, share information and concerns and get to know each other’s barriers, frustrations, expectations and expertise.

One thing we know from taking care of children is to expect mistakes, conflicts, misunderstandings, things getting broken, etc., and we know that these are “teachable moments.” They are opportunities to create bonds and strengthen relationships. Sometimes we learn more about our own and each other’s strengths and weaknesses, whom we can trust for what, and so on. It’s been said that when we are in conflict with someone, there’s a greater, purposeful reason for the conflict: the person we are in conflict with is a teacher, bringing us a lesson. Look for the lesson. Conflict is educational. It can enrich us as individuals and enrich our work.

It’s been said that when we are in conflict with someone, there’s a greater, purposeful reason for the conflict: the person we are in conflict with is a teacher, bringing us a lesson. Look for the lesson.

Advocates to end violence against women say their work is not a job, it's a lifeway. Educational campaigns are more effective if seen as part of that lifeway. Providing accurate information

Advocates to end violence against women say their work is not a job, it's a lifeway.

about violence against women is a large part of advocacy and a tool of social change. Using this tool appropriately and effectively is a matter of having a vision of what it is the tool is being used to make and striving to use it in a woman's way. The process of reclaiming women's ways in all that we can is in itself social change.

Many women may find nothing new reading this *Introduction*, in which case, we hope you feel validated it what you know. There are far too many voices telling you otherwise. This second part of *Domestic Violence Awareness: Action for Social Change* offers ideas, samples, models and other tools to assist in the establishment of educational campaigns that engender social change to end violence against women. It is hoped that you will find many things that are useful to you. And, perhaps more importantly, it is hoped you will bring those tools, thoughts about social change and women's ways to the kitchen table for a long conversation with your women friends.