Preventing Family Violence:

Community Engagement Makes the Difference

Produced by the Family Violence Prevention Fund

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Project Director

Lindsey Anderson
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INTRODUCTION

"We have to build communities from the inside out in order to make change. And if we are going to ensure child well-being and reduce violence, we are going to need thousands of people working on it—not just service providers, but community residents as well."

~ **Marcie Biddleman**
Assistant Executive Director of Communications and Development,
Devereux Florida,
Clearwater, Florida

The Problem

For years, child welfare workers and domestic violence advocates have noted that child abuse and domestic violence—together referred to as family violence—often occur in the same families. Although numerous programs address these two problems separately, few have looked at them together. Yet family violence can have devastating consequences on individuals, families and the communities where they live.

Nearly one-third of American women report being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives.[1] Reports of child abuse or maltreatment are equally alarming, with almost one million confirmed reports of abused or neglected children in 1998. In that same year, an estimated 1,100 children (three per day) died of abuse or neglect, nearly 80 percent of them children under five years of age.[2]

Child abuse and domestic violence are so intertwined that a 1995 report by the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect suggested that domestic violence may be the single major precursor to child abuse and neglect fatalities in this country.[3] In Oregon, for example, a 1993 study showed that domestic violence occurred in 41 percent of the families in which children had been critically injured or killed.[4] In a 1994 study of 200 substantiated child abuse cases, the Massachusetts Department of Social Services found mention of domestic violence in 48 percent of the cases.[5]

Most institutional response to family violence is based in the child welfare and criminal justice systems. In the past, it was rare for child protection and domestic violence workers to coordinate their efforts or work together. In fact, there was often tension between the two. Child protection workers, with a government-based mandate, advocated for safety of children and preservation of the family unit when

[1]The Commonwealth Fund, *Health Concerns Across a Woman's Lifespan: 1998 Survey of Women's Health*, May 1999.

[2]U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect. 2000. *Child Maltreatment 1998: Reports from the states to the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

[3]U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect. 1995. *A Nation's Shame: Fatal Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States: Fifth Report.* Washington, D.C.: Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, p. 253

[4]Oregon Children's Services Division. 1993. T*ask Force Report on Child Fatalities and Critical Injuries Due to Abuse and Neglect.* Salem, OR: Oregon Department of Human Resources.

[5]Hangen, E. 1994. *Department of Social Services Interagency Domestic Violence Team Pilot Project: Program Data Evaluation.* Boston: Massachusetts Department of Social Services.

possible. Domestic violence workers, on the other hand, grew from a community-based movement aimed at protecting women from their batterers and focused on efforts to help women leave abusive relationships. They did not collaborate with one another, and they rarely worked with members of the communities they served to develop family violence prevention strategies.

Why Look to Community Engagement Strategies to Prevent Family Violence?

While appropriate services and responsive institutions are important components in the effort to counter family violence, it takes more than that to generate and sustain real change. But those who are most affected by the violence—the families and communities that live with it—have largely been left out of discussions about the solutions. Yet they are the ones who know all too well how violence affects their daily lives, their environment, their relationships, and their ability to move freely in their neighborhoods and among their peers.

Families and community members play a crucial role in preventing family violence for many reasons:

- Studies show that abused women turn first to those closest to them—extended family, friends, and neighbors—before they reach out to an organization or professional service provider. Relatively few access shelter services. And they seek out government institutions—police, courts, and child protection agencies—last.
- Families that experience violence are often disconnected from traditional service providers and isolated from services offered outside their immediate neighborhood.
- Community members often know which families need help and which services can make a difference.
- Community members know the cultural values, traditions, and practices that support violence—as well as those that can be used appropriately to intervene and stop it.
- Communities include men, women, and youth who understand the connection between violence in the home and on the street and see family violence as a primary barrier to community development and revitalization.
- Most community residents and leaders have the willingness and capacity to develop the skills needed to conduct family violence prevention and intervention activities.

The Community Engagement for Change Initiative

The community is thus a critical place to hold the conversation about preventing and stopping family violence. Yet little is known about how to engage local community leaders and residents around these issues. A few organizations, foundations, and agencies are beginning to look at the link between child abuse and domestic violence, but programs that address them together are still, for the most part, in their infancy. The Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF) launched the Community Engagement for Change Initiative in order to identify and learn from organizations and systems that are employing community mobilization strategies to prevent family violence.

The FVPF visited a range of community-based programs engaged in local mobilization efforts to prevent and reduce family violence. These programs, located all across the country, operate in specific neighborhoods or with constituency groups connected by affinity or race. Participants define family violence broadly, including child abuse and maltreatment, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and same-sex violence between intimate partners. In some of the organizations, child abuse was the original focus, in others it was domestic violence. In a few, substance abuse, youth violence, HIV or community violence was the introductory factor; and in a few others, the starting point was a community development approach. But wherever they started, the community organizations surveyed have come to understand the connections between the various forms of family violence and other problems affecting their community.

All of the programs are using a community engagement strategy, defined as "bringing together the talents, resources and skills of people in the community in order to increase their collective power and work for social change"—in this case, decreasing family violence. The pioneering programs surveyed by the FVPF are learning from the ground up, using community-based engagement strategies to reach out to families that need help and to involve local leaders, residents, service providers, and government institutions in stopping violence. They all share a commitment to listen to the community and to learn from the families they serve. They are all working to connect families to appropriate services. And they are all grappling with the complexities of focusing on family violence in communities struggling with various degrees of poverty, economic hardship, educational disadvantages, and substance abuse. The task is a challenging one.

Their ultimate goal, however, is quite clear: to prevent and reduce family violence. Few have developed ways of measuring their progress. They realize that dealing with ongoing and interconnecting problems means there are no "quick fixes"; they must stay in it for the long haul. But they already have a lot of stories to tell and lessons to share.

What's in This Report?

This report looks at some of the lessons learned from these community-based efforts to counter family violence. The bulk of the report focuses on five key goals that emerged from the FVPF's survey, goals that are critical to family violence prevention efforts. The discussion includes examples of groups that are addressing each of the goals. There is also a section on the nuts and bolts of reform—a list of practical guidelines for effective community engagement to prevent family violence.[6]

It is the FVPF's hope that, after reading this report, community leaders and residents, social service providers, domestic violence advocates, and child welfare workers will be able to approach community engagement to prevent family violence from a more informed perspective. This, in turn, should facilitate better working relationships among participating groups and individuals and help foster the successful creation and implementation of new community-based engagement efforts to combat family violence in communities across the country.

[6]The FVPF is producing a manual, available December 2002, that will outline specific strategies and guidelines for how to initiate community engagement efforts to prevent family violence.

GOALS: WHAT HAS TO HAPPEN TO PREVENT FAMILY VIOLENCE

The FVPF's study found no simple solutions to family violence or proven practices to end it. The organizations surveyed take different approaches and bring different experiences and services to the table. But all of them look at the problem of family violence in the context of the conditions present in the community. This means finding and building on community assets, using culturally appropriate messages and services, and cultivating and supporting local leaders who can advocate for and sustain change. The five main goals discussed here are intertwined, and most of the organizations cited work on several of them simultaneously.

What It Takes to Prevent Family Violence in the Community

1. Raising awareness of the problem of family violence and establishing social norms that make violence unacceptable.
2. Connecting community residents to services.
3. Changing social and community conditions that contribute to violence.
4. Building networks of leaders within a community.
5. Making services and institutions accountable to community needs.

1. Raising Awareness of Family Violence and Changing Norms

One of the first requirements in any community mobilization effort is to raise awareness of the problem. If people do not know that family violence exists in their community, if they don't understand its impact or know where to turn for help, they will be unlikely to get involved or to communicate the unacceptability of violence. Violence is often seen as a private matter, one that families are hesitant to talk about. But the organizations discussed here discovered that families who have a safe-place and opportunity to speak about violence have no reluctance to do so. Raising awareness allows people to think differently about the problem, and to own the issue as one they can do something about.

Líderes Campesinas press conference on domestic violence in Coachella Valley, California

The Placemat Project, an ongoing project of **United Neighbors of Fall River**, in Fall River, Massachusetts, a Community Connections site (see page 13 for a description of the Community Connections project), produced 225,000 placemats and distributed them to local restaurants, community centers, and factory lunchrooms to inform residents about domestic violence and where to get help. "I got tired of reading the same zodiac sign placemat every time we went to our local Chinese restaurant," says Kim Chouinard, the founder of United Neighbors. "I thought, if I read these horoscopes over and over again, people will do the same thing if the message is about domestic violence." The Placemat Project is an example of collaborating with community businesses to educate the general public in a nonthreatening way that is likely to reach families who don't recognize the problem or who experience it personally but wouldn't actively seek help.

United Neighbors of Fall River Placemat

In South St. Petersburg, Florida, Community Involvement Teams, an organization created by **Devereux Kids**, a subsidiary of the Devereux Foundation, works with residents to introduce the American Humane Association's Front Porch Project®, which teaches residents what to do when they see a child being harmed. Residents have a simple but effective approach to supporting their neighbors and watching out for the safety of children and residents. One resident said, "We believe in the 'star' model of neighborhood accountability. You are responsible for the neighbors you see out your front door, out your back door, and through the windows on both sides." The Community Involvement Teams worked with Devereux Kids to involve community residents and to conduct Front Porch Project® training for groups such as faith leaders, grassroots organizations, neighborhood association presidents, and block captains. By engaging community residents in identifying the issue of child abuse and how they can respond to it, awareness of the problem is raised and new community leaders are developed who then help their neighbors understand the problem. In the process, residents discover their own strengths in ending family violence and become advocates for making a difference in their communities.

Another creative awareness campaign was developed by the **Asian Women's Shelter (AWS)** in San Francisco. AWS provides emergency and long-term shelter to immigrant and refugee women in the Bay Area. Recognizing that only a small percentage of women seek shelter services, they began community engagement activities to spread the word. One of these efforts is Shimtuh, the first Bay Area project to mobilize the Korean community against domestic violence. Shimtuh began as an informal network of Korean women interested in the issue of domestic violence called Korean American Coalition to End Domestic Violence (KACEDA). KACEDA educated the Korean American community about domestic violence through Korean language newspaper articles, informational booklets and networking with other Korean related resources. KACEDA first did surveys and focus groups to learn more about how domestic

violence is perceived and experienced within Korean culture. The collection of information became an organizing strategy in itself, as Korean media, businesses and faith institutions became involved in the survey distribution, and it resulted in the creation of Shimtuh. Shimtuh has since organized community events such as block parties sponsored by local stores, launched website campaigns linked to local churches and temples to educate and involve the faith community, and held forums with Korean language newspapers to involve important institutions in domestic violence prevention.

Strengths and Challenges of Raising Awareness and Changing Norms:

- It helps community members better understand how and why family violence happens and how it affects the community.
- It creates a vehicle for establishing new norms about family violence and how it can be prevented.
- It brings the dialogue about violence in the home into public consciousness.
- It addresses the denial and isolation that often surround family violence.
- Awareness does not, by itself, lead to action.

2. Connecting Community Residents to Services

Awareness is the first step towards preventing and reducing family violence. The next is to get help to the families who need it. Help can come from traditional and existing services, as well as from new programs developed by residents themselves. All of the groups identified by the FVPF are doing this work to some extent, and in many of them, community members who were once abused themselves take the lead in helping other families where there is violence.

"People in these neighborhoods used to go home and close the door, saying 'That's not my family.' Now they say, 'Can I help you with anything?'"

~ **Fannie Green**
Governing Board Chair,
Community Partnership
for the Protection of Children
Jacksonville, Florida

In Jacksonville, Florida, the **Community Partnership for the Protection of Children,** an initiative of the Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare (CCPCW), of the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), has a motto: "Keeping children safe is everyone's business." Working in low-income neighborhoods, residents and social service providers work together to identify families in need of help before problems reach the point of requiring formal intervention. Families can be referred to the Partnership from a variety of sources, including the management of housing complexes, community based groups such as the Boy Scouts, or by the residents themselves. Once identified, Partnership staff work with the family to put together a meeting of individuals and service providers who the family believes can help them develop and carry out a plan to prevent problems that may lead to family violence. These "Family Team Meetings" may or may not involve staff of the child welfare or domestic violence agency, and might also include neighbors, friends, the faith community, schools, or other social service agencies. As Fannie Green, chair of the Jacksonville Partnership governing board, puts it, "People in these neighborhoods used to go home and close the door, saying 'That's not my family.' Now they say, 'Can I help you with anything?'"

In Louisville, Kentucky, the **Community Partnership for Protecting Children**, another initiative of CCPCW, has as its symbol arms linked together. "This represents the belief that childhood is a sacred time and that safety is the promise our community makes to its children and their families," says Jewell Douglass, co-chair of the Louisville Domestic Violence Task Force comprised of law enforcement, child welfare and domestic violence advocates, court personnel and protective service workers. To reach deeper into the community, the partnership created Community Resource Teams (CRTs) comprised of child welfare workers, family members, church volunteers and specially trained community residents. The teams work in designated neighborhoods with families in need of support. Often times, families are referred to CRTs by Neighborhood Partners, a group of women residents who provide informal support to residents on a range of local health and safety issues. As Douglass says, "We have neighborhood folks and providers out here working the streets together. That's important for people to see." "Talkshops" – informal information sessions at which neighbors share concerns about child maltreatment and domestic abuse – also increase the reach of the partnership.

"These issues are all connected...You can't just deal with violence and not help with other critical issues. That's not easy, but these women's lives are not easy."

~ **Ruth Slaughter**
Divisional Director of Community Education, Prevention and Intervention
PROTOTYPES
Los Angeles, California

Seattle's **Northwest Network of Bisexual, Transgender, and Lesbian Survivors of Abuse** (Network) deals with the challenges that arise when the abuser and the victim are of the same sex. The Network's Friends Are Reaching OUT project works to ensure support and safety for victims, while holding batterers accountable for stopping their violence. They focus on finding a safe space for friends and/or family members to gather and discuss violence. Using approaches such as a house party potluck, picnic, or craft night, the survivor and her friends/family collectively develop strategies to discourage violence, break down isolation, and access safe, gay-friendly services. The group builds social networks within these communities to act as protection and work on prevention.

PROTOTYPES, Centers for Innovation in Health, Mental Health and Social Services, has provided a broad range of community support and preventive services since 1986 to Los Angeles women affected by HIV/AIDS. One of the largest programs of its kind in the country, their integrated model of care utilizes street outreach for HIV prevention as a way to reach women affected by domestic violence. They run three resource/outreach/drop-in centers for at-risk women. With PROTOTYPES, advocates and outreach workers go to where the women are—from beauty salons to local motels—and work to help them with whatever problems they are experiencing. "These issues are all connected", says Ruth Slaughter, Divisional Director of Community Education, Prevention and Intervention of PROTOTYPES. "You can't just deal with violence and not help with other critical issues. That's not easy, but these women's lives are not easy."

Strengths and Challenges of Connecting Community Residents to Services:

- The approach provides real services to community members in need.
- It creates access points within the community that enhance members' ability to find help and connect to social networks.
- Community engagement is not always a priority in service models. Often there are resources for services, but not for efforts to engage community members in reaching out to families needing help.
- Service programs may be overwhelmed with current needs and not eager to do outreach that they fear will just generate more demand.

3. Changing Social and Community Conditions

The majority of the organizations identified in this report are working in communities where poverty is prevalent. The most visionary and probably the most difficult goal is to engage community members in changing those conditions, such as poverty, that contribute to violence, while at the same time helping individual families get services to address specific needs.

Central City Lutheran Mission in San Bernardino, California, serves an urban community where half the population lives below the poverty level. The community has limited viable family structures, a 30 percent high school graduation rate, few jobs, and a high rate of youth and family violence. It also has the highest rate of infant mortality in the state, the highest sexually transmitted disease rate for teens in the country, and is informally known as the "methamphetamine capital of the world." Despite these factors, the Mission seeks out and builds on community strengths, offering a wide range of programs that are youth-focused and youth-run. Youth have developed a variety of projects, including a newsletter of writing and photography about young people's critical analysis of a variety of neighborhood problems, including family and community violence; a Hip Hop Mass of poetry, rap, and writing that explores specific themes related to the community each week, including violence; peer-to-peer outreach on a range of health issues; and an after school program where teens tutor younger children. The Mission's programs develop strong and resilient youth, giving them tools to become leaders and decision-makers who work to change the social conditions that contribute to violence.

Based in Seattle, Washington, **Communities Against Rape and Abuse** (CARA) works with the African-American community, the disabled community, and young people to identify the connections between interpersonal violence and other issues of concern, such as police brutality, institutionalization of people with disabilities, and poverty. Community Action Teams comprised of people from these communities organize a variety of forums such as popular education workshops, discussion groups and community events where connections between interpersonal violence and other community concerns are explored. CARA's Young People's Liberation Project, for example, organizes a Scratching Post, a monthly gathering for young people to engage in discussion on topics such as healthy relationships,

rape, dating violence, oppression, and community organizing. A typical Scratching Post involves food, critical discussion, and creative projects such as producing stickers or buttons featuring messages designed to interrupt social norms that contribute to violence. In this way, CARA develops grassroots leaders with skills and vision and builds opportunities for long-term cultural transformation.

Strengths and Challenges of Changing Social and Community Conditions:

- This approach addresses the community's need for stability, health, well-being, and justice.
- It recognizes child abuse, domestic violence, and community violence as interconnected problems.
- It recognizes the connection between violence and other social problems such as poverty, urban decay, substance abuse, and mental and physical health issues.
- Efforts to link these issues are sometimes dismissed as diminishing the importance of one issue over another.

4. Building Networks of Leaders within the Community

Leadership development is a core premise of any good community engagement effort and a critical task of all of the groups surveyed by the FVPF. Finding and fostering new leaders creates messengers who can help raise awareness about family violence and articulate the connections between child abuse and domestic violence. Leaders mobilize people to action, engaging them in new activities to identify and prevent violence. Development of new leaders from within each community also helps ensure that reform efforts will be sustained.

Children at an Initiative for Violence Free-Families vigil.

Organización en California de Líderes Campesinas, Inc. (Líderes Campesinas), started out as a "kitchen table" organizing effort by farm-worker women to improve their working conditions. Since 1992, Líderes Campesinas has worked to incorporate activities and educational outreach around domestic violence and sexual assault into its worker safety materials. Líderes Campesinas trains female farmworkers so that they can inform and educate women in the fields and packing houses about the cycle of abuse. "We go to people throughout the community to talk about environmental safety and hazards–clean water, asthma, and lead poisoning. And we talk about violence. It's all connected," says Mily Treviño-Sauceda, founder of Líderes Campesinas. Their strategies include informal dinners in women's homes, which provide non-threatening settings for intimate conversations.

Battered immigrant women face many institutional barriers to seeking services that often prevent them from leaving an abusive relationship, such as language inaccessibility, fear of deportation, and mistrust of law enforcement response. Based in Des Moines, **Iowa, Latinas Unidas Por Un Nuevo Amacer** (LUNA) supports the leadership of Latina immigrant women by teaching them skills to advocate for more culturally appropriate and effective services for their community. Through peer-to-peer training with organizations like Líderes Campesinas (see page 9) and Mujeres Unidas y Activas (see page 13), LUNA members build their confidence and skills by learning about their rights and how to negotiate with institutions and service providers. Once trained, LUNA members develop skits in Spanish with translation illustrating their plight as women trapped in violent relationships. They then present these skits to local officials such as law enforcement, prosecutors, and service providers, and suggest changes in policy and practice that would improve the response to immigrant battered women seeking services. LUNA's advocacy has built bridges between the immigrant community and systems, and has increased the communities trust of institutions and service providers. As a result, institutions and service programs have changed practice and policy governing response to immigrant families facing violence. LUNA members have started an independent non-profit organization that provides direct services to immigrant women, including counseling to domestic violence victims and ESL classes.

The Initiative for Violence-Free Families, a program of Family & Children's Service in Minneapolis, Minnesota also focuses on leadership development among community members to promote healthy and safe families and communities. Here, neighborhood action teams build skills among residents and community organizations to prevent child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, and community violence. The Northside Action Team, for example, works with African-American men, training them to speak out about the cost of domestic violence to families and the community. This provides these men an opportunity to stress the importance of developing alternatives to the criminal justice and child welfare systems – systems which often fail to meet family and community needs. The team also reaches out to faith leaders. According to Pastor Lalahery Andrianihaja of the Jordan New Life Community Church, involving churches aims to "move the clergy beyond the letters of Paul to develop new ways of dealing with domestic violence."

Close to Home Domestic Violence Prevention Initiative, in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts, is a resident-driven community organizing and public awareness campaign that seeks to create a broad based civic response to prevent domestic violence. The goals of the project include building the capacity of family, friends, and neighbors to prevent domestic violence. Close to Home's community organizers speak about domestic violence at civic meetings throughout the neighborhood, host discussion groups with community members to generate dialogue and problem solving about the issue, and work with groups of community residents to change community norms that support domestic violence. For example, the King Street Group, a diverse network of women residents, meets for monthly potlucks and talks about what they can do to prevent domestic violence in their part of Dorchester. They have developed "tips" on how to talk to someone who may be living with domestic violence as well as planned community events that combine arts and crafts, children's activities, food, music and fun with building community awareness about family violence and what a community can do to prevent and respond to it.

In 1998, in the Germantown area of Philadelphia, community residents conceived and implemented the **Queen Lane Domestic Violence Community Mobilization Initiative.** Part of the FVPF's "Philadelphia: Let's Stop Domestic Violence" campaign, the initiative formed a partnership with Germantown Settlement, a multi-service organization; WISDOM, a small grassroots women's group that works on AIDS education and outreach; and Women Against Abuse, a local domestic violence shelter. The partners recruited and trained a core group of 15 women from the Queen Lane Housing Project as peer leaders. These women surveyed and mapped their community to learn what people saw as the impact of domestic violence, and what they thought should be done about it. Then they did educational outreach, and developed a comprehensive plan to respond to domestic violence. Yvonne Andrews, one of the community organizers, said, "We actually went out into the communities with our clipboards and surveys to ask people their opinions about domestic violence. We went to grocery stores and laundromats and up into the high-rise—anywhere we knew we would find people who might be willing to talk." The subsequent plan included monthly resident-led support groups for women dealing with abuse, youth activities, and public demonstrations to deliver the message that abuse is "everybody's business." Development of community leaders builds a sense of ownership and can have a transforming effect on the women's lives, breaking their own cycle of violence and isolation and leading to new opportunities for education and involvement of others in the community.

"We actually went out into the communities with our clipboards and surveys to ask people their opinions about domestic violence. We went to grocery stores and laundromats and up into the high-rise—anywhere we knew we would find people who might be willing to talk."

~ **Yvonne Andrews**
Community Organizer
Queen Lane Domestic Violence
Community Mobilization Initiative
Philadelphia, PA

Strengths and Challenges of Building Networks of Leaders within the Community:

- This approach equips community leaders and gatekeepers with the information and skills they need to engage their community in family violence prevention.
- It engages community members in assessing their own realities and in critical thinking and planning that can lead to action.
- It provides opportunities to learn new skills and apply them to personal and community life.
- Leaders sometimes burn out from overwork or are recruited to work on other issues or for other organizations. The challenge is to develop a group of leaders and not rely too much on any one individual.

5. Making Services and Institutions Accountable to Community Needs

Change in the Community Engagement sites often comes from and is led by community residents, those who know first-hand the problems and the potential solutions. But permanent change also needs to involve the state agencies and institutions formally charged with supporting families and protecting children and the community. Collaborating with grassroots organizations and placing workers in the neighborhood doesn't come easily to traditional social service systems. But there is a growing recognition among state and local officials that families will be safer when communities are involved. There is also a growing recognition on the part of some communities that the "system" is not the enemy.

"It's a constant struggle to move from victim to survivor. Nobody believed that we were worth saving."

~ **Judy Murphy**
Former Moms Off Meth Facilitator
Ottumwa, Iowa

A number of the efforts surveyed by the FVPF address the complexities of domestic violence and child abuse within a cross-system, community-based approach that brings together community-based organizations, service providers, institutions, and community members. In the past, these systems often did not talk to one another, despite the fact that they frequently worked with the same families.

Moms Off Meth (M.O.M.) in Ottumwa, Iowa, began as a peer-led support group for women with substance abuse problems who risk losing (or have lost) their children to foster care. The group focuses on a woman's whole life, addressing her experiences with domestic violence or sexual abuse and seeing how these issues are connected to her parenting, her substance abuse, her self-image, and her economic and educational opportunities. Recovery is thus only one outcome of M.O.M.'s work. The group also works with the child welfare, family court and prison systems, which has led to changes in the system's response. Because of M.O.M.'s advocacy, the system now allows these women to have a voice in the types of services they feel are helpful, to submit their own reports to court, and to provide support to other members at court hearings. Additionally, M.O.M. members provided testimony to the state legislature's Human Services Committee and the State Probation Officers Association, sharing their experiences as women facing abuse, fighting addiction, and identifying the barriers in the human services system that thwart their efforts to regain control of their lives.

Ventura County march against domestic violence by Líderes Campesinas members and their families.

Founded in 1990, **Mujeres Unidas y Activas** provides opportunities for Latina immigrants in San Francisco to advocate for themselves and their families by building self-sufficiency, leadership, and political power. The organization develops community leaders who educate their peers about their rights and available services, particularly those around family violence issues. Mujeres Unidas members often appear before policy makers and were active in ensuring protection for immigrant women in the landmark federal Violence Against Women Act of 1994.

Based in Warwick, Rhode Island, **Sisters Overcoming Abusive Relationships (SOAR)** was founded in 1989 from a support group for battered women who wanted to move beyond healing toward action. The group transformed itself into a grassroots organizing effort to promote, advocate and work towards preventing domestic violence and changing Rhode Island's family court system. Recently, Rhode Island passed a law requiring judges to follow specific guidelines in determining child custody and visitation decisions in domestic violence cases. SOAR, now a 100-member task force of the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, was instrumental in developing the guidelines, spoke with state representatives about guideline recommendations and testified at legislative hearings regarding the law.

All across Massachusetts, **Community Connections** coalitions bring community members and parents together with representatives of child welfare agencies, domestic violence programs, and other service providers to build neighborhood-based networks that reduce child abuse, support healthy, nurturing families and build communities. Community Connections is an initiative established in 1994 by the Massachusetts Department of Social Services in response to the Federal Family Preservation and Support Act of 1993. Believing that formal intervention is not always the best solution and that families are the best resources to programs, communities and other families, the coalitions are guided by a set of family support practice principles that stress connecting families with other community members to provide mutual support and assistance and coordinating existing resources to better meet the needs of families. Some examples of this include developing parent support groups, clothing exchange, home visitation provided by coalition member-agency staff, drop-in family resource centers that provide flexible child care, information and referral, English as a Second Language and other adult education classes, and after school programs for young people that provide tutoring and structured activities. Coalitions act as a link between the state child welfare agency and informal resources in the community for those families who may not, or no longer, require formal state agency involvement. Some coalitions develop community-specific child abuse public education campaigns and provide parent education on a host of topics,

Queen Lane Domestic Violence Community Mobilization Initiative peer leaders.

including domestic violence and child abuse, and encourage community action, such as how to bring concerns to City Hall. Coalitions ensure that community voices are heard, as they identify key issues and develop strategies to address them in their particular community, by striving to maintain residents as at least 51 percent of their governing boards.

Strengths and Challenges of Making Services and Institutions Accountable to Community Needs:

- This approach creates a powerful voice for social change, the voice of those who are directly affected by abuse.
- It promotes empowerment and leadership development.
- It engages institutions in constructive dialogue with community members about how cases are and should be handled.
- A challenge is finding people within formal institutions or service-delivery systems who are willing and able to invest the time to change their own systems, particularly when on the surface, it often seems like these efforts will add to staff workloads.
- There is also a danger of involving community members in a tokenistic manner, rather than truly incorporating them into the leadership structure and decision-making process.
- Since social service systems have not always accepted community residents as leaders and collaborators, this approach runs the risk of not being supported by the systems they hope to change.

THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF WORKING IN COMMUNITIES

The site visits and interviews with each of the programs, their leaders and community residents yielded a number of guidelines for working with, and within, communities to prevent family violence. These practical tips cover coalition building, collaboration, recognition of cultural values, communication and more.[7] They reflect the real complexity of the work the organizations are undertaking, in environments that often include significant poverty, unemployment, and substance abuse, in addition to family violence. Recommendations include:

- **Help community members see family violence as a priority**. Community members have many issues on their mind. They may be more willing to begin with a discussion about drug dealers and violence on the streets than to talk about violence in households, which is often seen as a private issue. But once families sense "permission" to speak out and know they can do so safely, they will begin to make powerful connections between violence in the home and other problems plaguing the community. Organizers can provide a safe forum where people can talk about the impact of family violence on the community as a whole – in terms of the safety and well-being of everyone, the link between violence at home and on the street, the incarceration of perpetrators, the resultant increase in poverty and children growing up without a father in the home, the dangers of domestic violence if it spills over into public realms such as the workplace, etc.
- **Help residents and local organizers address family violence issues in ways that do not stigmatize or label people as "abused" or "abusers."** This will help promote community norms that make it acceptable to talk about family violence and thus to intervene when someone is in danger.
- **"Invite, don't indict" the men in the community.** Men often feel blamed, defensive and excluded when the issue of family violence comes up. Some believe that social service systems are biased in favor of women and punitive to men, particularly poor men of color. Framing all men as perpetrators or potential perpetrators makes it difficult to bring them into the conversation. It is important to create a language and context for community mobilization that includes and welcomes men and to recognize that they may be the most effective carriers of anti-violence messages to other men and boys.
- **Remember that the real work of community mobilization happens within the cultural context of a community.** Efforts to address child abuse and domestic violence need to be compatible with cultural mores and a longstanding need to protect the community from external forces that may be perceived as hostile. When shaping program goals and methods, listen to the community's voices, which reflect its cultural attitudes and traditions. Programs created from a distance by outsiders have less chance of success.

[7] The FVPF is producing a manual, available December 2002, that will outline specific strategies and guidelines for how to initiate community engagement efforts to prevent family violence.

- **Help residents identify new community-driven ways of holding perpetrators accountable for ending their abuse. Devise strategies that do not rely so heavily on the criminal justice or child welfare systems.** Forcing communities to air issues that may open them to unwelcome social services or criminal justice sanctions can provoke resistance or even hostility. This is especially true when workable solutions are not offered. In communities of color and immigrant communities, for example, calling the police may not be seen as a viable option by many abuse survivors who fear that law enforcement could result in incarceration, deportation, or placement of their children in foster care. Among lesbians and gay men, where the perpetrator and victim are of the same sex, and the community is often small, issues are especially complex. It is essential for a community to determine how to hold perpetrators of violence accountable for stopping their violence in ways that take into account the real or perceived barriers to disclosure and intervention.
- **Integrate activities about family violence into the regular life of the community.** Talk about family violence at community events such as health fairs, block parties, back-to-school picnics, English-as-a-Second-Language classes, etc.
- **Build individual capacity to intervene with friends and families.** Empowering individuals with the information, tools and resources they need to help victims and perpetrators of abuse is a critical component of any community engagement effort. As victims and perpetrators feel safe enough to disclose their abuse, it is important that organizers know how to respond appropriately and where to refer them for help.
- **Close the gap between social service providers and the communities they serve.** Institutions can be involved in community efforts to stop family violence in a variety of ways, including lending resources and support or basing workers in the neighborhood. Providers who are involved at this level are more likely to learn what families need and to adapt their programs accordingly.
- **Understand that people listen to those they trust.** This trust can be based on common background or shared past experiences or it can grow from working together. In engaging a community, involve existing community structures or leaders who are already trusted. Be a consistent and ongoing presence. Community members are justifiably wary of initiatives designed to solve the latest "problem" that has been "discovered" by outsiders.

CONCLUSION

Community engagement to end family violence is complex work, but changing society happens in small increments, one family, one step at a time. The organizations cited here clearly illustrate that family violence does not occur in a vacuum and that community solutions must reflect the full scope of issues of concern to their residents. Working in partnership with residents can push advocates of social change to come up with new and creative approaches as they discover ways to help create healthy communities where people want to live: where there are jobs, a connection of spirit, where families know when and how to get help.

Violence occurs at the local level. And that is where the shift has to happen—and where it has to be sustained over time. The most promising of the community projects surveyed by the FVPF involve local residents at every step of the process, from identifying the problem and spreading the word to developing interventions and implementing strategies for change. The organizations that do this kind of work recognize the sense of ownership that grows when community members are involved in solving problems. They also recognize the importance of collaborating with the systems charged with responding to family violence—and of holding those systems accountable for changing practices.

CARA activists Shane Felles, Eboni Colbert, and Tara Bethea, at Seattle's International Women's Day Teach-In.

It requires a great deal of time, resources and patience to engage in a community-based process to address child abuse and domestic violence at the same time, but the potential benefits are tremendous. When solutions come from within, the changes that result are long-term and truly reflect a community's resources, culture, needs and goals.

Appendix A
PROGRAM CONTACT INFORMATION

APPENDIX A

The following is contact information for the organizations featured in this document. Please contact them for additional information about their program.

Asian Women's Shelter
3543 18th Street, #19
San Francisco, California 94110
Tel: (415) 751-7110

Central City Lutheran Mission
1354 North G Street
San Bernardino, California 92405
Tel: (909) 381-6921
Website: www.cclm.org

Close to Home
44 Melville Ave.
Dorchester, MA 02124
Tel: (617) 929-5151

Communities Against Rape and Abuse
801 23rd Avenue S #G1
Seattle, Washington 98144
Tel: (206) 322-4856
Website: www.cara-seattle.org

Community Connections–
Massachusetts Department of Social Services
24 Farnsworth Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02210
Tel: (617) 748-2000

Devereux Kids, Inc.
13575 58th St. N, Suite 100
Clearwater, Florida
Tel: (727) 538-4198

Initiative for Violence-Free Families for
Family and Children's Service
414 South 8th St.
Minneapolis, Minneapolis 55404
Tel: (612) 341-1604
Website: www.ivff.org

Jacksonville Community Partnership for
the Protection of Children
3701 Winton Drive
Jacksonville, Florida 32208
Tel: (904) 924-1680

Latinas Unidas Por Un Nuevo Amacer
4815 University Ave., Suite 2
Des Moines, Iowa 50311
Tel: (515) 271-5060
Hotline: (866) 256-7668

Louisville Community Partnership for
Protecting Children
Neighborhood Place Ujima
3610 Bohne Avenue
Louisville, KY 40211
Tel: (502) 485-6717

Moms Off Meth
P.O. Box 457
Ottumwa, IA 52501
Tel: (641) 682-8793 ext. 210

Mujeres Unidas y Activas
995 Market Street, 11th Floor
San Francisco, California 94103
Tel: (415) 621-8140

Northwest Network of Bisexual, Transgender
and Lesbian Survivors of Abuse
P.O. Box 20398
Seattle, Washington 98102
Tel: (206) 568-7777
Website: www.nwnetwork.org

Organización en California de Líderes Campesinas
611 S. Rebecca Street
Pomona, California 91766
Tel: (909) 865-7776

PROTOTYPES
5601 West Slauson Avenue, Suite 200
Culver City, California 90230
Tel: (310) 641-7795

Queen Lane Domestic Violence
Community Mobilization Initiative
5538 Wayne Avenue
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19144
Tel: (215) 991-6196

Sisters Overcoming Abusive Relationships
422 Post Road, Suite 202
Warwick, Rhode Island 02888
Tel: (401) 467-9940

United Neighbors of Fall River
571 Second Street
Fall River, Massachusetts 02721
Tel: (508) 675-0098

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endabuse
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This publication is printed on recycled processed chlorine-free paper. A by-product of chlorine use is dioxin - an EPA classified "human carcinogen." The rise of breast cancer, and other cancers, is linked to the accumulation of toxins (like dioxin) in the environment.

The Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF) works to end domestic violence and help families whose lives are devastated by abuse, because every person has the right to live in a home free of violence.

FVPF is a national non-profit organization committed to mobilizing concerned individuals, communities, and organizations to join together to prevent family violence through public education, policy and practice reform, advocacy programs and public action.

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