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Community Engagement

ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITIES THROUGH EDUCATION, MOBILIZATION, ORGANIZING, AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO ERADICATE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Community Engagement is a core strategy...

... in preventing domestic violence. By developing awareness about the issue, building communities that will not tolerate violence, and taking action to impact the root causes of violence, community engagement at its core builds safer communities.

Partnering with other organizations is a great way to support community engagement efforts to end violence against women and girls. It can offer more creative approaches, expand the number of community members involved, and help develop partner agencies develop a deeper

understanding of the issue.

In this newsletter, the Community Engagement Committee features 4 partnerships that have helped domestic violence organizations build their community efforts to support survivors and end violence. As you read through these examples, we encourage you to think about ways that you can partner with other agencies to expand your own community engagement efforts.



Apna Ghar



Community Outreach and Education: Apna Ghar

Community outreach & education is about raising community awareness about domestic violence. The goal of this work is to build community members' understanding about the signs of domestic violence, and how to seek help. By partnering with other agencies, domestic violence groups have an opportunity to expand the reach of their community outreach efforts. Neha Gill of Apna Ghar provided this article about their community outreach work.

Over 90% of Apna Ghar's program participants in our domestic violence programs of legal advocacy, counseling, transitional housing and emergency shelter are recent immigrants to the United States, typically having resided here for less than 5 years. As such, they face tremendous cultural and linguistic barriers in addition to their experiences of domestic and other forms of gendered violence. Apna Ghar has served this vulnerable group of mostly women and children from its inception 20 years ago, and has over the years developed expertise around the issue family violence in immigrant communities.

In addition to direct service work, Apna Ghar's staff conduct extensive community level advocacy through education and outreach, with the goals of increasing awareness of the cultural, linguistic and legal barriers faced by immigrant and refugee survivors of domestic violence and trauma. We provide education on immigration issues, cultural and linguistic barriers to mainstream domestic violence service providers, and on domestic violence to immigrant and refugee serving groups. Recently we conducted two "know your rights" workshops for the program participants of Refugee One and the Pan African Association. Staff at these agencies indicated an increasing need to understand the dynamics of domestic violence against the refugee women and children they served.

We are working on developing an advocacy group with staff at these and other immigrant and refugee serving groups to help build their capacity to serve domestic violence survivors. Additionally, Apna Ghar's legal advocates presented to staff at Sarah's Circle, an agency that provides counseling related services to homeless women experiencing domestic violence. We provided information on legal rights and accessing the legal system. We have also developed relationships with area law schools. Recent presentations included a panel discussion on domestic violence related legal services at Northwestern University Law School, and a presentation on socio-cultural and legal barriers faced by immigrant survivors to law students at Loyola University Law School.

Several international delegations have visited Apna Ghar since October, 2010 including delegations from the Middle East, Central and South Asia, Russia, Serbia, Belize and Nicaragua. Apna Ghar also hosted Legal Fellows from Tajikistan and Bangladesh for a two week internship. Their time with us helped them think about areas of improvement in the way services are provided in their countries and to really conceptualize how legal issues intersect with social issues, providing a framework for their community level and policy level advocacy in their home countries. In addition, I have facilitated two workshops in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq to government officials, international and local NGO staff working on issues of gender based violence in the Middle East through a collaborative effort with Heartland Alliance.

Education, outreach, and coalition building is a key component of Apna Ghar's community level advocacy work. Increased awareness leads to a better response, improved quality of services, and empowered communities.



Community Mobilization: Between Friends



Community mobilization brings community members together to take action to address violence against women and call attention to the issue. In this approach, community members speak out on their own, rather than organizational staff being the sole presenters on the issue. By making the issue more public, mobilization can help survivors throughout the community feel supported and help connect residents to our organizations. In partnering with other groups, domestic violence organizations have an opportunity to expand their mobilization efforts. Committee co-chair Colleen Norton provided this article about Between Friends' mobilization work.

Between Friends' Relationship Education: A Choice for Hope (REACH) Teen Dating Violence Prevention Program has provided classroom-based co-ed and gender-specific programs to thousands of middle and high school students each year in Chicago since 1995. Teens and pre-teens learn about healthy and unhealthy relationships as well as oppression, gender roles, healthy ways to break up, and how to help a friend through a variety of interactive curricula. When schools break for summer, Between Friends' REACH team finds new and creative ways to engage youth to take on leadership roles so that they can educate their peers about dating violence.

Last summer Between Friends partnered with Alternatives in order to do just that. Alternatives is a comprehensive, multi-cultural youth development agency that serves youth and families through counseling, leadership development, substance abuse and violence prevention, and academic enrichment programming. Alternatives placed 5 teen interns with Between Friends. The girls spent their mornings at Between Friends learning about the dynamics of dating violence and healthy relationships and they spent their afternoons at Alternatives learning about media literacy and creating videos to educate their peers.

At Between Friends, the teens were able to discuss their own experiences and work on projects and activities that would help others who might be in abusive relationships. The girls created a newsletter profiling Between Friends and the girls' summer activities, a poster that was displayed in area businesses, a zine that was given out in one girls' community, and a workshop about technology abuse in teens' relationships. They also hit the streets doing outreach as they gave out lollipops with facts about teen dating violence and Between Friends hotline number to people at the train station.



We spent time discussing current events related to domestic violence. Two of the girls were interviewed by CBS news when Mel Gibson's misogynist rants filled the airwaves. Also, the Eminem song featuring Rihanna, *Love the Way You Lie*, came out that summer. We discussed this song and the video at length with the teens. They knew that the song was having an impact on many people and wanted to use it to educate others. The girls were able to bring what they learned at Between Friends over to Alternatives and create this public service announcement video: http://www.chainofchange.net/reactions/view/between_friends-ycare/

The partnership between Alternatives and Between Friends worked so well because each organization held only a piece of the puzzle. Between Friends had domestic violence educators and time available while Alternatives had a summer employment program for youth and video editing skills, educators, and equipment. The program contributed to both organizations' missions and it got teens and community members to take action to help end domestic violence in our communities!





Community Organizing: Heartland Alliance & Brighton Park Neighborhood Council

Community organizing aims to build community power to impact the root causes of domestic violence, and to encourage institutions to do a better job. When we speak of community organizing around domestic violence, we mean that survivors are speaking on their own behalf, in partnership with organizational staff, to develop their leadership skills and advocate for change. While domestic violence is not an issue that most Chicago-based organizing groups address, partnerships can help bring the issue to the forefront in creative and supportive ways. The Brighton Park Neighborhood Council and the Heartland Alliance provided this article about how their partnership has helped them build community support for survivors of violence and advocate for safer community institutions..

For the past few years, the Brighton Park Neighborhood Council (BPNC) and the Violence Recovery Services from Heartland Human Care Services, Inc. have formed a strong partnership to serve victims and survivors of domestic violence on Chicago's Southwest side, as well as organize campaigns to end violence in all of its forms. BPNC is a community-based, nonprofit organization serving a low-income working class neighborhood on Chicago's southwest side. BPNC's mission is to create safer communities, improve the learning environment at public schools, preserve affordable housing, provide a voice for youth, protect immigrants' rights, promote gender equity, and fight all forms of violence. For over 30 years, Heartland Human Care Services, Inc. (HHCS) has been providing domestic and sexual violence prevention, intervention, and recovery services through our Violence Recovery Services (VRS) program located on Chicago's southwest side. Today, VRS continues to respond to the needs of our community, by providing culturally and linguistically competent services to a predominant Spanish-speaking community. The partnership between BPNC and VRS has led to a mutual expansion of organizational capacity to impact the lives of women and girls in southwest Chicago.

The partnership has strengthened and brought new resources to the community-wide network that focuses specifically on how to make Brighton Park safer. The network consists of leadership from the neighborhood high school, elementary schools, human services agencies, and parent leaders.

Most recently, VRS and BPNC have been awarded a new grant from the US Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women to form a coordinated multidisciplinary referral and response system that provides onsite trauma-focused and culturally specific domestic violence and sexual assault counseling, case management, and advocacy services to youth at Kelly High School. VRS will be providing the direct counseling and case management services at Kelly, while BPNC will be coordinating a new youth employment effort to develop their leadership skills through developing a needs assessment and research project to examine the impact of sexual assault and dating and domestic violence in the lives of the young people in Brighton Park. Through their engagement in the process, the youth learned about the impact and prevalence of dating and relationship violence in our community, helped to raise awareness of these issues to the rest of the student body, and worked to craft new school policies that will make the school the safer.



Community Accountability: St. Pius V Parish

Community accountability builds the capacity of community members so that the community can support survivors and hold perpetrators accountable without resorting to the criminal legal system – a system that some survivors do not wish to access. Using restorative and transformative justice practices such as peace circles, community accountability makes communities part of the solution, and provides additional options for survivors to seek redress. Because this strategy engages the community, it also provides support for survivors beyond what we can offer in our programs, thereby extending the reach of our efforts.



St. Pius, a Catholic parish in the Pilsen community, is a great example of a religious institution taking on the issue of domestic violence in a comprehensive way – including through a community accountability lens. The domestic violence program at St. Pius was founded in 1996, based on a recognition of how many immigrant women from the community were experiencing domestic violence, often linked to gambling and alcohol addiction, as well as struggles with the child welfare system which did not understand their culture.

In response, St. Pius has developed a multifaceted approach to working with families. Beginning with sessions on parenting skills, support groups for women, and presentations in church about domestic violence, this approach has since expanded to engage men and families as well. Support groups and individual counseling sessions have been offered since 2002 not only to women in the community but to men who want to end violence and build healthier families. Men receive individual counseling, as well as group support, and the program – which has between 30 and 35 men attend every week – has been so successful that many men have continued to attend weekly sessions for over 2 years.

St. Pius has, further, developed a community accountability approach because women in the program said that they did not want to divorce their husbands; they were adamant that the violence had to end but that they also wanted to rebuild their families. The program model is unique in that survivors and their husbands attend separate counseling sessions for several months to address issues of abuse, creating a safe space for women to heal and men to receive culturally competent counseling. Once the woman feels that she is ready and has seen a significant change in behavior from her husband, a plan is put in place to bring the husband and wife together for family counseling. In this way, St. Pius is able to rebuild the family unit in a healthier, safer way with community support.

This community accountability approach is in turn supported by community outreach and education throughout the year. For example, St. Pius raises the issue of domestic violence in church throughout the year in order to build community understanding and let people know about their services. This includes a focus in April about violence against children, a focus in May about violence against women, a focus in June about men's role in ending violence, and a focus in October about the importance of a healthy family in preventing violence. For St. Pius, community education and community accountability work hand in hand.

St. Pius has made extensive use of partnerships to support program participants, to educate the community about domestic violence, and to share their approaches with other parishes. A key set of partnerships is with churches in other communities in Chicago and the suburbs, including Melrose Park and Waukegan. St. Pius leads workshops in these parishes for priests, deacons, and lay volunteers to help them recognize the signs of domestic violence within their congregations and to develop support and services for survivors and perpetrators. In this way, St. Pius has expanded its reach in its efforts to end violence against women through outreach and accountability.





LEARN MORE AT OUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TRAINING!

**June 27, 2011
9:00 - 4:30 pm
UIC Student Center**

Registration and fee information can be found at www.batteredwomensnetwork.org.

In our efforts to end violence against women, community engagement is a key approach. From outreach and education to help community members understand domestic violence, to rallies and marches, to sustained community efforts to target the root causes of violence, engagement strategies offer an opportunity to expand our prevention efforts. This training will provide participants with:

- Concrete examples of efforts to engage diverse communities across Chicago
- A solid understanding of the 4 types of community engagement, to help your organization set goals and strategies
- Workshops on how to use social media; how to do community mapping; how to use arts to expand your engagement efforts; ideas for building citywide efforts; and more!

GET INVOLVED IN THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE!

All committee meetings take place at the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network offices, at 1 E. Wacker, Suite 1630, Chicago 60601. For more information about the committee, and to be added to our email list for updates, contact the Committee Co-Chair, Colleen Norton.

Committee Co-Chairs:

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TELL US ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WORK!

We would love to hear about the work you do to engage your community in ending violence. We may feature your organization in our next newsletter! Email Ana Romero or Gwyn Kaitis Roland.

This is a committee of the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network staffed by:

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