

# COMMUNITIES ENGAGED IN RESISTING VIOLENCE

By Ann Russo & Melissa Spatz



Women & Girls CAN  
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## **WOMEN & GIRLS COLLECTIVE ACTION NETWORK**

**The Women & Girls Collective Action Network is a center for consciousness-raising, training, dialogue and action around issues that matter to women and girls. We strengthen connections across communities to promote collective action. We provide resources and support to create safe spaces for girls and women to develop as leaders, learn from one another, and take action to promote social justice.**

Women & Girls CAN convenes the Community Accountability Planning Group which holds quarterly citywide conversations around ending violence against women and girls. These are our guiding principles.

- We believe it is possible to end violence against women and girls.
- We believe that there are multiple approaches to ending violence.
- We believe that approaches must be appropriate to the community developing them, and should evolve from specific community experiences.
- We believe it is important to recognize and draw upon people's different experiences, knowledge and organizing approaches.
- We believe in the power and knowledge of survivors and resisters of violence.
- We believe in having honest conversations about working in solidarity with one another.
- We believe that communities have the potential and the responsibility to be more accountable to members of their community in ending violence against women and girls.
- We believe that it is important to develop alternatives to the criminal legal system.
- We believe that there is a connection between interpersonal and structural violence, and that we need to struggle on all levels.
- We are interested in struggling against all forms of oppression, inside and outside of our communities, organizations and movements.

***Our goals are to unite people who share these beliefs to envision new possibilities for change, & to serve as a forum for the development of new projects that share these principles.***

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## GROUPS WE INTERVIEWED FOR THIS REPORT

Access Living	GABRIELA Network
All Hail Project	Incite! Women of Color Against Violence
AquaMoon	KAN-WIN
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council	Latinas Organizing for Reproductive Equality
Broadway Youth Center	Mango Tribe
Casa Segura	Rogers Park Young Women’s Action Team
Females United for Action	Take Back the Halls
FIRE	Young Women’s Empowerment Project

# COMMUNITIES ENGAGED IN RESISTING VIOLENCE

*“Communities Engaged in Resisting Violence”* is part of a growing movement in Chicago of community-based initiatives seeking to resist violence against women<sup>1</sup>, to create community accountability for the perpetuation of violence, and to develop strategies to end violence and the oppressive systems that support it. While the women’s anti-violence movement has made many inroads in the past 35-40 years, the groups and initiatives in this report are rejuvenating the movement, and taking the work in exciting new directions. The goals of this report are to highlight these inspiring initiatives, to encourage exchange and coalition between groups, and to generate more community anti-violence projects.

Since 2003, dozens of individuals and organizations across Chicago have engaged in a dialogue around community accountability and community organizing as alternative models to approach interpersonal and state violence against women. These conversations aim to reconnect anti-violence efforts with communities, to expand community engagement, organizing, and accountability as methods of ending violence against women, and to re-center social justice in anti-violence work.

The most recent conversations (2006-2007), convened by Women & Girls CAN and developed by the Community Accountability Planning Group – the same group that oversaw this report – have showcased concrete examples of effective strategies; generated a discussion of housing alterna-

## **Rethinking/Expanding the Anti-violence Movement: Some Recent Chicago Conversations**

June 2003: *Reconnecting to Our Communities – The Challenge for Domestic Violence Providers*

January 2004: *Second Thoughts? Domestic Violence 301 for Experienced Providers*

November 2004: *Race Matters*

March 2005: *Organizing Our Communities Against Domestic Violence*

February 2006: *Back to the Future (with Mimi Kim of Creative Interventions)*

May 2006: *Chicago Success Stories*

September 2006 & February 2007: *Beyond Shelters I & II*

June 2007: *Social Service & Organizing – What bridges connect us and what drives us apart?*

Planners have included Women & Girls CAN, the Community Accountability Planning Group, DePaul University Program in Women & Gender Studies, University of Illinois – Chicago, Incite! Chicago, Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women’s Network, Rogers Park Young Women’s Action Team, Rainbow House, and Between Friends.

tives to the state-funded shelter system; and explored ways to combine the best of service and organizing in our work. If you would like to be a part of these ongoing conversations, contact us at [womenandgirlscan@gmail.com](mailto:womenandgirlscan@gmail.com).

This report documents the models, definitions, approaches, structures and strategies of 16 groups in the Chicago Area. We conducted interviews with members of the groups, as well as with two additional

1. We use the phrase “violence against women” with the recognition that many groups of women fall under this heading and that many are invisible and/or marginalized in the mainstream anti-violence movement. Some of these groups are highlighted in this report – women of color, Latinas, Asian and Pacific Islander women, African American women, transgender youth, transwomen, queer women, women in the sex trade, women with disabilities. We also recognize that men – young and adult men – are often the subjects of interpersonal and state violence and can be allies in the movement to end violence.

activists who have been involved in the antiviolence movement for many years – Mary Scott-Boria and Alice Cottingham – to help ground the report in a history of Chicago-based work to address violence against women and girls.

## **Why do we need new approaches?**

Much has changed over the past 35 years with regard to the issue of violence against women. There are now many local, regional and national social service and advocacy organizations focused on sexual and domestic violence. These organizations, many formed in the 1970s and 80s, have created support, advocacy, and resources for survivors of violence, and helped reform the criminal legal system to more adequately address interpersonal sexual and domestic violence. One important result of these efforts is more public awareness about the realities of sexual and domestic violence.

**Yet violence remains an omni-present fact of our day-to-day lives.** Many in the antiviolence community have been frustrated and at a loss as to how to prevent and eventually end violence, and out of this frustration has come a critical re-thinking of the movement. Many now recognize that the movement’s focus has shifted over the years from its initial goal of ending violence and oppression to a primary focus on supporting and advocating for individual survivors.

As Alice Cottingham recalls, *“It went from working to end violence against women to working to help battered women, it seemed overnight. We slipped from one into the other, and didn’t necessarily notice it happening.”*

Mimi Kim, reflecting on the consequences of this shift, writes that the individual and confidential intervention approaches “limited the amount of energy and focus paid to community-based strategies” including “concrete actions or interventions unless a particular event, often tragic or lethal” got the public’s attention. As a result, she says, “many communities of color remain ravaged by violence against women and children but fall outside of awareness campaigns and accessible, appropriate anti-violence resources.” In addition, the work to change the system was left up to policy advocates and legal experts, rather than to the communities most impacted. (Mimi Kim, 2005, p. 8)

As a result, **the antiviolence movement now manages individual incidents of violence, rather than transforming the systems that perpetuate violence.** The large mainstream organizations now function

### **Critiques of the mainstream movement center around 6 interrelated themes:**

1. One size fits all
2. Over-reliance on the criminal legal system
3. Reliance on state funding
4. Narrowing the definition of violence
5. Focus on individual interventions
6. Professionalization of the work

like other social service agencies and work with local and state governments. Like the structures of other social service agencies, they are often disconnected from direct community engagement and more involved with the state through

their reliance on federal and state funding. Over time the movement has lost its connection and commitment to broad-based social justice and social transformation.

***“While the work has been good and important, it has never spoken to the needs of women of color.” — Mary Scott-Boria***

This current reality was not reached without struggle and contestation. Many in the movement – advocates, activists, counselors, survivors, community members – and many from the most disempowered communities, have been the foremost critics of the limits as well as dangers of the way the movement has developed, and many of these people are involved in the new work taking place in Chicago.

### **Limitations of the mainstream movement**

These new initiatives developed, in part, in response to what we see as key limits of the mainstream antiviolence movement:

#### **Limitation 1: One size fits all**

First, agencies tend to approach sexual and domestic violence with a one-size-fits-all model, with standardized definitions, options, and strategies that don't account for differences between and within groups and communities.

**The gender-based framework used by many agencies does not deeply consider the systemic inequalities of racism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and xenophobia embedded in the social service and criminal legal systems.**

Too often, agencies fail to recognize the particular experiences and perspectives of women from marginalized communities – for example, poor women, LGBTQI<sup>2</sup> communities, women in the sex trade, women

of color, immigrant women, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women, women with drug and alcohol addictions, women with disabilities, and young women.

As Mary Scott-Boria says, “While the work has been good and important, it has never spoken to the needs of women of color.” For example, the mainstream anti-rape movement has not adequately addressed the intersectionality of rape and racism; as Lisa Calderón writes, “women of color’s experiences of violence are often ignored or unchampioned since, historically, rape of women of color was not seen as rape, but as a natural consequence of our ‘lascivious’ nature. However violence against White women grabs the media attention, ignites legislative action, inspires protests by women’s rights advocates, and creates incentives for funding programs that continue to maintain the status quo.” (Calderón, 2004)

The needs of women with disabilities, who may experience unique forms of violence by caregivers, ranging from neglect to physical acts of violence, also are rarely taken into account. Susan Nussbaum of Access Living comments, “How can we even begin to call a hotline or consider going to a shelter when the person we’re dependent on for life is our abuser?” In fact, Chicago only has one bed at one domestic violence shelter to serve all women in wheelchairs in the city who are facing abuse. As Susan Nussbaum points out, “that woman is not able to bring a personal assistant with her who she very well

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2. LGBTQI is an overarching acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex individuals and groups. This acronym includes many different groups of people within and across the categories. We do not mean to imply that this is one homogeneous community who would define and approach issues in the same way. In fact, there are often tensions because the particular issues and struggles of those who identify as transgender, intersexed, and bisexual are often marginalized in mainstream groups. It takes intentional effort for the acronym to live up to its vision of inclusiveness.

***“The challenge women of color face in combating personal and state violence is to develop strategies for ending violence that do assure safety for survivors of sexual/domestic violence and do not strengthen our oppressive criminal justice apparatus.” — Incite! 2006, p. 1-2***

may need and depend on. And what about women who have children with disabilities, who need shelter? They have no way of getting their kids sheltered as well.”



Historically, many mainstream anti-violence agencies have excluded groups who do not fit the one-size-fits-all framework. For instance, queer<sup>3</sup> and trans women are often not welcome in

shelters as “clients” or “workers” because of homophobia and transphobia; women involved in the sex trade are often not welcome because their identities and work are criminalized; women with drug and alcohol addictions are not welcome because they are considered too risky; women who are homeless may not be welcome in a shelter even if their homelessness has been caused by domestic violence.

### **Limitation 2: Over-reliance on the criminal legal system**

Second, there has been an over-reliance on the criminal legal system for reporting, intervention and accountability. **This is the same system that often criminalizes and subjects communities of color, poor communities, LGBTQI communities, and immigrant communities to police surveillance, harassment and brutality.** In fact, the push for greater police involvement and harsher sentences has “fueled the

proliferation of prisons which now lock up more people per capita in the United States than any other country.” (Incite! 2006, p. 224) The mainstream movement also has not addressed the extraordinarily high rates of incarceration for women of color, lesbians, trans women, and immigrant women in prisons, who in turn are subject to sexual and racial harassment and assault by prison guards and officials.

**The effort to develop strong relationships with the state for law enforcement and governmental funding has restricted the movement’s ability to critically challenge the criminal legal system’s oppressive structures and actions;** thus, as Incite! says, “approaches toward eradicating violence focus on working with the state rather than working against state violence...” (Incite! 2006, p. 1-2)

Inhe Choi of Korean American Women in Need (KAN-WIN) points out that it is important to contextualize the increased reliance on the state in the face of a national shift to criminalization as an answer to social problems. “The largest portion of the funding is through the criminal justice system for legal services and general operating. It’s understandable that the domestic violence community turns toward this source of money because it is reliable and pays for general operating expenses, which are very hard to raise money for. What is problematic is that government funding is growing through the criminal justice system and not in community education or women’s self esteem develop-

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3. While historically the term “queer” has been a derogatory term, many in LGBTQI communities are reclaiming it as a term of empowerment, and also a term that would include anyone who see themselves as outside of normative sexual identities.

ment. We are seeing an increase in arrests, detainment and incarceration, especially with the growing anti-immigrant climate. Our high schools are swarming with cops, youth are criminalized, and having more money funneling through that route is going to make our work much more about feeding into the whole criminalizing process.”

### **Limitation 3: Reliance on state funding**

Third, the mainstream movement has become more and more reliant on local, state, and federal funding for the maintenance of its programs. As a result, the state has come to define the priorities and methods of the antiviolence movement. As Mary Scott-Boria says, “when you get involved with the police, city and federal government, they have the power to decide how the game is going to be played.”

**With the passage of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994, there was even more narrowing of what the government would fund. VAWA prioritized law enforcement intervention and direct service counseling, with very little interest in prevention and community engagement and transformation.**

Mary Scott-Boria tells a story of a frontline agency worker on Chicago’s south side who had lots of creative ideas on how to involve churches and other groups in the community, but “every time she tried to do something her hands got slapped. The focus was on, ‘How many victims did you see this month? How many crisis calls did you take? How many hospital interventions did you do?’ Which is so important, but always at the expense of some real

education and nurturing people where they are.” Because these mandates come from the government, they don’t ultimately serve the community interests in preventing and stopping violence.



### **Limitation 4: Exclusive focus on interpersonal violence**

Fourth, as this relationship with the state grew, the mainstream movement narrowed its focus to interpersonal violence. In the early days, the movement defined violence broadly, and included an analysis of state-sponsored violence, including police violence and prison violence. Over time, activists came to privilege interpersonal violence over systemic forms of violence. This was a natural outgrowth of a growing partnership with, and reliance on, the state, which made critiques of the state difficult.

As different state funding streams developed for groups addressing specific forms of violence, even interpersonal violence was siloed along these lines. Organizations narrowed their focus to deal with only one form of violence, such as domestic violence or sexual assault, and stopped addressing the linkages between different forms of violence. While this “siloing” was, as Alice Cottingham points out, “in many respects an attempt to try to manage catastrophic pain, to limit it to some kind of bearable proportions,” it moved groups farther and farther away from an analysis that linked violence to multiple forms of oppression and their perpetuation by state institutions.



### **Limitation 5: Exclusive focus on individual intervention**

Fifth, over time, rape crisis and domestic violence agencies began to focus almost entirely on individual intervention (whether as counseling, support, or legal advocacy) aimed at solving immediate problems rather than on broad social transformation. As Mary Scott-Boria points out, “The more we were successful, the more we were less successful, and the narrower the scope of the work became. Now it’s a counseling strategy, a one on one go to court advocacy strategy, go into high schools and talk about rape crisis strategy.” And so, she feels that rape has become more of a “therapeutic issue, as opposed to institutional and community change...*It’s about how do I provide counseling to a black woman as opposed to how do I get involved with the black community and understand what’s going on there?*” The systemic issues of homelessness, poverty, economic injustice, racism, heterosexism, transphobia, anti-immigrant policies, and police harassment are put on the backburner or simply not addressed.



### **Limitation 6: Professionalization of antiviolence work**

Finally, the professionalization of antiviolence work, and the development of a social service approach has meant that organizations create a distinct division between professionals and community

members. This has led to a helper – helped dynamic between experts and clients. Alice Cottingham describes this: “Once you got swept into the helper / helped dynamic, there were paradigms in place. The helper is dispassionate, neutral, detached, and the helped are not entirely reasonable much of the time, aren’t really competent a lot of the time, don’t have anything to add to a conversation about what might they then want to do. These were very traditional notions too many of us bought into.”

This plays out in the standardized rules used in many programs and shelters. Alice Cottingham comments, “We had rhetoric that survivors are strong and powerful, but we didn’t treat them that way. We handed them a list of 68 rules to follow while they were there, and checked up on them. We weren’t respectful in a lot of instances. It would have been better to have an unstaffed shelter in some ways. It turned into a processing plant of a certain kind, a program.”

*Emi Koyama, a survivor and activist in the domestic violence movement, writes that we must “fundamentally change the dynamic of power and control within the shelter system.”*

Emi Koyama writes of her own efforts as a shelter worker to challenge abusive policies – “I questioned everything; the ‘clean and sober’ policy regarding substance use; the policy against allowing women to monitor their own medications; the use of threats and intimidations to control survivors; the labeling of ordinary disagreements or legitimate complaints as ‘disrespectful communication’; the patronizing ‘life skills’ and ‘parenting’ classes; the seemingly random enforcement of rules that somehow always push women

of color out of the shelter first.” (in *Incite!* 2006, p. 210)

### **Giving further voice to ongoing critiques**

These critiques have been raised all along, particularly from women of color and LGBTQI activists. From the start, activists and advocates from particular ethnic/racial and queer communities developed their own organizations to address the needs of their communities, and larger organizations formed taskforces to address the experiences of marginalized groups. Many of these initiatives, however, also trended towards adopting social service, criminal justice, and educational awareness models, as they began to accept state and federal funding.

Korean American Women In Need (KAN-WIN) is one example of a group that developed its work grounded in a cultural context, and has since thoughtfully worked to navigate the developments of the mainstream movement. Formed in 1989, KAN-WIN has always been led by the community rather than by outside professionals, and so tools and methods have been ones that make sense to the Korean immigrant community where the work is centered. In addition, KAN-WIN was initially formed as a nonhierarchical collective, a structure that raised concerns among the group’s initial funders. But as founding member Inhe Choi recalls, “We challenged them. We said that’s who we are, that’s how we work, this is our aim. Doing the work was about building community, including more people into our layers.”

<p><b>Websites of some innovative organizations:</b> <a href="http://www.incite-national.org">www.incite-national.org</a> <a href="http://www.generationfive.org">www.generationfive.org</a> <a href="http://www.nwnetwork.org">www.nwnetwork.org</a> <a href="http://www.cara-seattle.org">www.cara-seattle.org</a> <a href="http://www.creative-interventions.org">www.creative-interventions.org</a> <a href="http://www.survivorproject.org">www.survivorproject.org</a></p>
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While KAN-WIN eventually made a collective decision to begin accepting government funding, and then to adopt a traditional, hierarchical structure, dialogue and questioning have remained an essential part of the group’s culture. The organization has opted out of applying for government grants that were too closely tied to criminalization, and has questioned policies that they see as harmful to women in immigrant communities, such as automatic arrest. They have also spoken out against the movement toward licensing domestic violence workers, arguing that it works against community building by creating a tier system as well as yet another barrier for those who are not proficient in the English language.

### **Why Now?**

Now is a time of great innovation in the field, both in Chicago and nationally. New and innovative efforts are being led primarily by women of color, youth and LGBTQI communities. The broad range of efforts in Chicago is very exciting because

it is happening within a broader context of national efforts to re-ignite, rethink and re-mobilize communities to resist violence and struggle for social justice. Organizations like *Incite! Women of Color Against Violence*, *Generation Five-Ending Child Sexual Abuse in Five Generations*, *the Northwest*

*Network of Bi, Trans, Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Abuse*, *Communities Against Rape and Abuse*, *Creative Interventions*, and *The Survivor Project* have been providing leadership at a national level to reshape the face of the antiviolence movement, and Chicago’s work is very much part of this change.

A number of key reports and writings (*please see Suggested Readings at the back of this report*) have reoriented the movement toward community engagement and organizing and towards efforts to build community accountability for the perpetuation of violence.

The current movement is exciting, also, for the variety of approaches being used. As you read about the work taking place in Chicago, you will see many different analyses, structures and strategies at play. **The groups recognize that there is no one strategy to end violence; rather, we must use multiple approaches that arise from within communities rather than being imposed from the outside.** In fact, many of the groups do not reject the need for services for violence survivors, or anti-violence laws, but rather reject the notion that these responses will, on their own, end violence.

National Incite! and Critical Resistance have a powerful vision linked to what we see as this momentum in Chicago; they write, "We seek to build movements that not only end violence, but that create a society based on radical freedom, mutual accountability, and passionate reciprocity. In this society, safety and security will not be premised on violence or the threat of violence; it will be based on a collective commitment to guaranteeing the survival and care of all peoples." (Incite! 2006, p. 226)

**One of the most encouraging aspects of the work in Chicago is the willingness of groups to collaborate with each other.**

In order to have the greatest impact and to successfully end violence, we will need everyone's talents, resources, and contributions. The groups in this paper realize this and are acting in ways that will make this real. Youth-driven and youth-led groups are particularly adept at partnering: groups such as the Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team, Females United for Action (which is itself a coalition), the Broadway Youth Center and the Young Women's Empowerment Project regularly attend one another's events, partner to hold joint public events, and lead workshops for each other.

Groups are interested in building respectful and intentional relationships with each other, and reject the idea that they are in competition with one another. This may reflect many of the groups' reliance on grassroots fundraising rather than state funding. It also reflects groups' explicit commitment toward movement-building and their understanding of the need for collaboration towards this goal. This commitment provides important opportunities to continue to build the movement in Chicago.



# HOW ANTI-VIOLENCE GROUPS DEVELOP THEIR APPROACH

## Broadening the definition of violence

In the 1970s, many feminist antiviolence organizations used the phrase “violence against women” or “women abuse” to cover many different forms of violence and to make visible a continuum of violence against women and girls, including intimate partner abuse, sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment, street harassment, police violence, femicide, war-time rape, and other forms of mistreatment and violence. Over time, the organizations tended to narrow their focus to one particular form of violence, such as rape, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, sexual harassment, among others.

The groups we interviewed all see themselves as antiviolence, and yet the term “violence” or “violence against women” appears in hardly any of their names. The groups emphasize the importance of having more fluid definitions of violence and violence against women. While most of the groups we interviewed define their focus as women and girls, a good number focus on or include queer and transgender youth, and many include men from their communities in the work.

Most groups are less interested in specifying one form of violence or identifying one source of oppression and reject the idea that one is more important than another. Instead, there’s an emphasis on the interconnectedness of issues, including interpersonal and state violence, domestic violence and gang violence, and reproductive control as a form of violence. Most groups focus on multiple oppressions, including sexism, racism, ableism, classism,

homophobia, transphobia, classism, xenophobia, colonialism, among others.

## Communities define violence

All of the organizations develop their definitions, analyses, and approaches to violence from within their groups and communities. Rather than telling people what violence is, how it affects them, and what they need to do about it, these groups focus on generating the definitions and approaches from the experiences and perspectives of the members of the community. It’s important because, as AquaMoon points out, *“having definitions imposed has been what’s always been done to women of color.”*

The Young Women’s Empowerment Project (YWEP) encourages “girls to create their own analysis around violence and to create their own support system. We’re not saying you can’t handle this violence, you need a shelter and crisis worker. We’re saying violence happens all the time and we need to understand how best to support ourselves through it.”

Jen Curley from FIRE adds, “We let the women and girls define violence for themselves here. We don’t impose our definitions. If she has felt that she has been put down in some way, we aren’t the ones to say: well no, that’s not violence.”

Latinas Organizing for Reproductive Equality defines control over women’s reproductive choices a form of institutional violence. Mariela Alburges says, “We believe that reproductive rights are fundamental human rights. When there are laws dictating our reproductive rights options or controlling our decisions over our

*“People tend to put violence at different levels. Rape is at the top, sexual harassment at the bottom. But it’s all violence, no matter what kind of violence you’ve experienced.”*  
– FUSA member Yunuen Rodriguez

bodies, we consider that a form of personal violence and also institutional violence.”

It is not just definitions, but also approaches. Most mainstream service providers encourage counseling, leaving the abuser, and/or reporting to police. And yet, the youth connected with YWEP, which works with young women impacted by the sex trade, are often subject to police surveillance, harassment, and arrest, and thus do not see the police as a place to seek assistance, safety, or accountability. For YWEP, a commitment to transformative justice means not relying on the legal or legislative system to create accountability for individual acts of violence. Shira Hassan explains that for the girls and young women that YWEP works with, “more laws are not going to help.”

*“Transformative justice recognizes that we can transform our communities without the help of state systems, federal systems, social services. There is a way you can address violence without going to a shelter or without calling the cops.”*  
– Shira Hassan, YWEP

This has been a key issue behind the organizing of Incite! Women of Color Against Violence. The national Incite! in collaboration with Critical Resistance circulated a statement entitled, “Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex” that was directed to anti-violence advocates who have “often uncritically called for tougher prison sentences and greater police involvement” and to anti-prison activists who “have often not seriously considered issues of safety for survivors of domestic and sexual violence.” It calls for the

development of “community-based responses to violence that do not rely on the criminal justice system and which have mechanisms that ensure safety and accountability for survivors of sexual and domestic violence.” (Incite! 2006, pp. 223-226)

### **Linking local and global violence**

The GABRIELA Network Chicago works to make visible how the violence against women of colonialism, imperialism, and global terrorism is connected to sexual and domestic violence and other forms of interpersonal violence, including homophobia, within Filipina and progressive communities. They encourage anti-war and anti-imperialist activists to address interpersonal sexual violence, domestic violence, homophobia, and sexism, and they encourage anti-rape and domestic violence activists to include an analysis of global and imperialist forms of violence in their efforts.

As Kay Barrett explains, “A lot of us are against U.S. occupation and a lot of us are against rape.” GABRIELA Network wants activists to consider the questions of “How are these issues connected? How do we break down these issues of global terrorism? *How are rape and violence against women and LGBTQI folk connected to global terrorism?*”

GABRIELA Network believes these are intricately connected: “Women are raped in occupied countries and that is an act of war, that is a tool of war perpetuated by colonization, or comfort women from Korea, our bodies have always been colonized, or women who are being sterilized in Puerto Rico, the Philippines, various

places in Africa, we have to identify that these are patriarchal forms of violence as well.”

As groups look at global forms of violence, some also look internationally for models and approaches to respond to violence. Casa Segura, whose members are primarily Latin American immigrants, bring first-hand knowledge of approaches from their countries to their work in Chicago. As Ana Romero says, “Some of us worked with marginalized communities back in our countries, in places like Oaxaca, Mexico, where there was not much funding, no fancy infrastructure, not many *licensed* professionals, and yet a clear understanding that we ALL have certain inalienable human rights...and we had to fight for them. Needless to say how much we have learned from these compañeras.”

Similarly, in Women & Girls CAN’s February 2007 convening, looking at alternative approaches to providing housing for women impacted by violence, planning group members brought in examples of models from India and Bolivia to inform our discussion and work. The project from Bolivia, *Mujeres Creando*, for instance, runs a house, la Virgen de los Deseos, which is open to women to stay for a few days if they need a place. They also run a variety of economic, community, artistic, and political spaces/projects (for more info, [www.mujerescreando.org](http://www.mujerescreando.org)).



## Rethinking Survivors & Perpetrators

Many of the groups do not identify themselves as survivor-specific in their mission statements. Because they aim to end multiple kinds of violence from a variety of sources, they don’t emphasize a distinction between “survivors” and “non-survivors.” The projects engage members of the community to recognize that multiple forms of violence and systems of oppression exist and that members may be impacted differently.

**Most groups assume that all members of the community in some ways are survivors of violence and oppression and all can contribute to making the community more accountable for stopping its perpetuation.**

Most groups choose not to use the term “survivor” because it is not one embraced by members of the community. For instance, the Broadway Youth Center (BYC) is very flexible and fluid in their approach to those who participate in their programs, and the definitions come through “community and relationship-building, and change over time.” Thus, no one who seeks BYC’s services has to identify as a “survivor.” While the staff and youth leaders at BYC understand that most youth who come to the organization have experienced violence, these youth are not required to focus on the violence or to identify themselves as survivors in order to be a part of the project. BYC provides a space for youth to address the issues and concerns they decide to address, rather than to have these imposed upon them.

BYC recognizes that they are sometimes working with perpetrators who have also

been victimized. As Lara Brooks says, “We’re accessible to those who are impacted by and those who have perpetuated violence. *Some youth may be both survivors and perpetrators. . . . It’s important that staff and youth workers develop a complex analysis of anti-violence work, responses to trauma, and multiple oppressions.* It’s important for us to remain diligent in challenging this analysis and the different ways violence exists within our communities. We do a lot of intentional work, especially with individuals who perpetuate violence and how that relates to their experience of multi-tiered and intersecting forms of violence.”

This approach is quite different from many agencies that explicitly would not include both survivors and perpetrators of violence as part of their work. BYC’s decision to not separate out “victims” from “perpetrators” at the outset is based on their recognition that there are multiple systems of oppression and privilege at work, and that people who are part of their community come from multiple identities and experiences. Lara Brooks relates this, then, to the issue of safety. **While some groups hope to create “safe” space by focusing on survivors and excluding perpetrators, or by including only a particular group in the project, groups like BYC believe that safety is more a process and must be created through community building. Safety is negotiated rather than assumed.**

Lara Brooks provides this example: “We may build a relationship with a trans woman of color who is experiencing homelessness and accessing our daily drop-in program. During the course of our relationship, she may develop an intimate relationship with a BYC participant who is impacted by multiple oppressions, disproportionate state violence, trauma, and

poverty. How can we utilize our long-standing relationships to support the individual growth, resilience, and survival of these two individuals if intimate partner violence occurs? What does safety mean within the context of this relationship? And, more importantly, how do we create safe space that is informed by the needs of our youth, larger systemic issues, and intersecting oppressions? In our space, we have the opportunity to use our relationships with young people to discuss and explore – using a pace that the young person defines – the intersection of personal, community, and state violence. For us, this is healing work.”

### **Systems of oppression as root causes of violence**

In setting out to end violence, it is important to begin with an analysis of why violence is so prevalent in the lives of women and girls. There is no one answer to this complex question.

**As with defining violence, it is community members who define the root causes of violence, and so the analysis varies from group to group.**

Some groups see societal views of men and women as the central cause of violence. The Rogers Park Young Women’s Action Team feels that the root cause of male violence against women and girls is “the pervasive **social belief system** that posits male superiority over women as natural and preferred.” Ending violence, then, will “require changes at the most fundamental levels of society. These changes must eliminate policies and practices perpetuated by the male-dominated culture that sexualize women as objects, demean their value, restrict their participation in

decision making, control their rights over their bodies, dehumanize them with labels, restrict their ability to use public space, and marginalize and demean their presence.”

Another young women’s group, Females United for Action (FUFA), similarly believes that societal views of women, youth, people of color and other marginalized groups are the root cause of violence. FUFA believes that these views are **shaped by the media**. Youth organizer Stacy Erenberg comments, “It’s deeply embedded in our society through language and art that women are less than men, and should have no voice, and men should assert their power over women. You see it in music, in news programming, who the authority is vested in... So on a personal level when you have these societal dialogues telling men and women that one gender is supposed to be subordinate, it’s accepted. We think: that’s what happens, men beat women up, that’s the way it is.”

Other groups identify **multiple oppressions** as the root of violence. Mariame Kaba of Chicago Incite! captures the complexity of the issue when she explains, “We believe that at its roots, violence against women is based in and relies on the maintenance of oppressions, including but not limited to colonialism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, fundamentalism, imperialism, ableism, and classism that cannot be separated because they work in concert to reinforce each other. Hence, we are committed to ending violence by confronting and dismantling all of these systems of oppression.” The Young Women’s Empowerment Project also points to the maintenance of multiple oppressions as the root cause of violence against girls, queer youth and women in the sex trade. These forms of oppression “work together to reinforce each other and

to maintain the hierarchy of power within these system of violence – from police to pimps, from parents to prosecutors – that affect our daily struggle to survive.”

For Susan Nussbaum at Access Living, it is the **capitalist political system**, the power of the state, that leads to violence. “It’s a system of government that commodifies human beings. Humans are like raw material under capitalism. It breeds violence on a grand scale, such as war, and on a very personal, individual scale, between partners, parents and children, etc.”

**Here are some questions your group can discuss to develop your analysis:**

- ◆ What do you think the term “violence against women” includes? Is this a phrase that represents your concerns or issues? If not, how do you define your issues?
- ◆ What does it mean to be a “survivor” of violence? A “resister” of violence?
- ◆ What is the role of survivors in your group?
- ◆ Why do you think violence happens? What are the root causes?
- ◆ What forms of violence do members of your group and/or constituency face?
- ◆ What do you think is the role of the state in promoting or responding to violence?
- ◆ How is violence against women connected to other systems of oppression?



## HOW ANTI-VIOLENCE GROUPS STRUCTURE THEIR PROJECTS

Questions of structure, including how decisions are made and where to seek funding, reflect groups' analyses around issues of violence and oppression.

**Rather than copy the structures they have experienced in the mainstream service community, groups have gone back to the drawing board to question every aspect of their structure.**

Groups are asking the question that Alice Cottingham articulates: "How can we think about beginning to deconstruct hierarchies and funding structures and organizational structures that exist?"

### **Being grounded in communities**

A starting point for many groups is their concern that many mainstream anti-violence groups are disconnected from the communities they serve, and that these organizations view survivors as clients and agency staff as experts. Ana Romero explains that in founding Casa Segura, "women saw the need of building a project that was comprised primarily by community residents, who had a natural knowledge of the neighborhood, spoke the language, could relate to the issues....their concern was that these social service agencies were invading the community without ever including community members in the conversation as to what type of structure their program should have. *They hated the fact they were defined as clients, so they were open to develop something that was more community based, and where the community would have active participation... and they would be called compañeras.*"

The language used by other organizations also reflects this goal. Members of Latinas Organizing for Reproductive Equality (LORE), according to Mariela Alburges, refer to one another "not as colleagues, but as hermanas, sisters."

Typical of the groups we interviewed, the Young Women's Empowerment Project (YWEP) does not view the young women in their group in only one dimension; they see them in their full humanity. As Shira Hassan says, YWEP understands that "people have multiple lives; they are not just the drug user or prostitute, they are also a knitter, a mother, a nurturer, etc. When we look at the whole person, we recognize that they do have strategies to keep themselves safe, and they are already using some of them."

**Many people we interviewed want to make this potentially draining work sustainable, by creating systems of support and self care, and by consciously rejecting the helper-helped dynamic.**

An important part of this process of community-building is the creation of systems of support for members of the group.

Alice Cottingham explains that in the early days of the movement, "it was so urgent to create safe space, women were dying... Hearing stories of how terrified women were, how much they had been hurt, how close they were to being killed, nobody was prepared to listen to those stories. We didn't anticipate, what do you do with that information, how can you listen to it every day?" Based on this experience, she urges activists to have a "sense of gentleness with each other."

***“What we’ve done is found a way to make people feel really safe and to promote healing and action and support.” – Jen Curley, FIRE***

Many groups focus on self care and building support and solidarity among group members. LORE insists that the work take place on a personal level, with members of the group supporting one another. Mariela Alburges explains, ***“I can speak to another woman and check in at a personal level, as opposed to solely work work work. So we acknowledge that we’re all human beings and we’re doing this on a volunteer basis and we know that we can support each other in different ways.”***

FIRE stresses that the work they do “comes from our lives.” Members use their experiences – “as healers, organizers, nurses, as women that work in salons, as mothers, artists, as survivors” as well as what they experience on a daily basis. Jen Curley comments, “There is space to bring this - our experiences, what we read, hear, live - into our meetings. It’s not like this is the agenda and this is all we can talk about. We don’t box ourselves in in that way. For example, there were several young women of color who were assaulted on the south side and the news portrayed them as ‘unrelated.’ We had this long conversation about how we are pushed to see acts of violence against women of color as ‘unrelated’ if not perpetrated by the same perpetrator, rather than as part of a system of violence.”



Jen Curley continues, “We incorporate these conversations into our analysis – when we are working on the publication, in how we frame our issues. Important to this is an analysis of how we may perpetuate what we are working to end; so ***we ask ourselves – do we use/support ways of thinking about violence that allow it to continue? Does how we frame the issue of violence in our publication prop up systems of violence? We feel that these are important questions for us to ask.***”

The group has prioritized the balancing of work and healing, both within and outside of their meetings. Meetings do not focus solely on action steps, but include “healing rituals, sharing food, grounding exercises, telling our stories, what we have heard, seen, read about.” The group has decided to hold separate monthly sister circles, to provide more space for healing and support outside of the regular meetings.

### **Grappling with the Non-Profit Industrial Complex**

Groups have also made structural decisions based on a critique of the “non-profit industrial complex” (NPIC), the restrictive structures in which tax exempt nonprofit organizations operate.

Non-profit, or “501(c)3” organizations, are sanctioned by the state as official charities. Such organizations must follow state regulations -- they must have boards of directors to govern the group, meaning that they have inherently hierarchical structures; they must approve by-laws and policies to govern their organizations; and they must file annual reports with the state.

Most organizations obtain 501(c)3 status so that donations, including foundation grants, can be tax deductible. Others, however, are choosing not to have this status because they argue that it is counter-productive to create social justice projects within a state-sanctioned system. For these groups, reliance on foundation support, like reliance on state funding, is risky because funders may have too much control over the organization's goals and strategies.

While critiques of the NPIC are not new, there has been an increased focus on the subject both within Chicago and nationally over the past five to ten years. Much of this focus has been spurred by women of color, and in particular, national Incite!. They held a series of conversations beginning in 2002, and eventually published an anthology called The Revolution Will Not Be Funded (2006). Chicago Incite! in partnership with several local groups, held a two-day event in April 2007. It featured a panel discussion with several of the book's authors, as well as a workshop with Paula Rojas from New York's Sista II Sista to focus on implications for groups working with, and led by, young women.

**The groups represented in this report have negotiated the NPIC in different ways. Some choose not to adopt the non-profit status, and others choose to adopt it with some innovation.**

One group that has moved far away from a hierarchical model is Incite! Both national and Chicago Incite! have held discussions to determine whether their structure should be centralized or decentralized. Leadership on the national level decided against a top-down approach in which they would be setting priorities for groups around the country. Taking this to

the next level, Chicago Incite! has agreed that any woman of color who agrees with the national Principles of Unity can label her work as part of Incite! and hold events in the name of the organization.

Some other groups that have formed in the past five years also have decided to forego the process of becoming 501(c)3 organizations, and instead have developed non-hierarchical structures. For example, Mariela Alburges explains that at Latinas Organizing for Reproductive Equality (LORE), "we don't like thinking of ourselves as a board, we think of ourselves as a steering committee where we give ourselves the opportunity to facilitate these discussions, bring it back to the group, and think about next steps. It's a reciprocal, cyclical engagement."

The Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team (YWAT) is committed to remaining a fiscally-sponsored project because of the flexibility that it affords the group in setting up its decision-making structure. YWAT director Daphnee Rene explains: "*We don't need to become a 501c(3) and then have to deal with the paperwork and the regulations. We don't need that to accomplish our goals. Plus, we try to operate more like a collective and want to remain youth-led. When you have to have a board, you have to open yourself up to adults having more power in the organization.*"

**Some of the groups have decided to not seek out foundation support, or to limit it significantly.**

FIRE members had long discussions about whether to seek larger grants to support their work, but as Jen Curley explains, "we decided that we wanted to be able to make decisions about our work that made sense

for us – that were in line with our values, our mission, and what is happening in our lives – not on what a funder wants. We also wanted to spend our energy on the publication [a survivors’ storytelling project that FIRE is creating] and with each other, not on having to go to funder events, keeping track of guidelines, fitting into rules that don’t make sense for our work.”

Mariela Alburges explains that LORE would ideally find “a funding source that doesn’t have any restrictions to our work and that just really allows us to tell our stories and the stories of the women that are working with us in a way that is respectful to their experiences and that is enacting change.” LORE has thus far chosen to fundraise without turning to foundations, holding events and selling T-shirts and buttons to bring in funding. Mariela Alburges sees this as a strength for the group. *“Financial factors have been a struggle, but also rewarding because we know that we are on very limited funds, and so we want to make any organizing event we put together something that is worthwhile for the community, something that propels our work, increases the momentum, and takes us to the next step.”*

**Wondering how to raise money from sources beyond foundations? Here are some things that Chicago groups have done successfully!**

- ◆ Ask for volunteers for expenses like childcare and cooking for meetings
- ◆ Hold a “Cultural Night,” where you can sell jewelry and art
- ◆ Pass around a donation box at every one of your events
- ◆ Sell T-shirts and buttons
- ◆ Ask supporters to contribute, and then ask them again!

At the same time, it can be challenging to operate outside of the 501(c)3 system and to develop alternative models. Inhe Choi of Korean American Women in Need (KAN-WIN) reflects on the organization’s decision to move from a collective model to a more traditional one. “As the number of workers grew, board members were placed in the role of micromanaging the organization in personnel matters such as work hours, vacations and reimbursement, as well as disagreements over case management...The absence of an executive director also limited funding opportunities from certain funders that only support organizations with an executive director at the helm. Thus while we succeeded in securing grants from important foundations and government agencies, we also knew that we could do significantly better if we presented ourselves as an organization with accountable and *traditional* leadership.”

**Groups that choose to operate completely outside of the 501(c)3 structure generally have small budgets, and are often unstaffed; this decision can also present challenges.** Some of the challenges Casa Segura encounters from operating primarily with a volunteer base are the lack of continuity and forced interruption of certain initiatives due to leadership turnover. This turnover “speaks to the multiple barriers faced by the compañeras we collaborate with,” Ana Romero observes. “Many of them are first generation immigrants, low income, single moms... with no discretionary income and whose lives can change in an instant because of a job loss, a sick child, a personal illness.....In fact, we are currently exploring alternative models of women’s economic development and sustainability focusing on social purpose businesses and cooperatives....”

**With these challenges in mind, other groups have chosen to become 501(c)3 organizations.**

For these groups, the decision has required them to rethink the role of the board of directors, to create more levels of decision-making. For example, Females United for Action (FUFA), which is a project of Women & Girls CAN (a 501(c)3 organization), has its own decision-making core group that guides the project's work; youth representatives serve on the organizational board of directors as well, to infuse a youth voice into all levels of decision-making.

Organizer Stacy Erenberg feels that "an organization like FUFA that works to end violence against women shouldn't put hierarchical power structures in place that could lead to oppression within the organization." FUFA is able to operate within a 501(c)3 structure, in her opinion, because "the board of Women & Girls CAN is dedicated to keeping FUFA grassroots and making sure it's youth-driven, and the adults confront their own adultism. The board is really willing to learn... and it's not just the board driving something because of a grant they may get."

**The organizations we interviewed were uniformly committed to having their issues, strategies, structure and definitions of success defined by their communities rather than by outside forces such as foundations.**

As Shira Hassan of the Young Women's Empowerment Project explains, "it's been a long term struggle around how we define success instead of how funders define it. We need to build a language to

help people understand what we are doing so they see the successes." Groups define success in many different ways, including: developing and deepening their analysis and understanding of violence; developing youth leadership; the ability to push the social justice community at large to develop a gender analysis; and the individual transformation they see taking place within their communities.

**Questions to ask yourself:**

- ◆ What type of structures do you need to accomplish your work?
- ◆ How will you share power within your organization?
- ◆ How will you ensure accountability for the work to get done?
- ◆ How do you define success?
- ◆ How will you fundraise to support your project?
- ◆ What values will guide your choices?

**Conducting anti-violence work in a social service setting**

Projects operating within larger social service agencies face a unique situation. Social service agencies addressing violence against women are almost always dependent on state funding, and often have extensive reporting requirements on the individual women served. While all of the people we interviewed stressed how important the work of these social service agencies is, operating a community-driven anti-violence project within such a structure - in particular, one that seeks to challenge the state - may present conflicts.

One activist spoke of an experience she had had at a project several years ago which was situated within a mainstream

agency that provided services to domestic violence survivors. "I started to implement more of what I know, which is popular education, and the group was growing and became very powerful, and at some point there was a question within the organization, because there was a contradiction between our philosophy and the mainstream organization... They were trying to close [our project] but after a letter writing campaign to the board with men and women from the community, they decided to give us another chance to continue."



FIRE began as a project of Southwest Women Working Together (an organization that closed its doors recently), but left after several struggles in trying to operate within the larger organization. Jen Curley, who was hired as an organizer, explains that the organization "was challenged by our circle structure and the dignity and respect with which we treated each other. *They were threatened by the ways in which women started speaking up about the abuse and violence they saw at the organization. It was then that they started trying to control all of us in different ways.* They threatened me with changing my position at the organization or trying to impose rules on our work (i.e. deciding what our meetings looked like, and what we should work on). There were even implied threats of taking away some people's housing or punishing them for 'breaking program rules.' And they denied us access to funds we had raised. It created a hostile environment for members to come into the office."

FIRE member Cernora Johnson adds, "*The organization that was there to provide help and guidance to women who experienced domestic violence became a place of tension, gossip, verbal attacks, and much more. It's like the organization that was put forth to help survivors of abuse became the abusers. It had got so bad that I could no longer walk in the building because of all the evilness that was going on.*"

FIRE's decision to become independent brought clear benefits, but also challenges. Jen Curley explains, "Being outside of a nonprofit organization has freed up both space and energy to focus on our work rather than defending ourselves and our work, but it has created new challenges. My time as the paid organizer had been devoted to keeping the group going and helping to build the group -- through agenda building, follow-up, turn-out calls, documenting our work and growth, and seeking out resources and opportunities. Not having paid staff has helped us to create a more collective model of working in terms of leadership and responsibilities, but it has been harder to meet or keep up momentum."

**Such experiences have led some activists to develop an inside/outside approach, in which they hold paid positions at mainstream antiviolence agencies, while they are also involved in community-based projects aimed at ending violence against women outside of their work.**

At a recent Chicago dialogue convened by Women & Girls CAN, anti-violence activists discussed the limits of operating within the mainstream anti-violence agencies, with some arguing that more projects, like the ones reflected in this report, need to be developed outside of this framework.

Others saw the value of continuing to try to shift mainstream organizations to address some of the limits and renew their commitments to social justice (see also Building Movement Project report, “Social Service and Social Change” in *Suggested Readings*).

## **How to build safe communities within the anti-violence movement**

Given the groups’ anti-violence and anti-oppression analysis, they are committed to creating internal accountability to ensure that mistreatment, harassment and violence are not taking place within their own groups or within partner organizations. The groups adopt a variety of approaches and structures to create safe, accountable spaces.

### **Creating safe spaces**

Many of the groups recognize that their organizations and their communities are not homogeneous, and are not always safe, welcoming, and respectful for all members. Some have begun to reflect on their own practices, reexamining how their structures and methods might alienate or exclude certain segments of the community.

**Several organizations spoke to the need to create a safe space for queer youth and women with disabilities.**

The Brighton Park Neighborhood Council (BPNC) has made a conscious decision to create programming and structure that is welcoming to queer and questioning youth and allies. In 2006, youth leaders within the organization formed a community-based Gay Straight Alliance. Jessie Avilez, the first youth coordinator of the GSA, ex-

plains, “Its creation originated from small group discussion with other fellow queer people, who identified the need for a safe space. *People do not realize that LGBTQ people exist within their community, and this lack of visibility leaves the younger people at a higher risk for problematic situations.*”

Through the organization’s youth council and GSA, he “found comfort to be myself and express my individuality outside of the home or high school – the oppressive system that was and probably still is homophobic.”

BPNC followed up on the creation of the GSA by having trainings for staff and leaders around homophobia and heterosexism, and by holding board discussions, so that leadership at every level has an understanding of the issues facing queer youth in the community.

BPNC has also recently begun to have more conversations about gender identity and expression, as many of the youth involved have challenged rigid gender expressions and have talked about the policing they experience at school and in the community. As a group, however, they realize that they need to take more active and intentional steps in being trans-inclusive. They see themselves as in-process; as youth organizer Jen Curley says, “for us right now it means challenging transphobia and gender policing within our group and work and acting to change it.” The youth recently attended a Trans 101 training at the Broadway Youth Center to begin this work more structurally. BPNC has also brought issues of LGBTQ rights into their coalitions as they address issues such as educational equity and criminal justice.

Susan Nussbaum of Access Living stresses that *“we are allies in the struggle, but it is really important for all of us to understand all the various conditions that are on us because of our layers and layers of identities of oppression we’re dealing with, despite how we identify primarily.”* She urges organizations to think through ways to create a safe space that is welcoming and accessible to women with disabilities. This means taking into account the wide range of disabilities that women may have, as well as taking simple steps such as obtaining and learning how to use TTY equipment.

As groups expand their definition of who is included in their community, and work to build partnerships with other groups to end violence, they have had to develop ways to deal with conflict and to negotiate different ideas and approaches. Sharon Powell of All Hail acknowledges that “when you’re collaborating, tension is going to flare up.” Looking to coops and collectives, All Hail is in the process of developing and embedding conflict

resolution principles and practices into their group and organizational structure. The Young Women’s Action Team has used “healing circles” to address internal group conflicts that will inevitably arise. The circle process involves the use of a talking piece, a focus on active listening, and a commitment of basic respect for all group members.

### **Responding to an act of violence within the community**

When conflict arises because of an act of physical violence within the group, additional approaches come into play. A starting point for some groups is to explicitly state guiding principles for everyone involved in the organization. For example, Incite! members, including those in the Chicago chapter, agree to Principles of Unity, affirming their commitment to ending violence within and outside of the organization.

Chicago GABRIELA Network created a membership pledge card, in which all

#### **Principles of Unity:** We at INCITE!:

- Maintain a space by and for women of color.
- Center our political analysis and community action in the struggle for liberation.
- Support sovereignty for indigenous people as central to the struggle for liberation.
- Oppose all forms of violence which oppress women of color and our communities.
- Recognize the state as the central organizer of violence which oppresses women of color and our communities.
- Recognize these expressions of violence against women of color as including colonialism, police brutality, immigration policies, reproductive control, etc.
- Link liberation struggles which oppose racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism and all other forms of oppression.
- Support coalition building between women of color.
- Recognize and honor differences across cultures.
- Encourage creative models of community organizing and action.
- Promote shared leadership and decision-making.
- Recognize and resist the power of co-optation of our movements.
- Support these principles not only in our actions, but in the practices within our own organizations.
- Support the creation of organizational processes which encourage these principles and which effectively address oppressive individual and institutional practices within our own organizations.
- Discourage any solicitation of federal or state funding for Incite activities.



members commit that they will not participate in acts of violence against women. The card is accompanied by a series of trainings on violence against women, so that members fully understand their commitment. Initiated by the Chicago chapter, almost 1,000 women nationally representing 12 American GABRIELA Network chapters, have now signed onto this groundbreaking campaign.

**GABRIELA Network Pledge Card**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, pledge to challenge sexual and domestic violence in all its forms as a member of GABRIELA Network. I understand that sexual and domestic violence are issues of power that impact the lives of all people including women, men, youth, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, two-spirit, and gender nonconforming people. I also understand that sexual and domestic violence overwhelmingly affects women.

I pledge to stand by those who are survivors of sexual and domestic violence, meaning that I will believe their words, support them, and advocate for them. I will honor their wishes, especially if they do not wish to report incidents to the authorities.

I pledge that I will not perpetrate acts of sexual or domestic violence against others and I understand that if I do, I will be discharged from the organization immediately.

I have read the materials on sexual and domestic violence provided to me, and have or will participate in the GABRIELA Network educational about sexual and domestic violence.

In other cases, issues of violence and mistreatment may arise as groups partner with other organizations that may not share their analysis. This has raised questions that groups continue to struggle with.

**What does it mean for groups with an anti-violence lens to partner with organizations that do not share that analysis?**

**What should groups do when incidents of violence and oppression occur in partner organizations?**

**How can we create accountability within our own community – within our own group, with our partner organizations, and with groups in coalition?**

**How can we develop responses that engage the community, and that do not rely on the state?**

**Women of color have taken a leading role in this work.** Chicago activists participated in a 2-day discussion held by national Incite! in 2004, which resulted in a report entitled *Gender Oppression – Abuse – Violence: Community Accountability within the People of Color Progressive Movement*. The report begins by stating that “patriarchy continues to oppress all of us within our progressive, radical, revolutionary people of color organizations and movement. This system of oppression has held back our movement, divided us, forced us to make false choices among forms of oppression, and created environments of fear and submission rather than justice and liberation. Patriarchal attitudes and ways of doing our work, gender-based abuse within our own intimate relationships, among our own constituents and among comrades too often goes on silent and unchallenged. Denial, minimizing and victim-blaming which prop up and support continued gender-based oppression and violence remains deeply rooted within our consciousness, assumptions, attitudes, and actions or lack of action.”

The report clarifies the ways in which sur-

vivors are silenced, blamed and mistreated within the social justice community. It calls on people of color social justice groups to “set conditions for safety, respect and gender equity,” suggesting action steps including: grounding the organization in principles and practices that promote gender equity and challenge patriarchy; sending a clear message that serious action will be taken in response to oppression, abuse and violence; providing a transparent process for community accountability; and providing structured political education to all organizational members and allies.

**In 2006, Mango Tribe spurred a series of town hall discussions in response to “reports of rape and sexual misconduct by respected adult male members/leaders in the Asian American community involving female youths, 15-18 years old.”**

In their “Call to Action,” Mango Tribe emphasized that, “as mentors, educators, and organizers in our community, it is our duty to maintain safe spaces for youth. . . . And so, when young APIA women now feel unsafe in the very space where they first found validity for their political identity, then we have failed them as a community.”

Kay Barrett, a member of Mango Tribe and GABRIELA Network, talks about how infuriated organizers had been to learn that the decision on how to deal with one of the perpetrators

was made by an organization's Board of Directors and Executive Director that employed him, with no community input. The perpetrator was allowed to resign quietly from the organization, with no accountability to the community.



**The town hall meetings created a space to discuss how to create mechanisms of support when violence takes place within a social justice project, how to create a safe space to prevent violence from happening, and how to hold perpetrators accountable within the community.**

Kay Barrett, who was one of the coordinators of the town hall events, felt that the feedback they received pointed to the problem itself. She explains, “A lot of the other organizations, in my opinion as GABRIELA Network coordinator, are very homophobic and internalized sexist. The feedback was: Well, she should seek law enforcement, there should be a police report, we don’t really know who she is, but we know who the perpetrator is and he’s our friend, so why’s she anonymous? So, again, all of these mechanisms of coercion, of isolation.”

In response, GABRIELA Network circulated an “open letter stating our stance towards organizations we believe perpetuate sexual and domestic violence in the APIA community and in social justice communities in Chicago.” The letter states that GABRIELA Network will not “affiliate, work with, or formally attend organizational functions that do not have a transparent process addressing sexual assault. We believe that working with organizations that do not recognize sexual assault would be counterproductive in making connections towards the liberation we envision.”

The writing of the open letter was a collective decision made by all GABRIELA Network Chicago Members with the recognition that while it might limit their coalition work, it would deepen their militancy and political praxis. According

to Kay Barrett, one important result of their stance has been that “a lot of those Filipina young women who were in those organizations are seeking to come to GABRIELA Network because they realize that we are a supportive, empowering space.”

**Healing circles and the actions of united community members can also be used effectively to respond to violence within the social justice community.**



Last year, a group of people connected with Women and Girls CAN formed a healing circle of trusted friends and colleagues to support a member of our community who had been sexually assaulted by someone in the social justice community. The healing circle created a communal space for her to tell her story and for the group to talk about its impact on us.

The healing circle process was very powerful. The group recognized that it wasn't just an individual problem, but a community problem, and that the community as a whole could take action on it. As the survivor says, “Until we were all in the room, I kept thinking it was just my problem and I wasn't sure what steps to take to make sure other people would be safe. This circle was empowering for all of us, but especially for me, in large part because we took action together.” Through our healing circle, we came up with strategies to create accountability for the violence. We wrote a collective letter to the perpetrator and we alerted people who might be working with him about the incident and the potential for future violence.

**Are you concerned about abuse and mistreatment within your own community or partner organizations?**

**Here are some ideas:**

- ◆ Create a pledge card for your members, affirming their commitment not to perpetrate violence
- ◆ Hold trainings for your organization and partner groups to better understand issues of violence
- ◆ Hold a town hall meeting so that your community can openly discuss solutions
- ◆ Set clear policies on what steps will be taken if someone in your organization commits an act of violence
- ◆ Form a healing circle to support the survivor and work together to take action to address the violence

# STRATEGIES YOU CAN USE TO END VIOLENCE!

There is a broad variety of work taking place in Chicago to end violence against women and girls. This section will present six examples of successful strategies you might consider in your own work.

We want to make two points at the outset. First, this report provides a snapshot of work taking place in Chicago. Women & Girls CAN will continue to document this evolving work and share information about it. Please visit our website at [www.womenandgirlscan.org](http://www.womenandgirlscan.org) for more information, and to submit your group's information, ideas, strategies, and successes.

Second, we want to stress that **most groups do not fit neatly into just one of these categories, but rather borrow from a variety of approaches, and also shift their strategies and tactics over time.** Mariela Alburges echoes the sentiments of many groups when she says that Latinas Organizing for Reproductive Equality is "not bound to one specific model. Every time we go out we learn a little bit of something, and then we change our approach, little by little." **Activists are rejecting these "false choices" of having to opt for only one approach.** Rather than pigeonhole the groups as working only within certain models, then, we offer these as successful approaches to consider in taking on this work.



## Strategy 1: Engage people in your community!

Latinas Organizing for Reproductive Equality believes that it is crucial for women in the community to engage with one another and learn about each others' experiences in order to build community and open conversations about traditionally taboo topics. The organization has held a series of "cafecitos," in which women come together to talk about their lives. Mariela Alburges explains, "We present the conversations as cafecitos, so we imagine that women are just coming, sharing coffee, sharing with the break of bread, and creating this trust and rapport for them to be able to really speak openly about their own experiences and the experiences of their families. . . ."

This strategy of creating a space and opening a dialogue with women is common to



many organizations. This method does not have to take place in only one setting and in only one way. Ana Romero explains that Casa Segura uses many methods to "push into public consciousness the kind of violence that women endure everyday, and which has been historically denied and trivialized. We prioritize good old grassroots mobilization such as flyer distribution, rallying, and street theater." In response to the murder of one of the women in the neighborhood they organized a march,

which started at the victim's house. Later, they surveyed the community outside churches and supermarkets, and organized town hall meetings. "We were talking to many people - we wanted to know what the community thought about this murder as much as we wanted to incite them around this issue. The conversation was extremely rich. We all learned so much in the process."

Korean American Women in Need (KAN-WIN) uses community classes and workshops as an opening for engagement around issues of violence. The organization holds several different kinds of workshops - from auto repair to parenting workshops to Qigong. Inhe Choi stresses that this is about "meeting people where they are at and really working with them. It's the bigger notion of women's empowerment." Jenny Choi adds, "The Qigong classes are open to everybody. It's not just for the women we work with, it's more for the public to bring them out and in that process we talk about the work we do and invite them into it.... They do these meditative breathing exercises and *it's a social safe space to talk about personal issues and network with the community.*"

Young women at the Brighton Park Neighborhood Council developed a creative way to engage their community. They researched the impact of the Virgen de



Guadalupe as a religious and cultural icon on Latinas in the community, looking at a series of im-

ages of the Virgen, and at the mixed messages that young women in particular receive as to how they are expected to behave. The result was a multimedia presentation aimed at promoting dialogue. The young women found that the Virgen was associated with positive characteristics like love and understanding, but that these sometimes were interpreted to mean dependence and submissiveness to men.

Itzia Favela, a member of the Girls' Group, explained in her presentation, "In all of these mixed messages we came across, with purity, respect and the Catholic church, it seemed that there were some common messages that related to blaming the victim. For example, we are judged if we have sex before marriage or accused of sinning if we are raped. Sometimes the questions being asked aren't the right ones. Why aren't they accusing him of sinning? And why are they judging us?" **By sharing their research in a creative way throughout the community, they were able to promote community dialogue around media justice and violence against women.**

Because the engagement takes place within the community, rather than in a client/provider relationship, it can be more healing for survivors. Heather Flett of Take Back the Halls contrasts community engagement strategies with traditional counseling for youth. "I've been thinking about what's really a more healing experience for the young women - a counseling session or a group where she is out being active and being a part of something. I'm becoming more convinced that this traditional based counseling method is not what young women need."

**Community engagement can also surface issues and push groups' analysis around violence in surprising ways.** Stacy Erenberg recalls that when Females United for Action (FUFA) held a youth spoken word event around media justice in June, "we didn't expect such an open dialogue about transgender issues. But a bunch of folks from the Broadway Youth Center came and talked openly and candidly and it opened up FUFA's idea that violence is not just binary female - male, but people who don't define as one of those experience violence too. That was a big success for us." The queer and trans youth from BYC had an opportunity to share their stories and experiences, and FUFA members had an opportunity to see the connections with their own experiences, the sources of their oppression, and the possibilities for future collaborations.

Through these powerful approaches, women and girls in the community identify issues and develop solutions, instead of groups imposing a top-down approach. Because this is such a central part of all of the groups' analysis, community engagement in some form has also served as a starting point for nearly all of the other strategies used by groups across Chicago.

**Ways you can engage your community:**

- ◆ Hold cafecitos
- ◆ Pass out flyers
- ◆ Perform street theater
- ◆ Raise issues in community classes & workshops
- ◆ Present a research project
- ◆ Hold events in partnership with other groups

**Strategy 2: Organize!**

Many groups are organizing, mobilizing members of their communities to take action together to end violence against women. There is no one way to organize, and groups are using a variety of approaches.

**Whether they take direct action to address what they see as the root causes of violence, or infuse an anti-violence analysis into other social change efforts within their neighborhood, or engage in participatory action research, these groups are committed to dismantling systems that promote violence and to having those most impacted speak for themselves.**

The young women of Females United for Action (FUFA), who believe that media portrayals of women are a key factor in promoting violence against women, led a successful direct action campaign in 2006 against the Spanish-language radio station La Ley 107.9. La Ley's advertisement for a radio contest, which appeared on buses and trains, on billboards and in newspapers across Chicago, showed a row of Latinas, photographed from behind in short shorts with "25 pegaditas" (slang for 25 hits or slaps) across their backs.

FUFA members felt that the ad promoted violence against women and demeaned the Latino community. For FUFA member Yunuen Rodriguez, this was an important campaign to take on: "I don't like my community getting wrong messages about young Latina girls. I don't like the message they put out about men, and my little brother is a young man. And I don't want to have to be harassed... I wanted to tell them to take them down because it gets the wrong messages out there about Latina girls having to fulfill these stereotypes and

being looked at as nothing more than objects.”



Through press work, direct action, an email blitz, and several meetings, FUFA was able to get a meeting with both

the General Manager at La Ley, and a representative of Spanish Broadcasting System (the Miami company that owns La Ley) to make sure that they would hear firsthand from young women about their concerns. FUFA won not only immediate removal of the billboard, but also a change in La Ley’s ongoing advertising strategies. La Ley agreed to take into account the young women’s concerns in their future advertising.

**For groups that are grounded in Chicago’s traditional school of community organizing, these efforts have required some reformulating of traditional organizing practices.**

The Brighton Park Neighborhood Council (BPNC), which developed out of a traditional organizing model, has, according to former Director Alex Poeter, “undergone a process of reevaluating traditional organizing practices developed many years ago by white males, that traditionally don’t take into account identity, race, or the cultural context of community. That make a distinction between the public arena, where organizing takes place, and the private sphere, where domestic violence takes place. This distinction in traditional organizing means you don’t address domestic violence, you can’t organize around it.... But we’ve been exploring

ways to develop more of a community response.” For BPNC, this means developing new outreach methods, creating safe space for women and girls, raising violence against women as a community issue at public events and candidate forums, and infusing an anti-violence analysis into their work around related issues such as affordable housing and economic justice.

Access Living is currently organizing against the nursing home system, and includes an anti-violence analysis as part of this work. As Susan Nussbaum explains, “there’s violence and neglect in these nursing homes. Many people describe things that are nothing short of murder, and next to imprisonment, or torture, it’s the most incomprehensible cruelty that human beings are capable of inflicting on other human beings. There’s caregiver abuse, and also this whole warehousing, very paternalistic environment.” *The organization is fighting to have money for nursing homes go to individual people with disabilities to make their own choices “rather than straight into the nursing home’s profit margin.”* The group recently partnered with ADAPT, a direct action disability rights organization ([www.adapt.org](http://www.adapt.org)), in a 200-person protest at the American Medical Association.

**Some direct action groups – especially those working with youth – also utilize participatory action research in their work, so that young people can research their own issues and engage their communities in action.**

The Rogers Park Young Women’s Action Team (YWAT) begins their campaigns through youth-led research. Members frame the questions, design and use methods to collect data, analyze the information, make recommendations and work with others to follow through. YWAT’s

2003 study on street harassment included surveys of 168 young women and focus groups with over 30 other girls, revealing the depth of the “anger, fear, and anxiety” that youth were feeling about harassment.

The group’s initial action steps were to organize a RESPECT Campaign that included working with local businesses to hang



posters against street harassment and obtaining support from public officials. In 2006, YWAT launched an annual “Citywide Day of Action to End Street Harassment,” urging individuals and groups to take creative action on May 4 to make a collective statement against violence. The first Day of Action consisted of over 140 individual and collective “actions” across the city. These ranged from individuals who wore orange in support of the day, to public education events, street theater and a YWAT-led community march.

**As community groups engage in organizing strategies, and challenge systems that promote violence, they need to develop approaches to ensure the group’s safety.** YWAT members recall the reaction they received from some men in the community as they began to address street harassment. These men labeled YWAT members as “man bashers,” and one day, an angry community member carved “rat ass hoes” into their front door, leading the group to have several discussions about community reactions and safety. YWAT member Emilyya Whitis comments, “It didn’t matter because we are still in this space and we are still doing the work that we are doing,

and we are not ashamed of it.” Ronnett Lockett adds, *“We’re creating a community, so we can support each other and see each other as role models, and that’s a really good positive thing.”*

### **Strategies for organizing to end violence:**

- ◆ Hold the media accountable for offensive images of women
- ◆ Rethink your own organizing model
- ◆ Raise issues of violence in candidate forums and other community events
- ◆ Hold institutions accountable
- ◆ Do participatory action research
- ◆ Hold a citywide Day of Action

### **Strategy 3: Use art & storytelling!**

Many forms of artistic expression have been central to social justice movements, including the anti-violence movement. These include visual arts, media arts, poetry, spoken word, and performance art, among others. A number of the groups interviewed for this project have art as their mission or as one of their strategies. Like many of the groups, All Hail suggests that art has a special role in helping groups and communities to open up “different kinds of conversations, and a chance to open up the issues in a different way.” In 2006, they held a weekend event entitled “Saving Ourselves, Saving our Sisters,” featuring panels, performances, workshops and a photo exhibit to encourage community building and action to end violence against women and girls. A central goal of this work is to create spaces for people to express and empower them-

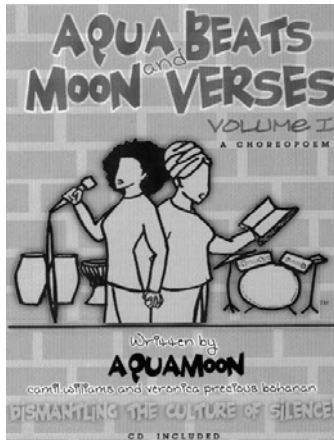


***“When we tell stories, others come forward. And this is the biggest success.”***  
**Angee Washington, FIRE**

selves, to tell their stories, and to contribute to awareness, action, and social change.

**Art can serve as a powerful vehicle for sharing women’s and girls’ stories.**

AquaMoon aims to “be a voice for disenfranchised youth and women, to be a voice until they’re able to speak out, through choreopoems, art, everything. To be a tool to encourage women and youth to be pro-



active in telling their own stories, and let them know there are other women and youth with the same issues.” While AquaMoon is best known for their powerful choreopoems, they stress that there is “not a corner we’ve left untapped.” The group has created art exhibits, education guides, and writings, and is now developing a full length play and screenplay.

Storytelling as a form of healing and community building is a key strategy of FIRE. They have experienced the power of storytelling through speaking at Take Back the Night events and conferences on domestic violence. As FIRE member Angee Washington says, “Our stories made connections to others. When we reach out to each other, we can build the connections and make the community stronger.” They are currently in the process of creating a publication with their stories and the stories of other survivors and people who seek to end violence, to

generate strategies on ending violence in our communities.

**The creation of video documentaries also can be a powerful tool, both for those who create the video and for those in the audiences.** Access Living has partnered with the group Beyondmedia Education ([www.beyondmedia.org](http://www.beyondmedia.org)) to produce three videos showing the real life dreams and struggles of young women with disabilities. All three videos have touched on the issue of violence, from the “brutality of paternalism” that the young women have experienced, to bullying, to control of women’s sexuality and the eugenics movement. Susan Nussbaum explains that the most recent film’s discussion of domestic violence was particularly empowering for the Empowered Fe Fes, the young women’s group at Access Living. “We talked about how it happens and what it looks like and how girls hopefully will begin to internalize a sense of self-worth that will help them to avoid those situations or extract themselves from them before they become too deadly.”



Mango Tribe uses art “as a tool to educate, as a tool to create dialogue, as a tool to heal ourselves, and as a tool to politically engage within women communities, queer communities, APIA communities of color, and honestly throughout the world.” Using a theater of the oppressed framework, Mango Tribe engages people to reflect on acts of violence and to develop a social justice analysis.

Kay Barrett explains that *“performances talk honestly on rape, on how sexism, racism and queer-phobia are connected, how some of us as refugees or immigrants have survived war. It’s making our own personal narrative accessible to the larger public, and then engaging in a community dialogue after every performance.”*

Sharing your personal narrative in a public space can be challenging. Kay Barrett, describing a performance piece called “Infestation,” which deals with rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment, comments, “Anytime we perform that, it’s so direct, just thinking about it makes me heavy and powerful at the same time... For us to push those pieces is a really groundbreaking and fantastic thing for us but also very challenging for us spiritually. It’s about, ‘wow, I just performed this six minute piece and I feel a little shaky, I’m getting body memory, I’m getting triggers. So as performers, it can get pretty heavy.”

At the same time, she expresses just how powerful this work can be in engaging communities and challenging preconceptions. “It’s really great every time to see an audience when we perform a piece that’s threatening, like, I will grab your balls and rip them off, I will write survivors’ stories in blood and hold a mirror up to your face and lock you inside this room so that you can look at all the stories of blood. To say things outwardly, not as a threat, but as reciprocity: *if this violence is happening to women and queer folks, it’s happening to all of us.*”

**Ideas for using arts & storytelling:**

- ◆ Create spaces for people to tell their stories
- ◆ Create a photo exhibit
- ◆ Hold a spoken word or performance event
- ◆ Create a video documentary

## Strategy 4: Use popular education!

Many groups use popular education, a method of creating critical consciousness and strategies for change based in the experiences and knowledge of the participants, rather than educating them with information and perspectives developed by people outside of the group.

Casa Segura uses a popular education and feminist socialist framework “to ground the political in the everyday life of their participants.” They describe their popular education work as helping “participants increase their ability to talk about and critically analyze their personal and collective issues in all its dimensions – that is, in relation to local realities and broader social inequalities (e.g. political work is not outside of your struggle for subsistence, is not in an office, but in your life).” This work sometimes takes place in the streets in the form of street theater.

The Young Women’s Empowerment Project (YWEP) leads popular education workshops in Chicago and nationwide for youth on the sex trade. As Shira Hassan explains, they lead these workshops in detention centers, group homes, shelters, drop in centers, “or any place that girls ask us to come.” They estimate that they will reach over 700 girls through 40 workshops in 2007 alone.



YWEP also holds weekly membership meetings called “Girls in Charge” that use a popular education curriculum centered around words related to social justice. For example, when the young women looked at the word “power,” they pooled their

collective knowledge about the meaning of the word, and then YWEP leaders added new information to support their analysis, exploring the differences between institutional and personal power. The young women then created an art project about power, making flags representing how they reclaim power and sewing them together to create a “giant flag of our collective power.” Finally, after seeing YWEP leaders speaking at a panel discussion on Reproductive Justice, the youth debriefed about the power of voice.

YWEP also uses popular education to work through issues that arise among staff and within the community. Shira Hassan explains, “Whenever we have an issue to work through – such as Safety/Violence Prevention – we come together and use popular education tools. Because we are a consensus-based project we generally incorporate the idea of mining our collective resources to come up with something that tells a story we can all see ourselves in. For instance, when our space was being targeted, we met together as a community and focused on our resilience and the ways we already protect ourselves. We also talked about the areas we wanted to know and do more about – like self-defense. We then broke up into committees to take action.”

**Popular education methods are of particular interest to groups working with young people, since youth are so often told by adults what they should think and believe.**

Heather Flett explains what popular education looks like at Take Back the Halls, which leads anti-violence workshops in high schools. “We don’t use traditional education. The information comes from the life experience of the students and what they already know.

When we give them extra information, we let them struggle with the ideas as opposed to us telling them what they should think about it.”

The All Hail Project also stresses the importance of popular education when working with youth. Sharon Powell rejects “propaganda education, which says ‘this is bad,’ ‘that’s a bad idea to have’, without really listening to what youth are telling us about their experiences.” The organization’s work “challenges that boundary of telling folks what to do as opposed to letting them discover something that’s workable for them and their experience and situation.”

As an example, she describes a situation in which workshop participants, responding to the question of what causes violence, answered “a nagging woman.” Rather than telling the youth that they were wrong, she had the group talk more about what it means to say that a “nagging woman” provokes violence. For her, it is important to explore young people’s ideas and responses rather than telling them that they are wrong. She believes it is important to listen because they might be telling us something very important that might help us deal with the situation in a different way.

#### **POPULAR EDUCATION PRINCIPLES**

1. Reflection—start with the experience of the people in the room
2. Look for patterns
3. Add new theory & information
4. Practice skills, strategize & plan for action
5. Take action

*Young Women’s Empowerment Project*

## Strategy 5: Use harm reduction!

Some in the mainstream anti-violence movement have worked under the often unexpressed assumption that there is one “right answer” in responding to violence – for instance, the suggestion of “leaving” as the best solution to domestic violence. Many traditional service agencies have fallen into the trap of encouraging an either/or approach to the complex dynamics involved in domestic violence, addiction, prostitution/sex trade. At some of these agencies, an individual must commit to total change to receive resources and services. Women who “go back” to their abusers are tacitly judged as weak and “bad”; women who use drugs and/or are involved in the sex trade are judged and unwelcome.

Some groups around the country, and in Chicago, have responded to this by developing projects using a harm reduction approach. The Young Women’s Empowerment Project (YWEP), which works with young women impacted by the sex trade, is based in a harm reduction philosophy.

*“Harm reduction is “a practice of respectful, free of judgment engagement with people to find ways to be healthier, safer, and more in control of their lives without having to make sudden and immediate changes.”*

– Shira Hassan, YWEP

Shira Hassan explains, “We don’t ask that girls promise to stop using drugs, being sexually active or trading sex for money or survival needs to participate in our project. We support youth who are seeking to exit too, but often exiting the sex trade is a long process. We encourage and celebrate

the small and slow changes people make in their lives.”

Similarly, Lara Brooks at Broadway Youth Center (BYC) insists on “*meeting people where they are, without requirements* like other programs have. For example, we know that youth who are homeless and living with violence may use various coping strategies, including using substances. We make services available to them even if they’re under the influence, as long as their use does not compromise the safety of the space. Young people are welcome to come, hang out, and access services.”

BYC emphasizes the importance of offering “young people a fluidity of engagement,” making it easier for the youth to stay connected. “In our daily drop-in program, you don’t have to talk to a case manager to get food or take a shower. *You don’t have to disclose your life story to meet some of your basic human needs.*” As a result, Lara Brooks says, “Some youth come for food only, and want quiet time, or to share space with others. Others are in 8 programs and have leadership in four programs and are here 8 hours a day. It’s significant to give young people that flexibility and choice.”

**The focus of harm reduction is on keeping people as safe as they can be and encouraging them to take whatever steps they can to make this possible.** YWEP does not mandate abstinence or complete adherence to one policy. They not only meet the young women and girls where they are, but they see the girls, wherever they are, as potential leaders of the project. Shira Hassan says, “No matter what, girls are capable, they are prepared to be leaders. If they are currently in the sex trade,

***“Other than being a moral obligation to end violence everywhere, males need to acknowledge the violence against women and educate themselves about it, so that they can educate and influence other men.”***

**– Lillian Matanmi, YWAT**

currently using drugs, they can still provide leadership in our project.”

Harm reduction can be a challenging approach, because it can be isolating in a social justice community that does not readily accept its values. Shira Hassan recalls that in YWEP’s early days, “we were really isolated, and in some ways it was intentional and in other ways it happens when you own your experience as a drug user or as someone involved in the sex trade. We’re saying this is who we are and that creates a lot of isolation and that creates a lot of burnout. We have to think, now, how do we sustain ourselves when we have so few people that we can really rely on that understand and don’t judge around the sex trade? And on an institutional level it’s hard but the lesson was that we had to start with individuals as allies.” YWEP has found that in partnering with individual staff at social justice groups across Chicago, they can build at least temporary alliances to support the work.

**HARM REDUCTION PRACTICE  
VALUES**

- ◆ Meet people where they are at
- ◆ Don’t condemn or judge!
- ◆ Everyone can be a leader
- ◆ Encourage and celebrate the small changes people make in their lives
- ◆ Everybody is an expert in their own lives
- ◆ Change is a process; every step matters

**Strategy 6: Partner with Men**

A common strategy among the groups is to partner with men, and in particular young men, in their work. For many groups, this developed as a natural progression of their analysis, and a belief that men have a large role to play in ending violence against women. Veronica Precious Bohanan of AquaMoon explains “We were never exclusionary. I feel you can’t deal with women without dealing with men; I feel men and women balance each other out. AquaMoon was first focusing on what is a female perspective on this. That perspective more often than not does include men, albeit in a positive or negative way. Our goal with the second choreopoem (*Aqua Beats and Moon Verses, Vol. II*) was to bring in and better incorporate the male voice.”



Lillian Matanmi, Associate Director of the Rogers Park Young Women’s Action Team (YWAT), feels that “violence against women and girls isn’t our issue but a man’s issue. Because if they don’t realize that it is the responsibility of the perpetrator to stop the oppression, the violence will never end. The fact is, men will listen to other men before they listen to us. People often commend us for the work that we do against gender violence, but I personally am embarrassed by the minimal amount of men that help fight women’s oppression.”

Alex Poeter of the Brighton Park Neighborhood Council agrees, suggesting that it “takes a specific approach to get

men to understand the issue and the need to support it, looking at systemic structures that perpetuate sexism. Women are still seen as lower beings with a lower status within society. We need to pursue and embrace equality, including gender. People have internalized sexist behavior and aren't even aware. Also, *men are in power, and it requires for us to understand that it's important for the benefit of the community to give up that power.* It requires a process to unlearn bad behavior, to develop a new analysis on the issue, to see how this issue relates to the broader context of the community."

Heather Flett of Take Back the Halls considers this work especially important in tackling the issue of teen dating violence. "Prevention efforts often focus only on working with young women. I believe that this sends an underlying victim blaming message. If we truly believe that it is men's behavior that is inappropriate and needs to change, then we should be targeting young men. But men and boys have historically not been considered allies in the movement to end violence against women. They have, in fact, often been unwelcome and seen as perpetrators and supporters of violence."

This work can raise several questions. First, for groups that are female-led, there is the question of points of entry for men. As Stacy Erenberg of Females United for Action (FUFA) asks, "How do we include men in a women or girl-led organization? Do we keep it a safe space for women? Do we open up our group to both genders?" In addition, as Heather Flett adds, "It can be a challenge to engage young men and keep them interested in the process. They learn and interact differently than young women, and these differences must be

taken into consideration. We also have difficulty finding adult men with expertise in the field to facilitate the young men's program." This latter challenge in particular has led groups to develop their own approaches.

Take Back the Halls has made work with young men an important part of their prevention efforts. Young men participate and take



active roles in each of the three high schools they work in, either in co-ed groups or boys-only groups. Last year, for example, one group of boys created an educational video about sexual violence that was directed toward other young men their age. Heather Flett explains the power of involving them in this work, "*The young men are seen as allies in the movement.* We also help them to recognize the negative impact violence against women and children has had on their own lives. Many of the boys are child witnesses of domestic violence and some are child sexual abuse survivors."

FUFA – a group that is only open to women and girls – developed a partnership with young men in summer 2006, holding dialogues around media and gender, and launching a photo documentation project. FUFA distributed disposable cameras to young men and women, asking them to document positive images of men and women that they do not see portrayed in mainstream media. The resulting images were turned into a traveling photo exhibit, with an

accompanying reading packet and discussion guide, that has already been viewed by hundreds of youth in communities across Chicago. FUFA member Yunuen Rodriguez felt that this was a powerful partnership: *"The guys were really enthusiastic about being male allies and actually saying 'no, I don't like seeing women being objectified, because I don't like it when my girlfriend or mom gets harassed. So they had a chance to show their life in a way that counters the media's views on how men live their lives."*

YWAT has struggled with the questions of how to partner with young men since 2004. After an initial project called *She Say/He Say*, they launched a multi-tiered partnership with young men, through their campaign, *"Engaging Young Men as Allies to End Violence Against Women & Girls,"* in summer 2006. A key goal of YWAT's work has been to identify young men's attitudes about violence against women and girls.

The young women partnered with Beyondmedia Education to produce a documentary called *Real Talk: Engaging Young Men as Allies to End Violence against Women and Girls*. They have surveyed over 200 young men to document their attitudes in a report and have co-facilitated workshops with young men over the past couple of years. Most recently, YWAT held a "train the trainer" event for young men to learn how to develop their own workshops and events focusing on gender violence. The young men will have an opportunity to apply for a small grant to launch their own projects, and the group will hold a conference in February 2008, *"Talking About Misogyny,"* to continue this important work.

Lillian Matanmi is hopeful about men moving forward with this work. *"YWAT is just taking a preliminary step by educating and recruiting men," she says, "but it's up to the men to really get the ball rolling."*



#### **Ideas for partnering with men:**

- ◆ Have a discussion with young men and women about violence
- ◆ Build a partnership with a group of young men as allies
- ◆ Engage in a concrete project together to promote dialogue
- ◆ Find out what young men think about violence
- ◆ Provide trainings for young men about gender violence
- ◆ Challenge men to step up to the plate

## WHAT YOU CAN DO!

We hope that this report has given you some ideas and inspiration for how you might begin, or expand, antiviolence work in your own community. Whether you are one person with a great idea of how to create change, a small group with a shared vision, or an established organization that wants to expand its work to end violence, we welcome you as partners in this work!

There are many ways that you can be part of this growing movement. Here are a few suggestions:

### **Share this report with your community.**

What resonates for members of your community? Are there strategies that you would like to try out? Use the Question Boxes throughout this report as ways to begin dialogue to determine your analysis and how you want to engage in this work. If you would like Women & Girls CAN to help develop this discussion, please let us know by calling us at (312)341-9650 or emailing [womenandgirlscan@gmail.com](mailto:womenandgirlscan@gmail.com).

### **Try out some of the ideas!**

Can you think of one concrete action step that you can take in your community?

Don't forget that it's not necessary to form a 501(c)3 organization, or get a big grant, to make change. Holding a community dialogue, telling your stories, meeting with young men, and many of the other strategies that Chicago groups are using can be done with little or no money. Try one out!

### **Meet with other groups!**

If you are in Chicago, come to our next citywide convening, to discuss this work and learn from one another. We hold convenings four times a year. To get more information, email us at [womenandgirlscan@gmail.com](mailto:womenandgirlscan@gmail.com)

### **Join the dialogue!**

Visit [www.womenandgirlscan.org](http://www.womenandgirlscan.org) to download a copy of this report and be part of our ongoing dialogue. There is space for you to leave your comments, and to let us know about your own ideas and innovative work. If you have tried a strategy that isn't reflected in this report, we want to know! We'd also love to hear about your successes, challenges and needs as you engage in anti-violence work. Our website will be updated regularly to reflect new ideas, strategies, and projects.





# CHICAGO GROUPS FEATURED IN THIS REPORT

## ACCESS LIVING

115 W Chicago Avenue, Chicago, IL 60610  
(312) 640-2100 voice / (312) 640-2102 tty  
generalinfo@accessliving.org  
www.accessliving.org

*Access Living fosters the dignity, pride and self-esteem of people with disabilities and enhances the options available to them so they may choose and maintain individualized and satisfying lifestyles. We recognize the innate rights, abilities, needs and diversity of people with disabilities, work toward their integration into community life, and serve as an agent of social change.*

## ALL HAIL PROJECT

1-800-574-0013  
allhail2@aol.com

*The All Hail Project (AHP) is an organization whose mission is to contribute to African American women's health and wellness by asserting, maintaining, and preserving the sexual integrity and independence of African American women by any means necessary.*

## AQUAMOON-DISMANTLING THE CULTURE OF SILENCE!

6167 N. Broadway #202, Chicago, IL 60660  
312-458-0912  
aquamoon@spokenexistence.com

*www.spokenexistence.com/aqua\_moon.html*  
*AquaMoon is the writing, performance, and artistic team of camil.williams and veronica precious bohanan, an entity of SpokenExistence, Inc. We bridge the gap between the streets, hip hop feminism, performance activism, and academia. We are a voice for disenfranchised womyn and youth, until they are empowered to assert themselves and use their own voice. We generate and disseminate new discourse and dialogue on women and gender issues. AquaMoon works with educational and community-based organizations to effect social change that will result in greater equality, freedom, and fuller lives for women and youth. We provide students with opportunities to actively express their voice in university, community, and business organizations focused on serving womyn and youth.*

## BRIGHTON PARK NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

4477 S. Archer Ave. , Chicago, Il 60632  
(773)523-7110  
info@bpnc-chicago.org

www.bpnc-chicago.org

*The Brighton Park Neighborhood Council (BPNC) is a community-based organization serving a low-income*

*working class neighborhood on Chicago's southwest side. BPNC's mission is to develop strong grassroots leadership, create safer communities, improve the learning environment for students of color, increase affordable health care, preserve affordable housing, embrace diversity, provide a voice for youth, protect immigrants' rights, promote gender equity, and prevent all forms of violence. BPNC works to build community capacity and empower marginalized groups, including girls, women, LGBTQ youth, differently-abled people, and people with criminal records to advocate for their rights. BPNC unites individuals and institutions to develop organizing campaigns aimed at increasing equity for low-income communities of color, improving public policy and addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality.*

## BROADWAY YOUTH CENTER

A program of Howard Brown Health Center and its community partners

3179 N. Broadway, Chicago, IL 60657  
773-935-3151

youth@howardbrown.org

www.howardbrown.org/byc

*The mission of Howard Brown is to promote the well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons through the provision of health care and wellness programs, including clinical, educational, social service and research activities. Howard Brown designed these programs to serve gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons in a confidential, supportive, and nurturing environment. Howard Brown Health Center is committed to working cooperatively with other community-based organizations serving and contributing to the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.*

## CASA SEGURA

2727 W. Winnemac, Chicago, Illinois 60625  
(773) 506-0890

casasegura88@yahoo.com

*Casa Segura is a women of color collective whose mission is to build community power and influence to change the social and political conditions that perpetuate gender based violence by providing education and raising individuals' consciousness; promoting community engagement; and building bridges with a broader social justice movement.*

## FEMALES UNITED FOR ACTION

11 E. Adams, suite 902, Chicago, IL 60603  
(312)341-9650

femalesunited@gmail.com  
www.myspace.com/femalesunitedforaction  
www.womenandgirlscan.org  
*Females United for Action (FUFA) is a coalition of young women leaders that is dedicated to educate not only ourselves, but others as well, on issues that affect women and girls. We organize to bring attention to the issues and take action to address them. FUFA is formed by girls and young women from all over the city of Chicago, from all backgrounds & nationalities, ranging from 12 years of age & up.*

**FIRE (Female Storytellers Igniting Revolution to End Violence)**

1507 E. 53rd St., suite 325, Chicago IL 60615  
773-484-6041  
fire\_ends\_dv@yahoo.com  
www.myspace.com/fire1215  
*We are a female centered and led group of women and girls, storytellers, survivors, leaders, healers, and activists committed to tearing down all forms of violence in order to create healed and whole communities through building leaders to create new opportunities, raising awareness, providing support, and empowering individuals for change.*

**GABRIELA Network**

chicago@gabnet.org  
www.myspace.com/gabnetchicago  
*GABRIELA Network is a Philippine-US women's solidarity mass organization. GABNet provides the means by which Filipinas in the US can empower themselves, functions as training ground for women's leadership, and articulates the women's point of view. GABNet effects change through organizing, educating, fundraising, networking, and advocacy.*

**INCITE! CHICAGO**

incitechicago@googlegroups.com  
incitechicago@yahoo.com  
*INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence is a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and their communities through direct action, critical dialogue and grassroots organizing.*

**KAN-WIN (Korean American Women in Need)**

(773)583-1392  
info@kanwin.org  
www.kanwin.org  
*KAN-WIN is a not-for-profit community organization established in 1990, committed to building safe and healthy communities. KAN-WIN provides comprehensive services to women and children affected by domestic violence and works within the larger commu-*

*nity towards women's empowerment and social change.*

**LORE (Latinas Organizing for Reproductive Equality)**

(312)479-2464  
LatinaLORE@gmail.com  
*L.O.R.E. is committed to promoting reproductive health and reproductive choices as fundamental human rights for Latinas and their families within Chicago communities. We are united in creating a safe space for dialogue and community mobilization to ensure reproductive justice.*

**MANGO TRIBE**

41 Madison Street #3F, Brooklyn, NY 11238  
http://mangotribe.thecollectivechicago.org/shows/sisters.html  
Chicago@mangotribe.com  
*Mango Tribe is a multi-city Asian/Pacific Islander American (APIA) interdisciplinary performance ensemble that provides space for APIA girls, women, and genderqueer people to develop their creative voices and skills through collaborative productions. We engage in cultural resistance to oppression through experimental, community-based performance and workshops. We believe that collective creation is a powerful force for social justice.*

**ROGERS PARK YOUNG WOMEN'S ACTION TEAM**

PO Box 268945, Chicago, IL 60626-2425  
(773) 338-7722 ext. 26  
rpywat@hotmail.com  
www.youngwomensactionteam.org  
*The YWAT is a youth-led, adult-supported social change project that empowers young women under 21 years old to take action on issues that affect their lives (particularly issues of violence against girls and young women). The YWAT believes that girls and young women should be free from violence. The team believes that through collective action, consciousness-raising, and organizing it can end violence against girls and young women.*

**TAKE BACK THE HALLS**

Heather Flett: heatherflett@sbcglobal.net  
773-510-1782  
Dr. Beth Catlett: bcatlett@depaul.edu  
773-325-4758  
*Take Back the Halls: Ending Violence in Relationships and Schools (TBTH) is a teen dating violence prevention and community activism program designed to prevent relationship violence among teens. TBTH gives teens the opportunity to examine issues such as*

domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment and sexual abuse, as well as the variety of social structures that support violence in our culture. It creates a space for students to talk about issues affecting their lives, to generate ways to raise public awareness, to speak out against violence, and to advocate for change in their schools and communities. In short, TBTH aims to empower teens to become community leaders and active participants in the movement to end violence.

**YOUNG WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROJECT**

2334 W Lawrence Ave, Chicago, IL 60625

(773) 728-0127

www.ywep.org

cindy@youarepriceless.org

Our mission as the Young Women's Empowerment Project is to offer safe, respectful, free-of-judgment spaces for girls and young women impacted by the sex trade and street economies to recognize their goals, dreams and desires. We are run by girls and women with life experience in the sex trade and street economies. We are a youth leadership organization grounded in harm reduction and social justice organizing by and for girls and young women (ages 12-23) impacted by the sex trade and street economies.

## **AUTHOR & PLANNING GROUP BIOS**

**Ann Russo** has been active in local and national anti-violence efforts since the early 1980s. She is Associate Professor and Director of the Program in Women's & Gender Studies at DePaul University and a board member of the Women & Girls Collective Action Network. She is author of *Taking Back Our Lives: A Call to Action in the Feminist Movement* (2001).

**Melissa Spatz** is the founding Director of the Women & Girls Collective Action Network. She brings 17 years of experience working through advocacy and organizing to end violence against women and girls, and is author of the report *At a Crossroads: Youth Organizing in the Midwest* (2005).

**Jen Curley** is Youth Organizer at the Brighton Park Neighborhood Council and a member of FIRE.

**Sabrina Hampton** is senior training coordinator with the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network, and has been active as an advocate, counselor and organizer in the anti-violence field.

**Mariame Kaba** is the primary adult ally of the Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team, which was founded in 2003. She has been active in the social justice and anti-violence fields since 1985.

**Lu Rocha** is an independent domestic violence consultant and trainer. She has been an advocate for survivors of domestic violence for twelve years. She is currently a visiting faculty member at DePaul University and a board member of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

**Ana Romero**, Director of the Centralized Training Institute at the Battered Women's Network, and co-founder of Casa Segura, is a social justice activist with 18 years of experience working in the global anti-violence against women movement.

**Michelle VanNatta** is Director of Criminology at Dominican University. Her teaching and research focus on domestic violence, sexual assault, criminalization and the prison industrial complex.

*For full bios of Planning Group members, please visit [www.womenandgirlscan.org](http://www.womenandgirlscan.org).*

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