Creating Safety and Justice for Women and Girls:

Transforming Communities

A Model for Community Organizing

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The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRC) was founded in 1993 as a project of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence as a key component in a national network of domestic violence resources. As a source of comprehensive information, training and technical assistance on community response to and prevention of domestic violence, the NRC exists to support the capacity of organizations and individuals working to end violence in the lives of women and their children.

The Public Education Technical Assistance Project of the NRC was initiated with funding from the National Center on Injury Prevention and Control of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to support the public education (PE) efforts of state coalitions, community programs, and others working to end domestic violence. A major activity of the initial project was coordination of a series of demonstration projects to develop new approaches for domestic violence public education. Based on information gathered from a series of focus groups with community educators across the country and a national survey, four issue areas were selected: school-based prevention with teens, rural public awareness, grassroots community organizing, and multilingual outreach. The NRC contracted with six organizations to carry out demonstration projects in these four issue areas from November 1996 through March 1998. For additional information on these and other public education efforts, contact the Public Education Specialist @ 1-800-537-2238.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERVIEW</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transforming Communities:</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Action Teams</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Is an Activism Campaign?</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizer Role</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novato—a Community Demonstration Project</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Recruitment Strategies</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study: The Media Community Action Team</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study: The Teen CAT</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles and Barriers</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Process</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lessons Learned</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging Issues</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachments</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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This material was reprinted from the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence's publication entitled “Transforming Communities: Creating Safety and Justice for Women and Girls” by Kathy Rath.
Overview

A Model for Community Action

Since Marin Abused Women's Services (MAWS) opened its doors in 1977, staff and board members have steadily increased their emphasis on developing effective ways to prevent violence against women and girls.

- In 1981, MAWS initiated a 24-hour hotline for violent men (first in the nation) and re-education classes for male batterers. The MAWS Men's Program, using the curriculum developed by manalive, has been replicated as a model approach in California and internationally.

- In 1985, one of the first programs to focus on teen dating violence, Relationship Abuse Prevention Project (RAPP) was created, and in 1992, MAWS began Transforming Communities (TC) as its prevention learning center.

- In 1995, after three years of organizing a variety of successful county-wide prevention campaigns, MAWS received a two-year grant from the California Department of Health Services to launch its most ambitious program, the TC Novato Community Demonstration Project.

The Transforming Communities project mobilizes volunteer community members into Community Action Teams (CATs) around specific areas of interest. The CAT members design and implement strategies to transform institutions, behaviors, and belief systems in ways that hold violent men accountable and that create safety and justice for women and girls. This document is intended to encourage and guide domestic violence organizations in adapting this theory, rationale and methodology of social change for their own communities.

Theory

Transforming Communities: Creating Safety and Justice for Women and Girls (TC) is a learning center for the advancement of new strategies that will end violence and abuse against women and girls. The model is based upon the premise that it is necessary to transform the current culture so that domestic violence no longer exists. This will succeed when the root causes of that violent behavior are identified and changed.

Consequently, this model does not emphasize identifying problems within an individual man or individual family alone. Instead it is rooted in the dominant domestic violence paradigm asserting that men's violence toward women occurs in American society because men are socialized to believe that: 1) they are superior to women; and 2) that exerting their perceived superiority over women using whatever means they choose—verbal and emotional abuse, control, threats of violence, and ultimately, physical violence—is not only permissible, but encouraged (to varying degrees) by society at large.
Few reliable risk factors have been identified for either male perpetrators or female victims of domestic violence. The most consistent finding on risk factors for both perpetrators and victims is experiencing or witnessing family violence as a child. However, even for this most consistent risk factor, the majority of men with this background have not been documented as batterers. It has been found that “no consistent personality profile has been identified for battered women.” Characteristics associated with victims—such as helplessness, low self-esteem and substance abuse—are now seen as more likely the results of being victimized rather than the antecedents of violence.

Although several risk factors related to battering behavior have been identified, these risk factors hold limited value for the purposes of primary prevention efforts (changing social belief systems that perpetuate violence) intended to reduce the prevalence of domestic violence. For example, while higher levels of domestic violence have been found among certain ethnic populations, the poor, the unemployed, and those with lower education levels, most batterers in the United States are white and not of lower class and/or educational backgrounds. When it is acknowledged and understood that American society teaches its boys and men, regardless of their cultural and socioeconomic background, to believe in their perceived superiority over women, then primary efforts can and will hold lasting value.

Correlating risk factors do have value for secondary prevention (early intervention before violence occurs) and tertiary prevention (intervention to prevent further serious violence and to address the effects of violence). Unfortunately, studies demonstrate that even the single most reliable risk factor—witnessing domestic violence as a child—has limited usefulness for primary prevention. Reducing correlated risk factors may contribute to primary prevention for individuals, but meaningful primary prevention of domestic violence will be accomplished when social norms that perpetuate male violence against women are modified and eventually eliminated.

Rather than analyzing individual risk factors, the Transforming Communities project is grounded in a gender-based analysis that attributes the root cause of violence to the socially sanctioned belief in male authority over women, which “emphasizes the use of violence to enforce inequality, [and] finds stronger support than alternative explanations highlighting pathology, risk behaviors or stress.” Indeed, over-reliance on risk factors can lead to placing responsibility for violence on victims, and failing to hold batterers accountable: male batterers are implicitly excused because their violence is often attributed to circumstances beyond their control.

In support of this model, a recent analysis of 14 cultures worldwide indicated the preventive effectiveness of community-level sanctions against batterers. Another cross-cultural study of small-scale societies found that female work groups and egalitarian family decision-making can act as protective factors for domestic violence. TC uses this understanding of protective factors to mobilize the community to develop sanctions against batterers and to work toward the creation of cooperative, egalitarian relationships between males and females.
Transforming Communities was created by Marin Abused Women's Services (MAWS), a non-profit organization established in 1977 in Marin County, CA. For 22 years, MAWS has been the only organization in Marin County specifically devoted to providing domestic violence intervention and prevention services. Since 1977, MAWS has provided shelter, support and practical assistance to over 80,000 women, and over 20,000 men have attended re-education classes to end their violence.

Marin Abused Women's Services has a multi-faceted mission:

- to ensure the immediate and long-term safety of women who are abused or at risk of abuse;
- to educate the community about domestic violence; and
- to mobilize the community to create innovative solutions intended to reduce and eventually eliminate domestic violence.

MAWS began focusing on prevention efforts in the mid-1980s, and established distinctions between tertiary prevention (to prevent further instances of violence), secondary prevention (early intervention before violence occurs) and primary prevention (changing social belief systems that perpetuate violence). MAWS then created strategies to develop and implement each of these levels of prevention in Marin County.

**Tertiary:** In 1981, MAWS established its Men's Program, utilizing the manalive curriculum, to accomplish this prevention by working with male batterers. manalive's curriculum is intended to change men's beliefs and behaviors, to hold men responsible for ending their violence against women, and to mobilize men as activists in stopping other men's violence.

**Secondary:** In the mid-1980s, MAWS developed a questionnaire to help respondents detect the “early warning signs” of being in an abusive relationship. Surveys were distributed during an intensive canvassing effort in public places throughout Marin County during Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Calls to the MAWS hotline more than doubled as a result, with hundreds of women (70 percent of respondents) calling in to say they had not realized the danger they were in and asking for support in actions they could take to promote their safety and well-being, and the safety of other women. MAWS used this increased community support to expand existing women's community support groups as effective early intervention tools intended to reduce the increased need for emergency shelters serving victims of violence in crises.

**Primary:** In 1985, MAWS initiated the county-wide Relationship Abuse Prevention Project (RAPP) in Marin County's public high schools, one of the first programs in the country to focus on violence against teenage girls. This three-year project was based on fostering violence-free values and personal responsibility at an age when values are still being shaped. The project included youth focus groups that were instrumental in developing and implementing a curriculum and filming a video, When Love Hurts. (The teenagers in the project helped create the video.) These materials have been marketed nationally to other programs that have replicated the project design. The RAPP subsequently conducted a survey of
teenage girls’ experience with violence: 35 percent of girls surveyed reported being “abused, molested, beaten or raped,” indicating that relationships at this age mirror the abusive patterns observed among adults. The RAPP was one of the first programs to document this statistic, which has since been verified in other national studies.

MAWS’ overall goal in each of its domestic violence prevention programs is to provide opportunities for people to become activists in sustaining this three-tiered model of prevention, regardless of the level at which they choose to participate.

In 1991, MAWS began the next phase of its prevention strategy by asking the broader questions:

- What will it take to move beyond responding to and recovering from violence against women and girls and to move toward preventing it from occurring at all?
- How can we identify and transform the norms and behaviors that perpetuate men’s violence against women and girls?
- How can communities collectively mobilize to change deeply ingrained attitudes and beliefs?

To inform the project about how to respond to these questions, MAWS used research, including a 1993 public opinion survey (Man to Man Survey) conducted by MAWS of men’s knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors (KABBs) regarding domestic violence. This survey indicated that men tend to implicitly blame females for the abuse and to excuse their own violent behavior by attributing it to circumstances out of their control. The survey also found that there are few negative social consequences for batterers: abusive behavior, for example, rarely lessens a man’s social standing among his friends, family, community, or employer.

The strategy for preventing violence must be to work to replace deeply ingrained knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that condone and perpetuate domestic violence with beliefs that promote safety, justice, and equality for women and girls. The Transforming Communities project research indicates that the model of community mobilization is the most effective approach for creating community ownership of the prevention effort. “Community mobilization is the movement of community members from dormancy (for pre-existing groups) or potential (for yet-to-be-formed groups) toward action.”

In refining this concept, Marin Abused Women’s Services established linkages with organizations and individuals in related fields, such as public health research, action research, community organizing, and the battered women’s movement. Staff at MAWS received training in social movement theory, evaluation and planning, various community mobilization models and consistently found that community ownership of the prevention effort is a core principle of community-based prevention practice, and is drawn from the best practices of the multi-disciplinary prevention field. The most effective community-based prevention arises from within communities that “own” and take responsibility for the prevention effort, rather than from outside imposition of pre-formulated intervention programs that tend not to be oriented toward social action or mass education and are accustomed to pursuing individual rather than community goals.
Transforming Communities: County-Wide Program

These efforts culminated in 1992 when Marin Abused Women’s Services created Transforming Communities: Creating Safety and Justice for Women and Girls (TC). The TC project mobilizes volunteer community members into Community Action Teams (CATs) around specific areas of interest. The CAT members design and implement strategies to transform institutions, behaviors, and belief systems in ways that create safety and justice for women and girls. (CATS are described in more detail below.) The long term goal of the project is to have the community “own”, i.e. assume responsibility for carrying through with the project’s intent.

Since 1992, county-wide TC mobilization and research activities have included:

- a two-year effort to organize a violence-free apartment complex in a low-income, multicultural neighborhood. TC was able to gather data on residents’ understanding of domestic violence and their willingness to take action;

- development of strategies and a training module for including former graduates of the Men’s Program in community activism events, such as community fairs, campaigns and presentations in the schools; and

- creation of a county-wide CAT.

Transforming Communities Technical Assistance Training project. In 1977, TC launched a statewide training and technical assistance project, TC Technical Assistance Training, (TC-TAT) funded by the CA Department of Health Services (DHS) Maternal and Child Health Branch, Domestic Violence Section and the Van Camp Foundation. This innovative project provides intensive training and ongoing support for community mobilization efforts for the prevention of domestic violence across California. To date, 27 organizations have participated in the TC-TAT institutes and over 1200 organizations received the semi-annual newsletter, Catalyst. CA DHS and the Office of Criminal Justice Planning, Domestic Violence Branch, (which provided a grant in 1998 to expand TC-TAT’s resource center capabilities), together supports TC-TAT in its continuing effort to develop and disseminate state-of-the-art prevention materials that support community-based movements for safety and justice for women and girls.

Community Action Teams

When people become aware of the extent of domestic violence in their community and the possibility of change, there are many ways they can volunteer: reach out to a friend in need of support, write a letter to the editor of a local newspaper about their coverage of domestic violence issues, or donate their time to a battered women’s organization. These are important steps in the process of creating social change.
**What is a CAT?**

For those who are interested in becoming involved on a long-term basis, a CAT is an effective next step. At TC, organizers train volunteers to join together in a team, decide on a specific prevention project and plan out a strategy toward achieving the goal of ending violence against women and girls in their community. The CAT members learn that community “ownership” of the problem is a key component to successful organizing. Organizers provide training, technical assistance, and leadership/facilitation skills so that CATs can eventually learn to function independently as allied community organizations.

**Why a CAT?**

According to the Domestic Violence Advertising Campaign Tracking Survey (conducted in 1995 by the Family Violence Prevention Fund and the Ad Council):

- 82% of Americans would do something to reduce domestic violence if they knew how to help in a way other than intervening in a specific incident;

- 55% want to take action but do not know what they can do to help.

A CAT provides structure and a sense of purpose so that day to day activities are connected to a long-range goal.

**Who Forms a CAT?**

A team of 3 - 8 community volunteers form the core of the CAT. They meet weekly to plan activities for a campaign to create a safe and just community. The challenge is to keep the team, which often includes a mix of personalities with different approaches to the issue, focused on the activities at hand.

When individuals choose to become part of a CAT, they join a team of other volunteers who are working together on a common goal. The TC structure is unique because campaigns and strategies are determined by volunteers rather than by paid organizers. The main goal of volunteer training is to communicate a working definition of domestic violence and the spectrum of abuse, and to convey an understanding of how the project’s theory and philosophy give form to TC’s prevention design.

Since the TC project goal is to transform attitudes, beliefs and behaviors, CAT members quickly learn that they are joining a social movement for change. In this context, their participation challenges them to critically evaluate their own attitudes and ingrained beliefs vs. doing unconnected task-oriented activities. CAT members also learn to:

- share responsibility for decisions, activities and leadership;
- value everyone's input and experience equally;
What Are CAT Goals?

Before a CAT can determine an area of interest or plan an active campaign, it needs to establish primary goals. Goals should be activism-oriented and give focus to the CAT’s work. Goals are vital to guiding the decision-making process and helping to determine direction. The primary strategic goals, for example, could be:

- educate the community about domestic violence. Motivate community members to take individual and collective action to stop violence against women;
- hold men accountable for the full spectrum of their abuse and violence (e.g., from challenging a sexist joke all the way to advocating pro-arrest policies), build men’s awareness of and accountability for stopping their own beliefs and attitudes that support these behaviors, and encourage men to become advocates for other men to do the same;
- educate women to understand how they have been socialized as women in our culture and to participate in challenging and changing the status of women;
- move the issue of violence against women to the forefront of people’s consciousness;
- impact the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of individuals residing in our county on the issue of domestic violence;
- invite people to participate in building a social change movement to end men’s violence against women.

What Is an Activism Campaign?

A successful activism campaign is a series of activities designed to achieve short, medium, and long-term goals. For example, staffing information tables and talking to passersby about MAWS’ services meet the short-term goal of raising awareness about the issue of domestic violence. While this is essential for building support, it provides no further opportunity for the long-term goal of getting people involved in creating change in their community. For the TC prevention model to succeed, organizers need to ensure that every activity meet the goal of contributing to the larger campaign, so planning must become more focused.

Five Initial Steps

1. **Identifying a community issue.** Because it can be difficult to focus the CAT’s efforts initially, the process usually begins with staff organizers leading a brainstorming session. The focus of discus-
2. **Choosing an action field.** Next, the group identifies arenas for activism, or action fields, within which they could work to address the issue. They could include:

- youth and education;
- media/public awareness; or
- law enforcement/judiciary.

3. **Dispelling myths.** The CAT members decide which assumptions or myths underlie the problem area in each of these action fields. Then, the CAT gathers information to prove or disprove the assumption. If a problem is apparent in one of the action fields, the CAT can create strategies for improving that system. It is important to consider a number of issues when choosing a campaign focus:

- Are there individuals within the CAT, or does a CAT member have a contact, who can provide access to areas of the community where change is most needed?
- How much interest, knowledge, and skill do the CAT members have in each of the action fields?
- Are there leaders or champions of the issue in your community who can be recruited to work with the CAT on this campaign?

4. **Developing goals/objectives.** It is important to begin with a grid of short, intermediate and long-term goals. All CAT members should be involved in this planning process so that their questions and concerns can be discussed and their input can be factored into planning. All members need to be in agreement with the identified goals/objectives in order to avoid future conflict.

5. **Developing activism strategies consistent with goals/objectives.** Every activity the CAT organizes is a step in the process toward reaching CAT objectives and, ultimately, the overall goals of the TC project. For example, if considering a letter-writing campaign to a local newspaper, the CAT needs to ensure that they will be educating the public about the issue and supporting some sort of action which will:

- help move the issue to the forefront of people's consciousness;
- promote men's accountability for their violence;
- impact knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of community individuals; and
- help expand the global social movement to end violence in the lives of women.
Helpful Hints for CAT Members

- Start with activities that are “do-able.” The CAT members should experience success as they begin working on the campaign. Small victories build momentum for the long haul.
- Work with like-minded allies on campaign activities when possible. Collaborate with other groups who can share the responsibility of the CAT activity.
- Go directly to the person who can make change happen and give him/her the opportunity to do the “right” thing.
- Every time the CAT organizes an activity in the community, make sure that there is a next step for people to take. Most importantly, know the date, time and place of the next activity or meeting and invite them to attend.

Organizer Role

Three main tasks of staff organizers are to develop leadership skills among the CAT members, to continually promote the perspective that every participant has expertise to offer, and to educate the CAT on an ongoing basis about domestic violence and activism. Before engaging in a community activism project such as the TC project, potential organizers should consider the following questions:

Personal:

- Are you comfortable working with groups and able to negotiate complex group interactions? Are you willing to do the dynamic group work with individuals from mixed groups?
- Do you like the challenge of being a leader who can encourage others to take on leadership as well? Do you have experience or training in facilitative leadership or both?
- Are you able to guide groups toward compromise by identifying points of agreement?
- How open are you to ambiguity and learning-as-you-go?
- Are you excited about starting something totally new?
- Are you willing to master the material and be self-disclosing and engaging in your leadership approach?
- Can you lead individuals through the unfolding of the transformational experience, support them when it creates personal problems, and also take care of yourself?

Organizational:

- How open is your organization to letting volunteers set goals and direction for an aspect of programming?
• Is your organization willing to live with the tension that could possibly arise when the CAT begins to challenge social institutions (e.g., media, legal system, educational system)?
• Is your organization willing to shift resources toward community change work that may not directly and immediately benefit your direct services program?
• How big is your volunteer pool? Can your organization afford to let those who may be interested in activism move their energy to this new opportunity for involvement?
• Are there staff members interested in and available to lead a CAT?

Community:

• Can you identify community members who care about the issue of domestic violence and would welcome an opportunity to champion the cause in their community?
• Do you feel comfortable determining the readiness of these individuals to embrace a community activism project which potentially may create backlash factors for them?

Education and Training Session

After a two-hour volunteer orientation that includes an overview of the project, discussion of community action teams and the opportunities for participation, the prospective CAT members are invited to join the education and training session.

Organizers conduct a 20-hour training program which provides participants with an introduction to the activist approach. Participants are also given the opportunity to learn and practice new skills, and are encouraged to share their life experiences with each other through lively discussion and creative exercises.

The initial 20 hours of training is provided by staff to members of CATs over a ten week period. Trainings are customized to meet the needs of specific CATs, but typically include three main learning segments. In the first segment, we cover the TC and MAWS history and philosophy. We define domestic violence, the spectrum of abuse, gender stereotyping, and prevention theories. In the second segment, we discuss the history of women and social change, the movements for gender and racial equality, diversity, alliance-building, and media advocacy. In the final segment, we explore the meaning of community action, what a CAT is, domestic violence and the law, and evaluate the training.

The periodic skill-building sessions are included as part of regular CAT meetings. The topics for these sessions are determined by the CAT members based on the areas they identify as challenges. For example, several Media CAT members received training on “how to effectively talk with media reporters.”

To set a tone of cooperation, the group makes agreements to interact with each other as team members. Providing sufficient time to share personal information or process information is important for participants. “Clearing the air” before proceeding to the next topic often enables participants to relax and maintain focus.
Ideally, by the end of the introductory training, the group will have developed trust and respect for one another and the skills and techniques to function as a team. In addition, participants will understand the dynamics of men’s violence against women, understand domestic violence activism strategies and tactics, develop sensitivity to issues of diversity, and be able to accurately describe the activism campaign.

In addition, individual CAT members will have an expanded knowledge and new perspective on domestic violence and a thorough understanding of how activism and social change movements can have a positive impact on attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

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**Marin County-wide CAT**

Since its formation in 1993, the Marin County-wide CAT has designed and implemented many projects on its own initiative. These include:

- support through legal advocacy for battered women dealing with the criminal justice system by implementing a letter-writing strategy, raising issues and conducting court watches;
- data collection and analysis of all 13 law enforcement agencies in Marin County regarding their use of Emergency Protective Orders (EPOs) for battered women, resulting in an EPO training program for the largest agencies;
- public events in malls, farmer’s markets and fairs to increase citizen awareness about prevention, e.g., “Color My Home Violence Free: A Community Paint-In”;
- a two-year participatory research effort on the relationship between domestic violence and homelessness among women, resulting in the creation of an ongoing women’s activism group at a local homeless shelter, and organization of “Break the Silence/Protest the Violence: Women and Men Unite for Change,” a funeral procession for a Marin woman murdered by her husband—both the march and the murder received coverage from the local newspapers, television stations, and TIME magazine.

Additionally the CAT has undertaken a three-year effort to define strategies to reach young women ages 13 - 24, which has resulted in:

- the creation of the Sisterhood Empowerment Club at the College of Marin which organized events and teach-ins on issues important to young women;
- a highly successful campaign in local high schools, which resulted in the Young Feminist Network, a group of young women speaking about violence prevention to other high school girls. The Network is now in place at five schools and is sponsored by the Marin Chapter of NOW.
The county-wide CAT members trained 10 members of the Network in domestic violence and they, in turn, have made classroom presentations of TC project’s video;

- the current “This Offends Me Campaign,” an effort to make explicit the intersection between sexist advertising and violence against women and girls by distributing postcard-sized handouts for consumers to use to influence local merchants not to sell offensive products;

- a 23-minute educational videotape entitled Beyond Awareness to Action: Ending Abuse of Women, produced with the pro bono assistance of professional filmmakers. The film dramatizes ways that individual residents can contribute to ending abuse of women and girls;

- a training manual How to Facilitate Community Action Teams: A Practical Handbook, which outlines the steps involved in creating CATs; and

- a 20-hour training program for adults who have joined a CAT.
Having had success implementing the TC project on a county-wide basis, MAWS set out to test the model within a smaller area to determine whether the strategies being implemented were conducive to transforming norms and behaviors that perpetuate violence against women. The TC project conducted an intensive research process to select a community in Marin for project implementation. The process included the aforementioned “Man to Man” survey, compiling 1993’s “Marin County Domestic Violence Incidence and Data Prevention Report,” and researching and developing 33 indicators to assess community readiness for undertaking a community-wide campaign.

Selecting an Implementation Site

Novato, now the largest city in Marin County with a population of 50,000, was selected after it showed the second greatest need out of 10 cities surveyed. Novato is a “bedroom” community for San Francisco. Residents view Novato as a quiet, safe community. For adults, this equates to being a good place to raise a family, while youth tend to find it boring, with few recreational opportunities. Unlike other neighboring cities in Marin County, most Novato residents tend to be quite active in becoming integrated into the life of the community. There are a number of established community groups (e.g., Concerned Parents of Novato, Sunrise Rotary Club, Novato Chapter of the Soroptimists) whose meetings and events, along with those of the city council and its committees, are well-attended—residents identify with and demonstrate active concern for the safety and welfare of the community. Other factors for selection were:

- moderate size: large enough to have organizations which can help facilitate the work of the project, yet small enough not to make community organizing overly cumbersome;
- demographics: closer to those of the county as a whole and of the United States; 85.6 percent white, 7.4 percent Hispanic, 4.7 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.6 percent African-American, and 0.5 percent some other ethnicity. (Overall, U.S. percentages are 80.3 percent white, 12.1 percent African-American, 9 percent Hispanic, 2.9 percent Asian-American, 4.7 percent some other ethnicity.)

In 1995, this projected five-year demonstration project was awarded a two-year grant from the California Department of Health Services (CADHS).

Evaluation Component

The TC Project devoted considerable effort to developing a thorough evaluation plan. Evaluation tools were created to measure the outcomes of the activities generated by the CATs. As project replication is one of the TC project’s primary objectives, these valuable tools have enabled community organizers to record successful actions as well as major obstacles and barriers that have impeded progress. This evaluation plan has been operative since the inception of the TC Novato Project.
TC Novato Project Begins

In order to fully fit into the community of Novato, a centrally-located downtown office was established. A large sign is visible from a busy parallel street. An extensive collection of informational handouts (in English and Spanish) are available at the office. Over the last two years, a lending library was developed where volunteers borrow books on a range of topics, such as domestic violence, community organizing, media advocacy, and national and international women's issues. Staff members include: a quarter-time project director, a full-time project manager, a full-time community organizer, and a half-time community organizer and administrative assistant.

The TC Novato project benefited from its connection with MAWS, a reputable organization known for its work among those it has serviced, and among influential individuals in the county. On the other hand, by establishing a separate and autonomous identity, curious residents could, for example, visit the office and not be identified and/or stigmatized as a victim or batterer. In 1994, the TC Novato project formed an advisory committee which consisted primarily of Novato community leaders (many of whom were supporters of MAWS), such as the police chief, a Novato City Council member, a member of the Novato School Board, the executive director of the Novato Youth Center, a pastor of the New Faith Church, and the executive director of Rape Crisis Center of Marin.

Getting to Know the Community and its Issues

Developing Allies. Interviews with a range of community leaders provided the TC Novato project with insight into community values. In addition to giving the TC Novato project staff a better understanding of the city, these interviews led to staff involvement in several community activities. For example: an organizer was asked to serve on the Multicultural Oversight Committee, a task force formed by the Novato City Council in response to local hate crimes. A TC Novato project organizer chaired the subcommittee on community diversity which enabled her to help shape the group's work by establishing the intersection between violence against women and hate crimes. Through this committee, the TC Novato project organizer made contacts and created relationships with other local organizations.

Community Exposure and Outreach. Recruiting community action team members using a new prevention model is a challenging task, especially for a project known for its ties to direct service domestic violence work. Staff needed to take the lead in developing specific proposals for how the CATs would operate and what they would do. It was important for staff to have a clear understanding of its goals and the method for achieving them so they could proficiently communicate this to the community and, in particular, to interested individuals. As a result, project staff decided to initially focus their efforts on forming two CATs: a Teen Theater CAT to be initiated during the summer of 1996 and an Adult Media CAT to begin in the fall of 1996.
Initial Recruitment Strategies

**Community Mailing.** Project staff developed written materials to explain the project and encourage involvement. These materials included a brochure about the project, recruitment flyers for both CATs, and a flyer announcing an open house. These materials were mailed to over 1,200 residents in Novato who had supported the work of MAWS over the years.

**Local Business Contacts.** Project staff and a volunteer went door-to-door in the downtown business district of Novato and distributed information about the TC Novato project. A number of merchants agreed to post project flyers in their windows.

**Farmer’s Market.** Project staff held a table at the weekly Novato Farmer’s Market between May and October 1996, passing out flyers and talking to people about the project. On average, 20 people each day stopped by the table to inquire about the project, and from these interactions, approximately six individuals per week signed on to the TC mailing list.

**Database.** Staff have been compiling a mailing list of interested individuals throughout the course of the project. While many of these individuals are not interested in being in a CAT, they asked to remain apprised of the activities and achievements of the project.

**Drop-ins.** Because the TC project has a storefront office in Novato, community members have an opportunity to “drop-in” and inquire about the project. To date, staff have documented 35 drop-ins on their contact record logs.

**Telephone Inquiries.** Project staff respond to telephone inquiries about the project. The contact record logs are categorized by those seeking general information and/or possible participation and individuals seeking help and/or assistance.

**Open House.** The TC Novato project hosted an Open House on May 7, 1996, where staff made presentations about the project and showcased the video, *Beyond Awareness to Action: Ending Abuse of Women*. From the personal contacts made at the open house, five people signed up for and began participating in the Adult Media CAT.

**Media Publicity.** The Marin Independent Journal (IJ) and a local television station both covered the TC Novato project open house. The IJ also published an editorial the week of the open house, praising the project’s work. Additionally, the Novato Advance, the local newspaper, published an article about the formation of the Teen Theater CAT.

**Monthly Film Viewing.** On October 29, 1996, the TC Novato project showed its first film called *Defending Our Lives*, which featured personal accounts from battered women serving prison terms for defending themselves against their batterers. Nine women attended the viewing. This was first in the series of the Media CAT’s monthly film presentations.
**Novato Youth Center Presentations.** In the spring of 1996, the executive director of the Novato Youth Center, who serves on the project advisory committee, arranged for project staff to do several presentations. The first presentation was to a coed group of eight middle school students who attend the youth center. This group of young people were identified as coming from “troubled” backgrounds and were younger than the TC Novato project’s target age for the teen CAT. No CAT members were recruited from this presentation.

**Community Presentations.** Staff did presentations to a variety of community organizations, including the Soroptimists Club, the Rotary Club, Novato Unified School District’s Diversity Committee, Novato Youth Center’s Board of Directors, a teen support group and to a group of counseling interns at the Youth Center. The intent of these presentations was not necessarily to recruit CAT members, but to build awareness about domestic violence and the TC project. For example, in January 1997, TC staff’s presentation to the School Board’s Diversity Committee was a part of a long-term plan to enlist the support of teachers, administrators and parents in the project.

**High School Presentations.** Project staff met with vice principals at the three Novato high schools and were subsequently given the opportunity to conduct five one-period presentations, reaching approximately 150 students. As a result, staff determined that a three-day, one-hour curriculum was needed to a) to address the full scope of the project and b) to invite teens to the project to learn more about volunteer opportunities.

Presentations were scheduled during the last two weeks of the 1995-96 school term, when students were looking forward to summer vacation, not school-based activities. Although 25 students indicated some interest in TC after the presentations, none of them joined the CAT. Despite meeting individually with several of the teens, only one showed up when the CAT was scheduled to begin. The 1996 summer theater CAT, therefore, was canceled. To counter this problem, organizers scheduled the next series of high school presentations for January 1997, the beginning of the winter semester.

**First Novato CATs**

Several interested community residents signed up to participate in the Media CAT and were invited to a two-hour orientation meeting in October 1996. Another group of adults who were interested in helping start the Teen CAT were invited to a meeting to discuss starting an Adult-Teen CAT. Our goal was to involve and train these adults to recruit teens for the theater CAT by doing presentations at the high schools. The full-time community organizer assumed the lead facilitator role for the Media CAT and the part-time community organizer facilitated the Adult-Teen CAT. Separate trainings for each CAT were conducted in the fall of 1996.
Case Study: The Media Community Action Team

Five women decided to join the Media CAT. Ideally, these women would have received the introductory training and selected, via common interest, media advocacy as their campaign focus. However, there was a great deal more staff planning needed to create the first adult CAT. Therefore, a media advocacy theme was introduced by TC project organizers so interested community members could quickly begin work on an activism project.

Specialized Training

In addition to core parts of introductory training, members of the media CAT also received training focusing on the role of the media in:

1. perpetuating the myths associated with domestic violence through inaccurate and victim blaming reporting of domestic violence cases (homework assignments included “editing” newspaper accounts of domestic violence cases and revising portions to reflect men’s accountability as well as placing the incident into a larger social context);

2. portraying sexist and degrading advertisements which depict women as “less than” men and thus perpetuate the social acceptability of men’s violence/abuse against women (homework assignments included reviewing magazines and clipping examples of degrading images and language, and following up with letters of protest); and

3. providing positive examples of what has been and can be done to change sexist attitudes (by showing the TC project’s video, Beyond Awareness to Action: Ending Abuse of Women, and discussion of MAWS’ history of community activism, including “Break the Silence/Protest the Violence: Women and Men Unite for Change”—the funeral procession in April 1993 for a Marin woman murdered by her husband).

Ready for Action!

At the end of the training, the group developed a six-month strategic plan. The plan was divided up into short, intermediate, and long-term goals. The CAT members were anxious to get started, so short-term objectives and winnable tactics were identified. Objectives included challenging sexist and degrading advertisement of women and girls (with the long-term goal of influencing product design and content); expanding knowledge (with a long-term goal of educating the press about accurate reporting); responding to, and writing articles for, the local papers; recruitment; and gaining recognition as a credible and reliable community resource.

The Media CAT has undertaken a variety of activities since its inception. The following discussion describes them in more detail.
Sharper Image. One of the members received her monthly Sharper Image Catalog, and noticed a particularly offensive advertisement. A device called a Night Vision Scope, which advertises the ability to see images in the dark, showed a man’s hand wearing a black glove holding this device. In the background of the ad, it depicts a small image of a man and women embracing in a dimly lit window frame. The obvious connection is that this device will enable you to “spy,” “stalk,” or become a “voyeur.” With new insights and sharpened awareness, CAT members decided to send the “This Offends Me” postcards to the president of Sharper Image. Within two weeks, the president sent a reply to the CAT members. In that letter, he not only apologized for the offensive ad, but promised to remove it and work with his advertising company on being careful not to use humor that may put women at risk. The ad was changed to a man wearing a red glove, no image in the background, and ad text that read: “Santa was using this device to find his reindeer.” A reporter followed this small, but effective example of community activism and reported it in the 10/17/96 San Francisco Chronicle newspaper. A large display was created by the Media CAT with a visual chronology of these accomplishments along with other images which sexually and violently degrade women. It has been used in conjunction with education and outreach events and continues to generate enthusiasm and activism for the “This Offends Me” campaign (see attachments).

Wherehouse, Inc. A CAT member went into the local Wherehouse Music store and noticed a calendar display by the cash register. In addition to images of puppies, golfers and scenic landscapes, the rack contained calendars showing scantily-clad women in provocative poses. The CAT member did not think these images were appropriately located in the store. She wrote a letter to the president of the Wherehouse as well as the local printing company, explaining her position and asking that the display be moved. One week later, the calendar display was moved to the back of the store and the Media CAT member received a letter of apology stating that he would not use that distributor in the future.

Mindscape. A community resident came into the office after reading about the TC project and the successful results that the Media CAT obtained from Sharper Image and Wherehouse in the Novato Advance. The resident was working with Mindscape, a leading software gaming distributor, which had developed a national ad campaign using extremely sexist images and violent language. The ad agencies had developed images of sexy women accompanied by violent language to attract 13 to 18 year-old males, the target audience for Mindscape’s game products. The Media CAT collectively wrote a letter to the chief executive officer (CEO) of Mindscape explaining their objections and requested that the company discontinue the ad. Months went by and no response was received from Mindscape. A follow-up phone call was made to the CEO who informed us that he did not receive our correspondence. Another packet was sent and within two weeks, the CEO wrote back, agreeing with our position and informing us of the decision to remove the ad from circulation (see attachments).

Novato Advance. Consistent with the strategy of educating local residents about domestic violence and the TC project to create safety and justice for women and girls, the editor of the Novato Advance, a weekly newspaper that reaches approximately 15,000 Novato residents, was contacted. The Media CAT members put together a “Discussion Points” document that gave an overview of the TC project and the Media CAT as well as relevant statistics about domestic violence. Two main objectives were agreed upon: getting the editor to write a special feature article introducing the TC project, and obtaining
weekly space for articles on the project to be provided by the Media CAT. Planning and preparation proved successful as the editor expressed interest in doing a feature article for the next edition. He also agreed to providing the Media CAT with a 500 word space four times a year. Since this decision in January 1997, the Novato Advance has published 18 articles written by the Media CAT. A solid relationship has been developed between the Media CAT and the editor such that whenever the Media CAT wants an article to be published and space is available, the piece gets in (see attachments).

**Responses to News Events.** The Media CAT rapidly responded to community issues that deserved its attention. In May, five girls reported that they had been sexually molested by the coordinator of the Novato Youth Soccer Association. At the same time, a convicted sex offender, who was allowed to move back into his hometown of Novato, broke his probation and disappeared. In response to these two events, the Media CAT organized a “Take Back the Day” march and public forum. The process involved preparing five media messages, gathering community residents, making signs, identifying a march route, notifying the police of the march route and obtaining a permit, locating a place for the public forum, getting together supplies, preparing an agenda for the forum, assigning speakers, and doing follow-up with interested residents and the press. Twenty-five residents showed up for the march and another five showed up to attend the public forum. A reporter for the Marin Independent Journal joined in the march, stayed for the public forum, and wrote a favorable article about the event, which was published the following day. Channel 5 news also covered the march on its 5:00 p.m. newscast. The soccer coordinator was convicted of sexual molestation and is currently serving an 18-month jail sentence.

**Novato High School Prom—Unlawful Sex Case.** A few weeks later, three Novato High School senior male students were arrested on suspicion of raping a 15-year-old girl in a hotel room after the prom. The young men were subsequently charged with sex crimes against a minor and pleaded guilty. In response, the CAT collaborated with Novato Police Department, Rape Crisis Center, and Novato Youth Center to provide violence prevention information to parents and community residents. Twenty-five parents and concerned community residents showed up at a TC open forum where a collective decision was made to begin a “Campaign for Justice”. The Media CAT coordinated and participated in various media advocacy activities (e.g., radio, newspaper, a national magazine and television interviews in support of the victim); as well as mobilized a court watch attended by 5 - 10 volunteers throughout the trial. They also initiated a letter writing campaign to the District Attorney’s Office as well as the Parole Board. In the end, the campaign was successful. The young men were sentenced to 60 days in jail, three years probation, and court mandated to graduate from the year-long Men’s Program of MAWS. This work inspired the mother of the rape victim to join the CAT. We also solidified support from local community groups and organizations.

**Coverage by a National Magazine:** After the case ended and while the perpetrators were still serving their sentences, TC was contacted by Teen People, a national magazine that had heard about the case and the community activism taking place in Novato. TC played an active role in arranging for reporters to speak with the victim and emphasized that the victim deserved to have her story told. Teen CAT members and TC staff were quoted in the article, leading to additional local TV coverage of the case and TC project’s efforts to secure justice. The national magazine piece had a tremendous impact in Novato, challenging entrenched media and community perspectives that blame victims. The victim received 25 letters in support (see attachments).
Strategic Planning: The CAT members held another planning meeting to develop short, intermediate, and long-term goals for the next six months. Long-term objectives identified were:

- recruiting more members;
- developing a workshop for media personnel on new perspectives for domestic violence reporting; and
- creating a credible resource book with successful case stories, reliable local and national statistics and a guide to effective media advocacy.

To achieve these objectives, the Media CAT decided to focus on the following activities:

- obtaining additional media advocacy training to become confident media spokespersons and writers;
- monitoring local and national press coverage of domestic violence coverage, and initiating responses;
- developing research expertise via the Internet, increasing exposure by 25 percent in local papers and providing electronic media interviews about the TC project; and
- conducting presentations to community groups to develop facilitation and group dynamic skills.
Case Study: The Teen CAT

In order to recruit a Teen CAT, the TC project staff conducted a three-day presentation for ninth grade students at San Marin High School. On the last session, teens were invited to TC to find out more about the project. Fourteen teens decided to join the Teen CAT training. In this case, the CAT was formed based on age group rather than topic.

Training

The Teen CAT members received an eleven-week training that consisted of:

- an overview of domestic/dating violence and take-home reading;
- a general overview of women's history and oppression;
- chapters from Reviving Ophelia (a non-fiction exploration of the most serious emotional issues facing teenage girls today) by Mary Ann Pipher;
- group exercises in the media's role in perpetuating negative stereotypes of women, e.g., collages were made from the magazines they regularly read;
- speakers from the local police department, a children's advocate and two teenage girls from MAWS' shelter and transitional housing, a volunteer from the Men's Program came and spoke about their experiences with domestic/dating violence and abuse;
- team building exercises;
- education on racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and ageism, as it pertained to dating/domestic violence and activism;
- facilitation skills; and
- emotional support for issues emerging from the content.

Ready for Action!

At the end of the training, the teens accomplished a great deal in their community and county. These activities are summarized below.

Listening to Ophelia Event. Members of the Teen CAT joined with the Marin County Young Feminist Network to host an open forum on the issues young women and girls face. The Teen CAT members served as panelists, performed skits, and participated in the open discussion. Over 90 adults and teens attended the event.

Novato High School. The teens continued their activism by educating their peers. In presentations with the TC organizers for over 400 ninth and tenth grade students at Novato High School, the teens performed skits and led audiences in role-plays which focused on preventing dating/domestic violence.
Take Back the Day Rally. In conjunction with the Media CAT, the teens organized their parents and peers to attend the march and rally.

The Children's Faire. Teen CAT members staffed a booth at the Novato Children's Faire. They coordinated an art project to get children to think about personal safety issues. Resource cards and facts about domestic/dating violence were distributed to parents.

Novato High School Prom— Unlawful Sex Case. Several of the Teen CAT members attended the "court watch." They were there to show support for the fifteen-year-old victim and to be seen as a presence in the court.

Teen Dating Violence Film Short. CAT members joined with students from Novato High School to complete a script on teen dating violence. This involved a workshop training session from an adult volunteer who is also a local independent film maker and drama instructor. She led a 20-hour workshop with a total of 12 teens in attendance. The teens provided a majority of the story development and script writing. Eighteen more teens joined in the film project in the spring of 1998. Final production took place in the summer of 1998 resulting in a 20-minute film entitled "abuse-no way! Teens Acting to End Relationship Violence." (The film, along with a Study Guide is now available for national distribution. Please contact the TC Technical Assistance Training Resource Center at 415-457-2464 ext.16)

The Multicultural Oversight Committee of Novato. Two of the teens represented the TC project on a committee sanctioned by the city council and designed to address diversity issues.

Weekly Chat Room on Date Violence. Every Wednesday from 4-5pm, the Teen CAT hosts a Chat Room for teens and young adults on dating violence and how to build healthy relationships. Young people from all over the country and the world log on with their questions. The address is: www.theinsite.com. This project began in October of 1997, when the Teen CAT was interviewed by Website hosts in conjunction with Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Silent Witness. The teens created a "Silent Witness" display for a large shopping mall for Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October. The teens had hoped to present the Silent Witness display at their high school, but the administration felt it would be too upsetting for the students. The Silent Witness Project displays life-size outlines of women's bodies and includes information about women and girls who have been murdered by intimate partners. This project is a visual display to urge members of the community to speak out and create change by joining Community Action Teams.

Peer Outreach. Teens created and performed dramatic sketches in a public forum in the wake of a high school hate crime. They also designed a workshop simulation of a campus hate crime for a youth conference in the state capitol attended by 1,000 teens. Teen CAT members also participated in theater games with a delegation of Hungarian women from NANE, the only domestic violence agency in Eastern Europe who were preparing initiatives for teen violence prevention projects in Hungary.
Strategic Planning

The Teen CAT met to plan goals/objectives for the next six months. In order to achieve the long-term goals of recruiting more teens into another CAT and producing the teen film short, the teens agreed on the following items:

1. host a monthly “movie night” featuring films that show women and girls in positive roles, followed by discussions and further involvement;
2. develop a support group on the school campus;
3. continue to do presentations for visitors interested in learning about the project.
Obstacles and Barriers in CATs

1. **The CAT Handbook** was initially designed to integrate volunteers previously trained through Marin Abused Women Services' volunteer program. This “first generation” effort was predicated on the assumption that those utilizing the handbook would already have a working knowledge of domestic violence. New volunteers, therefore, also required domestic violence education prior to being introduced to the handbook. By doing this first, new volunteers were better equipped to absorb the material being presented in the handbook.

2. **Meeting agendas** were often difficult to adhere to, especially with regard to maintaining time frames on individual “sharing.” More and more time was being spent on personal “check-ins”, which is when members can discuss their general feelings about the impact of their involvement. As knowledge and trust became more established, personal information sharing and processing required more and more time. This became so important to CAT members that a separate support group was created. The support group meets on alternative weeks so personal sharing can be accomplished without interfering with CAT meeting strategy sessions.

3. **Facilitation / leadership** training is an important component of the organizer's role. Members need to learn the facilitation skills necessary to create CATs that can function on their own. CAT members preferred to operate on a traditional volunteer framework where they could contribute their ideas and look to the organizer/staff for leadership and coordination of the joint decisions. Many attempts to get CAT members to facilitate portions of meetings were met with resistance. Reasons for their unwillingness to assume leadership roles included a lack of confidence in taking on facilitative leadership skills, insufficient knowledge of project and emotional/physical ailments that they said made it difficult to function in a take-charge mode. After almost a year, two members are now willing to facilitate meetings. It can be tricky to encourage higher levels of involvement while maintaining participants’ enthusiasm at current levels.

4. **The Media CAT members** wanted from the start to work primarily as “writers” and not to take on “speaker” roles. Thus, they learned that their words must be clearly written and representative of the TC project agenda. Unfortunately, the learning curve for feeling comfortable and confident writing about the project was longer than anticipated, which resulted in missed opportunities to meet media deadlines. For example, with the Novato Advance column, there were many times we could not get an article published because it was not ready for the paper's submission deadline. This is a concern, as it can slow progress and momentum. The organizer's task in these situations is to help members select one or two messages that they feel most comfortable saying in their own words. This can also help members become more confident media spokespersons in the future. CAT members tended to let the experienced organizer/staff speak and/or write for them, as opposed to jumping in and learning by experience. An organizer and one Media CAT member participated in an extremely worthwhile media spokesperson training which will be taught to the other CAT members.
5. **Incorporating new members** to the Media CAT is proving more difficult than anticipated. Media CAT members have been together for almost a year, so they have learned how to work with one another within the CAT process. New members need to be brought up to speed and as one member reported, “this requires the delicacy and experience of the organizer” to diplomatically build new relationships. The organizer needs to encourage leadership skills so that existing CAT members can confidently take on this task. An approach that has recently been initiated is to assign a new CAT member to work with a more experienced team member in a mentor relationship. This enables the organizer to work directly with the experienced CAT member in strengthening her facilitation and leadership skills and to eventually move from “volunteer” to trainer/organizer consistent with the overall project goal of community ownership.

6. **Recruiting acquaintances and friends in TC:** Despite numerous attempts and calls to action, Media CAT members were not able to bring in friends and/or acquaintances into the project on any long-term basis. Individual friends did accompany CAT members to large, public forum-type meetings, and one member recruited her husband and son to attend a 20-hour training, but no one returned for regular volunteer meetings. Several members attributed this to “discomfort” with the subject matter and to the subject being “too close to home.” Staff see lack of time (due to work and family responsibilities) as one of the biggest obstacles to volunteer participation.

7. **Male volunteers and graduates of the MAWS Men’s Program:** Some staff and community residents expressed mixed feelings about working with any men, and some expressed problems working with graduates of the Men’s Program. Many steps and initiatives have been taken to include young boys and men in the program, however, as the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF) noted in a recent study, women—and especially those who have been impacted by domestic violence at some level—are more likely to volunteer. FVPF’s conclusion, in our experience, does seem to bear out at the community level. Several graduates of the Men’s Program who are committed to stopping other men’s violence have completed the TC training program in order to create a Men’s CAT. Two male volunteers developed a program and presented it to high school students in January 1998. At issue is the men’s desire to work primarily with teen boys to help facilitate a boys’ teen CAT as opposed to working directly with adult men. More training and positive community interactions with the “Dads” of interested teen boys may help support the Men’s CAT efforts to recruit adult men from Novato.

**Teen CAT**

1. **Training.** The training took 30 hours (as opposed to 20 hours allotted to adults). It seemed that the learning curve for developing critical thinking skills requires more time for teens than adults. It appeared that teens retained information through anecdotes rather than analytical or theoretical processes.

2. **Transportation.** Getting teens to meetings took more time since they were unable to drive. This required the organizers to drive teens to and from the meetings. There were attempts to organize carpools with available parents.
3. **Responsibility.** CAT participation is beyond school and home time, so teens required constant reminders of times, dates, and meetings.

4. **Parental Schedules.** Teens needed to discuss schedules with parents before they were able to arrange their own.

5. **Parental Authority.** Teens could commit to only as much as their parents would allow. Teen participation was contingent on completing homework and other household responsibilities. Unlike adults, teens are subject to curfews and grounding. Most parents were understanding and supportive of their teen's activism, but some did not take their commitment seriously. Parents were invited to attend open houses so that they could learn to appreciate and support the work of their teens.

6. **Group Dynamics.** Several teens who disagreed with some of the information presented showed their resistance by being uncooperative at meetings. Instead of working as a team, they often interrupted others, whispered to friends and didn't pay attention. This slowed the process. As a result, one male teen was asked to leave and several other teens dropped out of the group.

7. **Information-Sharing.** Safety issues held some teens back from sharing information. Teens were informed that organizers were mandated to report abuse to Child Protective Services, which inhibited certain teens from speaking about abuse issues in their own lives.

8. **Organizers as Authority Figures.** Teens viewed organizers in the same realm as parents, teachers, and other authority figures. In order to ensure trust, organizers spent additional time building supportive, accepting, and open relationships with the teens.

9. **Peer Support.** As Teen CAT members were still learning how to articulate their new knowledge and attitudes, some were hesitant to tell their friends about their involvement with TC. These members became comfortable with the existing group members and didn't seem to want to actively recruit others. As the new generation of teen CAT members emerge, we will follow the same strategy instituted for Adult CAT members in creating a support group to deal with these immediate peer and familial pressures.

10. **Community Service Credit.** When community service credit was available for teens to volunteer with TC, more students got involved and stayed involved. In schools or grades that don't give credit for community service hours, there were no student volunteers. Incentives are critical for high school students who have many after-school activities to choose from. The objective for middle, high school and college students is to create a community activism credit system where hours spent at community-based organizations would be included in the student's academic record. This would benefit both community interests in improving whatever program students choose to get involved with (for example, Transforming Communities, Novato Human Needs, Novato Youth Center, Girl's Forum of the Novato Police Department, Rape Crisis Center, etc.) as well as transforming personal/individual attitudes and beliefs among the participating teens.
A number of features of the TC prevention project makes the evaluation of its impact complex. The expectation of community-wide change is ambitious, particularly in the short run, and requires the establishment of intermediate indicators of change. The evolving nature of the project, i.e., the actual activities selected by each CAT, requires procedures to assess the accomplishment of these activities as they are planned. Furthermore, the variables that are important to influence, i.e., attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that are on the surface socially unacceptable, are difficult to assess in a reliable manner.

All of these factors create a challenge for evaluators who may be more accustomed to programs that have simpler, more easily defined and reliably measured outcomes. The initial partnerships that TC established with evaluators from social research teams produced some valuable concepts and evaluation strategies, but not without considerable tension and difficulties. TC continues to work on the development of its evaluation component and views this as a critical aspect of the long term viability of the TC project.

A Household Survey was administered to 400 randomly selected households in Novato. The results both documented a baseline assessment of the community’s knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors (KABBs) with regard to domestic violence, and provided information for the design of potential CAT activities. A similar survey for teens was developed and used as a baseline measure prior to our presentations in the schools. Additionally, a Focus Group Research Questionnaire was developed and used that allowed an assessment of KABBs in greater depth with smaller numbers of community members.

Documenting the qualitative change in CAT member KABBs is important, given the reliance of the project model on these individuals as agents of social change. The CAT Summary Reports Forms are used by staff on a weekly basis for this purpose. The project is also tracking the accomplishment of the objectives that each CAT establishes for its action plans.

There is no single way of mobilizing a community on the issue of violence against women and girls, nor is there a single way to evaluate such efforts. Through the Transforming Communities Technical Assistance Training Project (TC-TAT), an Evaluation Handbook for Community Mobilization has been developed and will be made available in the summer of 1999. The intent is to provide a practical framework for evaluating community-based prevention efforts, that will include a range of adaptable tools and timesaving tips. This handbook may help organizations conduct low-stress evaluations of their community action campaigns that provide useful insights into “what works and what doesn’t” as well as persuasive evidence of successes. (Contact the TC-TAT Resource Center for more information at 415-457-2464)
Lessons Learned

The TC Project in Novato has come a long way since it began in mid-1995. A strong foundation for further development of the project is firmly established, and momentum is strong. There are many lessons about designing and implementing a community mobilization project—lessons which will aid the project in moving forward, and which can guide the replication of this program model.

Being Associated with An Existing Organization

Being a prevention program of MAWS was a real asset and contributed to the project's success, especially in the initial contact phase. A number of community leaders had prior contact with MAWS and these contacts proved invaluable in building links to the community. In addition, MAWS is perceived as a reputable organization doing good work in the county, which strengthens the credibility of any new project it creates. Resources and administrative set-up made the start-up at the TC Novato project much easier. Having a different name enabled the TC Novato project to form its own identity and its own purpose as a violence prevention project.

The CATs learned two major lessons about public relations and fund-raising from their connection with MAWS. Regarding public relations, the CATs needed to obtain input and approval from MAWS when sending out press articles and other media-related materials. CAT members understood the learning curve and legal consequences involved, but at times expressed frustration with the “interference” and the re-scripting of their work. By framing the relationship between MAWS and the Novato project as “allied organizations” vs. a perception of a parent to a child, CAT members became more accepting of MAWS’ input. In turn, this has proven effective in teaching members both language and content issues appropriate to the various media situations. It has been so useful that the last several articles written by CAT members for the Novato Advance were returned by MAWS with no revisions. The TC Project Manager can now facilitate the rapid response process so articles meet submission deadlines. Additionally CAT members now feel comfortable and have written many articles and letters to the editors on their own which ostensibly do not require approval from the TC Project Manager.

One of the greatest challenges in the development of the TC Novato project has been fund-raising. The TC project has had to cultivate new funding sources so as not to be in competition with MAWS direct service programs.

Staffing

Finding a qualified Project Manager took longer than anticipated and resulted in a redefinition of the job description. Staff turnover and lack of qualified candidates were also encountered with respect to the community organizer positions. Identifying a candidate with strong written, verbal, and interpersonal skills and a commitment to the project’s vision was difficult—especially when also combined with the lower salary ranges associated with domestic violence/social service-type organizations.
Fortunately, the project has been fully staffed since March 1997, with each woman possessing the qualifications necessary to move the project forward. However, organizers do not have the benefit of another model to draw from, so it is important as a supervisor to encourage flexibility, patience, and critical thinking responses when confronted with tricky situations.

Uncertainty of long-term funding is another challenge for staff in continuing to plan actions with community members. Fortunately, contributions from several private foundations and several merit achievement awards have been able to sustain the efforts thus far. In June 1998, TC was awarded a two-year grant from the California Endowment that has enabled the project to develop a long-range strategic plan.

Finally, community members/volunteers expect a great deal from organizers with regard to leadership skills. One of the main jobs of the organizer is to provide information in a new framework to help individuals unravel entrenched belief systems related to gender roles. This is an awesome task and very often, by bringing these issues to the surface, organizers need to be equipped with listening/advice-rendering qualities similar to the skills of direct service family advocates. This can be extremely challenging and draining. It often requires long work hours and often additional phone conversations during and after work hours with CAT members about personal issues. An effective solution was to organize a separate support group for interested CAT members, which meets every other week. Though staff still need to set personal boundaries with CAT members, this need has diminished considerably with regular support group meetings. Staff are also viewed as role models and therefore they face the daily challenge of practicing what is preached, which most often translates into taking responsibility for one's own actions and being held accountable to the project's mission.

Community Involvement

The project advisory committee (AC) was initially charged with providing input on design, implementation, and evaluation of the project, assisting with volunteer recruitment, and providing support and technical assistance to the CATs. As the project got underway, the staff began to envision a group resembling a CAT rather than a traditional advisory board. After a few incarnations, the new AC includes four members who have been trained in the TC prevention model and have agreed to become more active, initiating strategies within their own spheres of influence.

Community Support

The Novato Police Department has provided the TC project with the most visible and tangible support to date. They see the project as a solid ally, and mutually share resources to improve safety issues in Novato. The Captain has been especially helpful and has provided strategic direction to TC staff. The relationship has been invaluable to the project's credibility, and ultimately, its effectiveness. The editor of the local newspaper, the Novato Advance, has been an unexpected supporter as well and views the TC project as a valuable asset to the community. Other groups, such as the Novato Youth Center, Novato Unified School District, Rape Crisis Center and Spectrum (Center for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,
Transgendered and Queer Concerns) have also become stronger allies. Work with these organizations will continue through participation on task forces in which these groups are members (e.g., Blue Ribbon Task Force on Drug and Alcohol and the Multicultural Oversight Committee).

As the project has evolved, an important lesson learned was not getting discouraged when it required twice the amount of effort to get a good turnout for any TC project-sponsored event. It is also important to remain patient and let each community member express issues, thoughts and feelings in his or her own way. There is a tendency for organizers to restate concerns and frame them in “project” terminology. For example, using the word “outraged” on a flyer offended some members of the community as it was seen as inflammatory rhetoric.

Campaign-driven events have generated good community support, however both the “Take Back the Day” and “Campaign for Justice” projects encountered resistance in attempting to turn supporters into CAT members. This was an important discovery. Though the program vision is to continue to recruit and train volunteers in the CAT model, it also understood that there will be community members who will fall under the categories of short-term “campaign activist” and general “supporter.”

**Good Feedback**

Teens have provided the TC project with a great deal of excellent feedback. Right from the start, teens acknowledged that they wanted to get involved with the TC project because it was “different” from other outside speakers or organizations: they were actually asked for their input and participation. This was a new experience for them. Adult CAT members have, over time, responded well to their role as “activists.” Initially, they viewed the TC project as working toward changing the service delivery response with regard to domestic violence (e.g., better ways of protecting women, more effective police responses, legal advocacy, etc.). Now, however, they truly understand that the prevention effort must first and foremost focus on transforming attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate violence against women, and that it will take community activism at every level to create change.

**Technology**

Though a database was initially set up, it was not a user friendly system so organizers manually recorded interested contacts on paper forms. Some of the forms were lost, and handwriting was unclear. In addition, the manual system did not provide new organizers with a useful, centralized list of mailing addresses and phone numbers when, for example, emergency events needed to be mobilized. After much revision, a new relational database system was set up and all of the TC project contact names have been included. This is critical for any organizing effort to establish from the start.
Volunteer Awareness/Participation

Working with teenagers, adult women and men in transforming their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors has unfolded in several distinct ways.

Adolescent girls see and experience sexism almost everywhere they look—not only on television, in movies, books and magazines, but inside their own homes and among their peers. One unfortunate observation gleaned from the high school presentations is that often it is other girls who primarily dole out the verbal and physical consequences to those girls who don’t play by gender expected rules. Thus, breaking out from the stereotypic societal role or “getting out of the box” requires girls to first and foremost support and show solidarity to each other. The reality is that TC Teen CAT members have experienced some backlash by being isolated by other girls [as well as boys] as a result of their participation in the program. Our issue therefore is to try and understand the dynamic forces operating for girls to stay in or out of the “box” and work to find solutions that are within an age-acceptable range. Each step is important and must continue to build the momentum required to keep the process moving. One of the most difficult challenges for this age group is to take a stand and not buckle under peer opposition. In addition, as ninth grade teen CAT members have advanced into tenth grade, their academic loads as well as work and athletic commitments have exacerbated scheduling problems. This resulted in a period of approximately 6 months where only three teen CAT members remained active. Through the peer education program which included dramatic sketches and role play exercises as well as showing the teen film short, “abuse–NO WAY”, the CAT was able to recruit a brand new group of ninth graders. Currently the Teen Community Action Team members consist of the four 11th graders (the same girls who joined two years ago) and seven new 9th graders.

Adult women CAT members connect more easily to the goals of the project, but are less accepting of how “staying in the box” has impacted their lives. The reason is clear. It has been, for the most part, a painful experience. Each week, however, CAT members let down their guard and speak more freely about the real consequences gender inequality has cost them in their lives. More importantly, they experience the conflicting reality of increased awareness and a willingness to embrace this attitude, but can’t see a way out. This has manifested in various ways. For example, one member has emerged from her involvement to see her long-term relationship as a flawed and unequal partnership and subsequently divorced her husband while another has worked tirelessly on her relationship to the extent that her husbands and sons have participated in the TC Training Program and have become active supporters of the project. The good news is that by adopting an action-based agenda, these shifts in internal consciousness are hopeful. The more they see results, the better they feel emotionally and physically. By expanding the adult CAT member circle of support, a true sense of empowerment is felt.

Adult men CAT members are just beginning to emerge, and as previously discussed, we need to
examine and challenge their reasons or motivations for involvement. It has become a consistent ob-
servation that TC male volunteers need much more political training and education as community
activists. Their involvement seems to stem more from a personal healing agenda and less from the
perspective of being engaged in a social movement for change. While their community presentations
have had tremendous impact and are extremely well-received, the men are not showing up for the
planning and programmatic work needed to create an active Men's CAT. Given this reality, the opportu-
nity hasn't arisen to see how they would interact with interested male volunteers who have not been
through the Men's Program, nor their comfort or willingness to confront the obvious batterer who wants
to join the project. The TC project will continue to collaborate with the Men's Program at MAWS to
develop a stronger activism component in preparation for working within the Transforming Communities CAT structure.

Community Awareness

This is probably the greatest challenge to the TC project.

- Community organizers have the unpopular task of dealing with a subject that people do not
  want to hear or talk about. More importantly, people do not see how they, as individuals, can do
  anything to help reduce domestic violence. Therefore, careful articulation and creative presenta-
tional approaches are necessary ingredients to developing strong community allies. Creating and
developing presentational formats that are appropriately geared to diverse audiences are critical to
assuring that the message can truly be heard.

- Identifying the community groups who are closest to sharing a common analysis of the problem,
such as the Rape Crisis Center, is an important next step. Project participants have learned the
risks associated with putting forth the belief that the root causes of violence against women is
gender-based. Several kinds of reactions have resulted. For example, some groups have either
not returned phone calls, withdrawn from a joint project, or in one case, program staff were not
allowed to return to the high school where the three young men, convicted of unlawful sex with
a minor, attended as a direct result of the position we took during the case. Unfortunately, staff
and volunteers understand through this process that institutional sexism is still ever-present and
rampant. Training individuals from these community groups and encouraging them to return to
their constituents to present the message has enabled the Transforming Communities project to
be recognized more as a positive and needed presence. An example is the TC project's Campaign
for Justice, in which volunteers wrote letters and participated in a Court Watch for an unlawful
sex case. As a result, the district attorney acknowledged the TC project support in helping to
influence the outcome of the case, and praised the “professional” manner of the activism. This
has strengthened the relationships with the Novato Police Department and the Rape Crisis
Center. Most importantly, by collaborating and showing support for organizations and institu-
tions working to end all forms of violence generated by oppression (racism and homophobia), we
have been acknowledged by community leaders as an important voice for change. This evolving
recognition has enabled TC to actively participate in forums, task forces and committees working
toward a safe and just community.
Funding

Sustained community action to prevent violence against women and girls requires a long-term funding commitment. TC’s model was originally proposed as a five-year project to build community ownership of the issue so that CATs would be able to exist on their own. Despite the momentum of the second year, the inability to obtain more funding from the California Department of Health Services for the remaining three years placed these prevention efforts in jeopardy. Fortunately, funding from a California foundation has been secured to see the project through to its five year commitment. State funding institutions and foundations must be urged to change guidelines so that long-term funding can be allocated to demonstration projects in which they make an investment.

Evaluation

Additional research is needed to understand the informal mechanisms that develop within a CAT including:

- how leaders arise;
- how the composition of a CAT affects the strategies chosen;
- what makes CATs more effective than other approaches;
- why CATs sometimes falter when community barriers are too great;
- to identify the extent to which men internalize and assume ownership of this issue;
- to gain insight on the perceived resistance men have to embracing the CAT model as a method for change;
- to identify the perceptions men have about this issue and their own role in perpetuating violence against women and girls.
Conclusion

The TC project provides an exciting and innovative means for every member of a community to take action to end violence against women and girls. The research has been done, information and materials have been gathered, and the facts and statistics about battered women continue to be collected and shared. The TC prevention model can provide this data and information to create awareness of the problem both nationally and locally. It can:

- provide interested and enthusiastic residents with the training required to take action;
- provide examples of successful prevention strategies and support individuals to safely intervene to stop violence in their everyday lives;
- encourage community action teams to design activities that can accomplish their goals; and
- identify barriers and obstacles to progress and strategize ways to resolve and redirect the efforts.

The project has attempted to include male volunteers in this work which has been met with a mixture of suspicion, fear, and hope. The greatest contribution of this effort is in helping women and girls find their voice at home, at work, with their family and friends, and as part of the TC project. Audre Lorde wrote, “Your silence will not protect you.” In this regard, the greatest challenge is empowering women and girls to speak their truth without fear. With the support of an entire community, it is possible to envision a new socially sanctioned norm which gives individuals virtually no option but to view violence and abuse against women and girls as unacceptable—period.

For More Information

For general information about domestic violence, community organizing, awareness materials, or prevention strategies, contact the Public Education Technical Assistance Project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence at 800-537-2238/800-553-2508 TTY.

For more information about the Transforming Communities Project and/or materials, please contact TC-TAT Project Manager @ (415) 457-2464.


3 Stark and Flitcraft, “Spouse Abuse.”
4 Stark and Flitcraft, “Spouse Abuse.”
6 Stark and Flitcraft, “Spouse Abuse
7 Stark and Flitcraft, “Spouse Abuse.”
10 *Man to Man: Findings from 400 Men on Their Knowledge, Attitudes, Beliefs and Behaviors Regarding Women Abuse* (San Rafael, CA: Marin Abused Women’s Services, 1994)  
11 *Man to Man: Findings from 400 Men on Their Knowledge, Attitudes, Beliefs and Behaviors Regarding Women Abuse* (San Rafael, CA: Marin Abused Women’s Services, 1994)
THE SHARPER IMAGE

There are times when a subtle blast of light is unwanted and unwanted. Hence, the need for our latest Mini Palomar Scope. With the press of a button, the built-in illuminator floods any scene with invisible (to the naked eye) infrared light, revealing all.

Weighting only 8.8 ounces and just 5" long, the mini scope is ergonomically designed for user comfort. It fits easily into a pocket or briefcase.

Maximum viewing range of 25 feet. Made in Russia. Runs on two AA batteries (not included). Comes with protective rubber lens cap, carrying bag, wrist strap and one year warranty.

See what you’ve been missing. Get the Mini Palomar Scope.

$19.98 MSRP

THIS OFFENDS ME!

YOUR ADVERTISEMENT OR PRODUCT:

OFFENDS WOMEN
IS RACIST
GLORIFIES VIOLENCE

IS HOMOPHOBIC
IS AGEIST
EXPLOITS THIRD WORLD PEOPLE

I WOULD APPRECIATE IT IF YOU:


IF NOT, I WILL TAKE MY BUSINESS ELSEWHERE AND TELL MY FRIENDS WHY. SINCERELY,
Like Santa, now you can see through total darkness. One of the foremost mini-\noncral night-vision devices, the Mini Palma-\ntimeScope is the ultimate in high-tech, miniaturized night vision technology. The powerful,\nnight-sight mini-camera is designed to help you see in the dark, whether in your car, on a street, or on the go. With a 90-degree field of view, the Mini Palma-timeScope is perfect for anyone who needs to see in the dark. It's compact, lightweight, and easy to use. Use it for security, surveillance, or just to have fun! It's the perfect gift for anyone who loves the outdoors. The Mini Palma-timeScope is available now at your local retailer or directly from us. Order yours today and start seeing the world in a whole new light!
October 18, 1996

Ms. Renee Roberts
87 Orchard Way
Novato, CA 94947

Dear Ms. Roberts,

Thank you for your postcard commenting on our redesigned catalog.

I am sincerely sorry that our presentation of the night vision scope has offended you. Working together with the highly acclaimed advertising agency, Goodby, Silverstein and Partners (creators of the Polaroid and “Got Milk” ad campaigns), we were simply attempting to present the product in a humorous setting. Please be assured that we would never intentionally seek to offend any of our customers and friends.

We absolutely listen to our customers, and as a result of comments such as yours, we will be changing the advertising presentation, hopefully with the next edition of The Sharper Image Catalog. Please accept our apology, and view this incident as a temporary lapse in good judgment on our part that we sincerely regret.

Thanks once again for your comments, and the time you spent letting me know. It is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely

Richard Thalheimer
Chairman and Founder
John Moore
CEO
Mindscapes
88 Rowland Way
Novato, CA 94945

Re: Nothing to Do? Sweepstakes Advertisements

Dear Mr. Moore:

We are from a project called Transforming Communities, a group of Novato citizens concerned about promoting safety and justice for women and girls. As such, we have organized ourselves into community action teams (CATs) to respond to areas in the community that need to be challenged and changed consistent with our purpose. We are writing you today about the sweepstakes ads which appeared in several well-known national computer magazines, including PC Gamer, CGW, Electronic Gaming and Next Gen. This information was brought to our attention by a concerned Novato resident who learned about Transforming Communities through the January 15, 1997 Novato Advance feature article (see enclosed).

We wonder if you are aware that the language “trigger happy,” “power,” “competitive,” “furious,” “explosive,” “carnage,” “addictive,” “sliammin’” – and tone of these ads are sexually exploitative of women and that the ads promote violence against women. We understand that these magazines are primarily read by male teenagers and we feel it is inappropriate to use language and images that take advantage of women so as to appeal to this highly susceptible audience. Perhaps you consider this just a form of entertainment, but we can assure you this reality is not a game for women.

As a Novato company, we urge you to join with the growing grassroots effort, supported by the Novato Police Department, Novato Unified School District, Novato Youth Center, Concerned Parents of Novato, Multicultural Oversight Committee and the City Council, and take action to change existing attitudes that condone violence.

We urge you to set a new trend in the computer game industry by taking responsibility for the powerful messages you convey to our youth culture. By creating non-violent, non-sexist promotional materials and products, we are confident that your merchandise would continue to be entertaining and profitable.

We are interested in hearing back from you. As a Novato corporation, your responsiveness to our concerns will help with our community’s well being and ultimately, we hope, with yours.

Finally, please see the enclosures regarding Sharper Image’s night vision scope ads and accompanying letter from the company’s Chairman and founder, Richard Thalheimer. We’d be so pleased if you would join Sharper Image in setting new standards of advertising that are respectful of women.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Very truly yours,

Karen King, Renee Roberts and Annette Smial
Members of the Media Community Action Team
Transforming Communities
April 30, 1997

Cathy Rath
Transforming Communities
959 Front Street
Novato, CA 94945

Dear Ms. Rath:

Thank you for sending another copy of your February 14th letter. I apologize for the delay in responding, but I do not recall seeing your letter before today.

I can assure you that Mindscape has no intention of using language or images that are offensive or inappropriate; so we will not run these ads again.

Thank you for bringing them to my attention. I understand your concerns.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

cc: Caryn Mical, SVP Marketing - Sunnyvale
An end to violence begins with education
Transforming Communities seeks to make Novato safer for girls and women

by JOHN JACKSON
Advance Editor

When an advertisement in theSharper Image catalog featuring a nightscope device also showed a small picture of a man and woman in an obviously sexy embrace, members of Novato's Transforming Communities Media Action Team protested with a letter to the company.

Not only did Sharper Image change the ad, but company president Richard Thalheimer responded to the Novato group with a personal letter and offered a printed apology in a subsequent issue of the catalogue.

When team members discovered that Wherehouse in Vintage Oaks displayed calendars featuring “glamour” photos of women in the same area as calendars featuring pets and children's activities, they protested and the calendars were moved.

Transforming Communities is a project of Marin Abused Women's Services (MAWS). While the Novato Transforming Communities project is only a year old this month, MAWS has a proven 20-year track record of helping women and children in Marin. Transforming Communities is funded by the county Department of Health and Human Services.

Making the public aware of how advertising reinforces negative stereotypes of women is just one of the many ways the group is attempting to “transform” Novato into a better and safer community for women.

In many subtle and sometimes emphatic ways, Transforming Communities is making progress.

When an abused girl or woman needs help, Transforming Communities can get them immediate assistance by referring them to MAWS or some other appropriate agency, but it is not designed to provide direct assistance.

The real idea behind Transforming Communities is to make help unnecessary by getting at the root causes of abuse and sexual harassment and discrimination.

“We are trying to change the attitude that women are less than men and that men have control over women,” explains Cathy Rath, one of the staff members in the Novato organization.

She explains that after the holidays, the temporary cheerful facade has faded for a large number of women and girls in Novato whose reality includes physical or other abuse.

It is the attitudes that lead to that abuse that Transforming Communities is trying to change.

But, the group understands change only comes through action, and as the volunteers have already demonstrated, they are willing to take the action necessary to bring about change.

According to the group's brochure:

"Transforming Communities is an action project aimed at reducing violence against women and girls. It has been operating countywide for three years. The Novato project works intensively within a single community to prevent gender-based violence. Women and girls are subject to an array of violence, including battery, rape, molestation and harassment. The goal of Transforming Communities Project Novato is to mobilize the community to change attitudes, behaviors, and institutional responses that condone or support the violence."

To implement its mission, Transforming Communities has mobilized and is training a group of volunteers to be placed on Community Action Teams (CATS) to address such community groups as youth, law enforcement and the media.
One of the ongoing programs being conducted by Transforming Communities’ volunteers is an educational presentation they are making to each of Novato’s high schools.

And it isn’t only the girls who are hearing the message. The volunteers are also addressing boys, stressing the need for everyone to change attitudes and by changing attitudes changing actions.

“We separate the boys and the girls because we found that they were reluctant to address the issues when they were together,” Rath explains.

Each class includes a frank discussion of problems caused by stereotyping and categorizing both boys and girls, role playing and suggestions for change.

And changes are needed.

According to the Common Health Fund in its first comprehensive national health survey of American Women, a woman is physically abused every nine seconds in the United States.

Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 and 44 in the United States. This is more than are injured in car accidents, muggings and rapes combined.

Half of all women will experience physical violence in an intimate relationship and for a quarter to a third of those women, the battering will be regular and ongoing.

One third of all women who are murdered in this country are killed by their husbands or boyfriends and millions more are physically and/or psychologically scarred for life.

Family violence kills as many women every five years as the total number of Americans who died in the Vietnam War.

And we, as taxpayers, pay a heavy price for domestic violence.

Every year, domestic violence causes approximately 100,000 days of hospitalization; 28,700 emergency department visits, and 39,000 physician visits, which costs the nation between $5 billion and $10 billion every year. Half all homeless women and children are fleeing domestic violence.

“Unfortunately we tend to pretend domestic violence doesn’t exist rather than to get it out in the open and deal with it,” says Karen King, a Transforming Community volunteer.

“We need to open the way for discussion in the community of the problem.”

That Novato was chosen for a Transforming Communities office is no accident.

MAWS officials selected Novato for its strong community identity and family orientation, its variety of social and political networks of persons interested in improving their community, its relative diverse ethnic economic and cultural makeup (at least by Marin County standards), and its moderate size.

Novato also has a reputation for supporting women and children. Over the years, many have benefited from MAWS services and many Novatans have volunteered to help with the group.

“We need to identify and change beliefs that deny, minimize and perpetuate this violence,” says Rath. “When every member of our community takes a stand and acts to end violence, this vision of a safe and just community will be possible.”

Individual and group volunteers are always welcomed by Transforming Communities. For more information on how to help, call 898-3200 or FAX 898-3202.
"The other day while at my job as a cashier, an elderly man came in to pay his bill. It was the third day in a row of rainy, stormy weather, and this man said he wanted to tell me a funny joke to brighten my day," relates Renee Roberts, a volunteer with Transforming Communities.

"The man then told me this story:

"A man had a wife who died of mushroom poisoning. He married another and she died of mushroom poisoning. His third wife died of a blow to the head because she wouldn't eat any mushrooms!"

"My expression clued him in that I didn't think it was funny.

"Didn't like it, eh?"

"No, I didn't, I told him."

"Oh well,' he said as he turned to exit, 'have a nice day.'"

"In the past, I probably would have laughed anyway so as to not offend him. But now that I've been volunteering with Transforming Communities, I am much more aware that such jokes minimize the fact that domestic violence is the leading cause of death and injury to women in this country.

"And that's no joke!"

Domestic violence is often more insidious than the sensational media stories of murder and death; it encompasses a wide spectrum of abusive behaviors that men use to maintain power and authority.

There is emotional abuse such as name calling, ridiculing appearance, isolating from friends/family members, intimidating, destroying personal property and yelling.

Men can also be economically abusive by making all the financial decisions and/or preventing their partner from working or keeping a job. Physical and/or sexual abuse, which is commonly recognized but under reported, includes pushing, choking, pulling hair, grabbing, kicking, throwing down and the use of objects as weapons.

As members of the media community action team of Transforming Communities, we are dedicated to providing safety and justice for women and girls. Just as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) began, we are a small group of women outraged by the violence against women portrayed in the media and all too often, accepted by society.

We want to educate and mobilize Novato citizens to take individual and/or collective action to support these efforts. Our media team will respond to news coverage that perpetuates the myths about domestic violence as well as devalues or blames the victim.

Ultimately, we want to replace negative images of females that depict us as less worthy than males or as sexual objects with respectful, non-sexist, non-violent and woman-affirming ones.

How would you like to get involved in this project? We welcome your support. For more information, call 898-3200.

This column was submitted by Renee Roberts, Karen King, Annette Smail and Cathy Rath of the Transforming Communities Media Community Action Team.
Help available for batterers

Women's shelters, rape crisis centers, hotlines, mandatory reporting laws...temporary restraining orders, anti-stalking laws...2 million to 4 million women are battered in the United States each year.

The group of listings reflects a burgeoning array of organizations and agencies across the country developed to help women get out of violent relationships.

Yet despite this heightened awareness of domestic violence, what is missing from this equation is public recognition of the need for and acceptance of retraining programs for male batterers. For example, if the language in the statistic above read, "2 million to 4 million men batter women in the United States each year," it might begin to place accountability where it belongs...on those who abuse.

In response to women's urgency and need for men to stop their violence, Marin Abused Women's Services in 1979 created a Men's Program to address the root cause. The Men's Program reaches abusers through courts, referrals and a men's hotline.

Usually a man calls the Men's Program after he has been arrested or when his partner has obtained a restraining order barring him from entering the home.

The primary goal of the Men's Program is to stop the violence, whether it is physical, emotional or verbal. The process begins with the understanding that it is the man, not the woman, who is responsible for the violent behavior. Satisfactory progress can be made only after a man admits he has a problem and decides he wants help.

The program is intended to help participants learn to deal with their problems in a non-violent manner. They get help in understanding how to make decisions about the family and relationships jointly with their partners. More than 5,000 men have participated in this highly successful 48-week curriculum offered throughout the Bay Area.

Many former batterers become active volunteers working on the 24-hour hotline, accompanying police on domestic violence calls and speaking to community groups.

Men from all economic backgrounds, races and religions are represented, and 90 percent are considered law-abiding outside the home. There are, however, common beliefs that batterers share, including denial and minimization of the abuse, and feelings of jealousy and possessiveness.

Often these thought processes (excuses) enable batterers to refuse responsibility and leads them to blame the victim for their own actions. Many batterers also cling to the rigid views of sex roles which traditionally give men permission to have authority and power over women.

Our culture teaches its sons at an early age about male superiority and that behaving in overpowering and controlling ways is to "act like a man." We need to adopt a new definition of "manhood" that is based on equality, mutual respect and emotional intimacy.

We must re-educate our boys to understand what they are feeling and how to express their feelings appropriately. Plenty of people get angry, frustrated, hurt or denied what they want without getting physically or verbally violent.

The Men's Program at MAWS is not a cure-all, but it focuses upon the perpetrator and takes a community coordinated approach. With the police adopting pro-arrest policies, the courts handing down stiffer penalties for domestic violence, along with more aggressive prosecuting attorneys, we can send a clear message to abusers:

"Battering will not be tolerated and there will be consequences for violence."

For more information on the Men's Program, call the men's hotline at 924-1070.

The above was prepared by Transforming Communities; telephone 898-3202.
Non-violence is conscious choice

We interactively discuss gender stereotypes and how they influence our opinions and treatment of each other and ourselves. Additionally, two graduates of Marin Abused Women’s Services’ Men’s Program share the devastating consequences their violent behavior had on themselves and others. The men are highly motivated to help students avoid making some of the same mistakes that have caused themselves and others so much pain. They believe that their lives could have been very different if someone had given them this information at a young age. The teens were deeply touched by hearing from these men, one of whom graduated from Novato High School.

We define violence as “crossing someone’s boundaries without permission.” We asked the students to think about and set their own boundaries and to honor those others set for themselves. We explain the importance of recognizing when someone is violating their boundaries or is trying to control them. We emphasize how important it is to treat others with respect and equality. We stress that violence is always a choice and that we can decide not to be violent. For example, students are encouraged not to match energy with someone who is violent; choosing to diffuse, rather than escalate a potentially violent interaction. They are advised to make themselves safe by walking away, and calling for help if they or anyone else is in an unsafe or vulnerable situation. We discuss how to communicate by listening patiently and by using the four A’s—giving people their Attention, Acceptance, Appreciation and Affection. Teens can also help themselves and others by:

- Accepting people for who they are by not allowing gender (or other) stereotypes to define us.
- Refusing to use put-downs or rushing to judgment before knowing all the facts
- Choosing not to watch movies or TV programs (or play video games) that promote or glorify violence.
- Communicating openly and honestly about their own feelings and boundaries.
- Reaching out to peers who they know or suspect are in abusive relationships.
- Getting involved with other teens and adults to create safe and healthy relationships by contacting Transforming Communities at 898-3200.

This Viewpoint was written by Karen King, Renee Roberts, Cathy Rath, and Stephanie Linder of Transforming Communities.
Your friend is standing in the middle of the street. At a distance you notice a fast-approaching truck heading straight for her. You yell for her to get out of the way, but she doesn’t hear you. You scream louder, but again it falls on deaf ears. In a matter of seconds, your friend’s life will be in extreme peril unless you or she take immediate action.

How similar is this scenario and one in which many women find themselves—loving in a destructive relationship where her psychological and/or physical health is at risk. You suspect that your friend’s relationship is abusive by evidence of unexplained injuries or depressed behavior. Or she may even have told you many disturbing details of her intimate relationship. If it’s so bad, why doesn’t she just leave?

Why do women stay in abusive relationships?
There are many reasons. Among the most compelling:
• Economic dependence is a primary concern. Many women simply cannot afford to leave. Those who do leave risk living in substandard conditions. A 1993 study found that 50 percent of all homeless women and children in this country are fleeing domestic violence.
• Not only are women fearful of being alone, they often fear for their lives. Women are at 75 percent greater risk of physical danger when they leave their battering relationship. Women are more likely to be murdered when estranged from their partners, especially within the first two months after separation.
• Many women deny that their intimate relationship has deteriorated so dramatically from the “honeymoon” period. She loves him and believes that if she tries harder, he will change.
• Women raised in traditional religious families often believe that women should “be good and obedient to their own husbands,” and find it extremely difficult to leave. When feelings of shame, embarrassment and failure are added, leaving may not be an option.
• Maybe she stays because she, like most of us, grew up learning that this is just the way men are. There is little that she can do.

How can we as friends, family and community members provide the support battered women need to get on to a better life? How could social institutions, such as police, schools, media, government, religious organizations and family work to prevent abuse from happening in our society and to help abused women leave safely? How can these institutions address domestic violence as a community concern?

At Transforming Communities, Creating Safety and Justice for Women and Girls, we are building alliances involving Novato residents to end men’s violence against women and girls.

We, as friends and families, must not turn our backs and pretend that this is not happening. Offer your support and, if need be, jump in and help her to safety.

For more information, please call Transforming Communities at 898-3200.

Next time we will discuss the cycle of abuse.

This article was prepared by Annette Smail, Karen King, Renee Roberts, Cathy Rath and Stephanie Linder of Transforming Communities.
Transforming
Our Community
Creating Safety & Justice For Women & Girls

It's the Media Community Action Team's one year anniversary and we're celebrating! Since October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, we want to share with you our accomplishments and our ongoing efforts toward creating safety and justice for women and girls.

Have you ever felt degraded or appalled about women and girls being portrayed as sex objects or as victims of violence in advertising?

We have too. Together, we sent postcards and letters to three major corporations expressing our objections to these images. We alerted them as to how this type of advertising exploits and promotes violence against women and girls. As a result, all three companies apologized and modified their ads. This is how the Media Community Action Team got started. As a group of only five women, we created change.

Our goal was to reach out and educate the community and make it aware that violence against women and girls is, indeed, a problem in Novato.

The Novato Advance supported our efforts by featuring Transforming Communities’ work and then provided us space for regular articles. We have also been actively involved in several community events advocating safety and justice for women and girls.

Have you been concerned about your teen’s dating experiences? Are you worried about her safety and the health of her future relationships?

We at Transforming Communities spoke to 964 students at all three Novato high schools about gender stereotypes that can lead to dating violence. We also defined the spectrum of abuse and provided communication skills that build healthy relationships. As a result of these sessions, 14 teens signed up and created the Teen Community Action Team. Their eight-month program has included peer education, writing and acting in a video about the prevention of teen dating violence, the Silent Witness Display and producing a website for teens across the country.

What was your reaction when a local soccer league coordinator was charged and later pleaded guilty to molesting five young girls in Novato? Or when a convicted sex offender broke his probation and disappeared? Fear? Outrage?

So was ours. We were able to turn our fear and outrage into action by organizing the “Take Back the Day” march and public forum. The march was the first of its kind for Novato. The public forum gave members of the community an opportunity to speak out about their common concerns and be supported.

Have you ever wanted to see justice served, but didn’t feel like your voice counted?

Parents and concerned citizens were invited to an open forum to discuss their ideas for seeing a just outcome to the unlawful sex case on Prom Night. This resulted in a Campaign for Justice. Parents, students and other community residents formed a Court Watch Team to monitor the proceedings. Letters were sent to the Probation Department advocating for sentencing that would ensure justice was served. The three young men received sentences that reflected the severity of their actions. The Deputy District Attorney, Kelly Vieira, wrote a letter thanking us for “hard work and efforts in this case.” She indicated that our support “meant a lot to the victim.” Most importantly, she said, “I believe that your time and efforts were well spent.”

Do you want to transform this community and create safety and justice for women and girls?”

Join us at our Thursday, Oct. 30 public meeting at 959 Front St. at 6 p.m. For more information, call 898-3200.

The above was prepared by the Media Community Action Team of Transforming Communities: Annette Smail, Karen King, Deborah Materi, Cathy Rath and Renee Roberts.

Novato Advance, October 29 1997—A-13
Transforming Communities

Thanks to all who have the courage to get involved

Congratulations to community members who are working to make Novato the kind of place we all envision it to be—safe and just. Novato has had its share of unpleasant publicity concerning child molestation, rape, domestic violence and racist actions. This article will highlight some of the positive actions taken by people and organizations toward reaching the goal of making Novato a safe and just community.

A common denominator, especially for the individuals who have been instrumental in these cases, was the courage to speak out. They took a risk. The clerk at Long’s Drugs got involved by speaking up. If he or she had not, we would still be harboring a suspected child molester “safely” in Novato. How many more children (our own, perhaps) would he have assaulted? How much more damage would he have done to the children he had already exploited? A prevalent myth in our society is that matters such as domestic violence and abuse are personal and none of our business. Unfortunately, most of the crimes perpetrated against women and children do go on behind closed doors—and the perpetrators count on the public not intervening and taking action to respond appropriately. Many people don’t realize that a call to authorities to report suspicious circumstances is anonymous.

Credit should be also given to the manager of the apartment complex where these alleged child molestation crimes were committed. She acted quickly to invite speakers from “Child Lures” (a project of the California Department of Corrections) to come on site to discuss with apartment residents ways to protect children; how to identify potential child molesters and dangerous interactions between adults and children. This excellent program is available free to the public and would help all parents understand how to better protect their children.

The Novato Unified School District (NUSD) and Novato School Board is to be congratulated for organizing a public forum for residents to express their concerns about the racist incidents at San Marin High School. From that input, NUSD’s Diversity Advisory Committee is sponsoring a two-day planning retreat with the intent of creating and sustaining a respectful, safe and just learning environment for all. In doing so, the NUSD, along with the school board, parents, teachers, administrators, community groups and students will be working towards building a community of awareness, understanding, sensitivity and acceptance.

Another group of teens who deserve public recognition are the teens from Transforming Communities: Creating Safety & Justice for Women & Girls Project. They were recently featured by KRON-TV for hosting an on-line chat room for young people dealing with dating relationships, issues with parents, peer pressure, etc. If you are a teen, please join them at www.theinside.com on Wednesdays from 4 to 5 p.m.

We commend the Novato Police Department for its tireless efforts at implementing effective community policing initiatives here in Novato. From their commitment to address domestic violence and other violent and sexual assault calls to their education programs such as the Girls Forum and self-defense classes, we are fortunate to have such a progressive police force.

Because dating violence has become a serious problem for teens, Transforming Communities, in collaboration with independent filmmaker Deborah French Frisher, offered local high school students an opportunity to participate in a workshop designed for teens to create their own short film about relationship violence and date rape. Through guided improvisations, 12 teens created and performed dramatic scenes that will be framed along with off-camera interviews and documentary footage in a format chosen by the teens. The script for a 23-minute film emerged in the workshop as they worked as authors from their own experiences and imaginations. Prevention and positive intervention will be emphasized in the film. The film short will suggest how teens can intervene collectively and individually.

We believe that we have an individual responsibility to care about and protect each other. However, working alone on these problems can become overwhelming. Joining together and supporting each other’s efforts is vital to making effective change and staying on course. Do we really want a kinder, safer, more just society? Violence and abuse will stop when our community says it must.

We extend a heartfelt thank you to each person mentioned (and all those not recognized here) who has taken a risk to help another. We will never know how much needless and undeserved suffering you have prevented.

This column was prepared by Transforming Communities Creating Safety & Justice for Women & Girls. For more information on how you can get involved, call 898-3200 or FAX 898-3202.
prom
from party scene

Robert Grupe
sentenced 10/17/97

Trevor Codington
sentenced 10/17/97
Last May, three Novato High School students raped a girl at a post-prom party. Now, a community must come to terms with the consequences  

BY COLLEEN O’CONNOR

IT WAS PROM NIGHT AT NOVATO HIGH School in Northern California, and Lisa* danced the evening away with her friend and date for the evening, Christian Villagomez, 18. The 15-year-old sophomore wore a mint-green dress that enhanced her dark hair and gave her brown eyes an extra sparkle. This was her first prom, and everything seemed perfect—except that her best friend, Courtney Franzi, wasn’t there. The two girls had been banned from the prom because they’d been caught drinking at a previous school function—but when Christian invited Lisa to come as his date, she decided to take a chance.

At 1:15 A.M., Lisa, Christian and some friends checked into the Embassy Suites Hotel in nearby San Rafael. As in the past, many of the seniors had rented rooms for a post-prom bash, and after hitting a few of the other parties, Lisa and her friends headed back to their own room.

That’s when, according to Lisa, 18-year-old Trevor Coldington, a popular football player at Novato High.  

*N The victim’s name has been changed to protect her identity. All other names are real.*
stopped by and invited them to his room. Lisa knew Trevor pretty well—whenever his mother went away, she says, kids would party at his house.

Over the course of the evening, Lisa had consumed several vodka drinks and three beers. After Trevor left, she vomited in the bathroom. Later that night, she says, she got a call from Trevor repeating his invitation. Since her other friends had already crashed for the night, she headed over to Trevor’s suite, where several kids were hanging out, including two more Novato High football players, Robert Grupe and Nathan Fredlund, both 18. Feeling sick again, Lisa went into the adjoining room to lay down on the bed. Nathan lay next to her and began feeling her breasts.

Lisa remembers saying, “Just stop! I’m sitting here getting sick,” and then throwing up on the bedspread. (In Nathan’s police interview, he states that Lisa did not tell him to stop.) As some people started to clean up the mess, Lisa felt herself passing out. When she came to later, Robert was kissing her, and at least one of the boys was pulling off her pants.

Lisa passed out again. When she awoke this time, Robert was on top of her having intercourse, and Trevor and Nathan were standing naked on either side of her. Once Robert finished, he left the room, and the other two had sex with her. “I was awake when half of it was going on,” she says, “but I wasn’t there, really. When I snapped out of it and woke up, I was lying next to Trevor and I was naked. I almost started to cry, but I couldn’t.” She dressed quickly, shaking. As she left, she says, Trevor asked, “You’re not going to tell anyone, are you?” and Nathan added, “You could get us into a lot of trouble.”

Lisa began to panic. She worried that it had been her fault. “I was flirting with them the whole night,” she says. “I always flirted with them, because they were my friends. I couldn’t think, so I walked back to my hotel room feeling like a whore. I felt disgusting.”

Back in her room, she told one of her friends what had just happened, and after resting for 20 minutes she called her friend Courtney. “I think I got raped,” she said. “I don’t know what’s happened, but I really need you to come get me.”

**the aftermath**

While Courtney went to her friend, her mom called Lisa’s mother, Stephanie Vigil, a 33-year-old payroll specialist. “First I was in shock. I didn’t know...”

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**could it happen to you?**

The scary truth is, yes. Check out the statistics: According to one national study, one out of five college women reported that they had experienced date rape or attempted date rape since turning 14. The new term for date rape is acquaintance rape, which is “any sexually violent act with someone you know—whether it’s a date, a boyfriend, your brother’s friend,” according to Kathryn Geller Myers, communications director at the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape. “People believe a lot of those myths about what kinds of guys are rapists and what kinds of girls get raped. We just don’t want to believe someone we know, or may have a big crush on, would hurt us in that way.”

The big problem—for both male and female teens—is lack of communication. While it’s totally normal for a couple to feel sexual desire, it’s crucial for each person to know and discuss how far he or she is willing to go. “We basically tell guys and girls to listen and talk to each other,” says Myers. “Girls need to be clear and consistent in talking about their sexual desires. And we tell the guys not to make assumptions. Just because his date welcomes a kiss doesn’t mean she wants to do anything more than that,” she says. “If you don’t want to have sex, then say no as if you mean it. It’s all about respect, communication and being responsible for your own actions.”
how to react,” says Stephanie, who recalls how her daughter sat on her bed crying after she got home from the hotel. “We all hugged her and told her we loved her and that she needed to go to the police,” she says. “If she let them get away with this, she would have to live with it for the rest of her life.”

Lisa agreed to talk to the police, and that same day, Robert, Trevor and Nathan were arrested at the hotel, then released without bail the following night. Two weeks later, they were charged with unlawful sexual intercourse with a minor: While all three later pleaded guilty, each initially said the sex had been consensual. “She’s a tramp,” said Robert to one arresting officer.

That evening, the scandal riveted the TV news, leaving Novato’s citizens bitterly divided. While a small contingent in the community sided with Lisa, most rallied to defend the star football players.

“It was like the whole community left her out to dry,” says Carly Davidson, a 15-year-old sophomore at Novato High School. Says Novato High sophomore Poovra Pandey, 16: “People were all focusing on what this girl did wrong instead of what the young men did wrong.”

The series of hearings over the next few months did little to reconcile the two camps. Robert admitted to kissing Lisa, who had a reputation for being a party girl, but he said she had been kissing him back. And a witness at the scene told authorities that at one point, “She was rubbing all over Trevor... It looked like she was enjoying herself.”

In October, probation officers concluded that although Lisa’s behavior and excessive drinking had been “irresponsible and dangerous,” they were no excuse for the attack. Later, in a statement to probation officers, Robert admitted, “I made some poor judgments, which I take responsibility for.” All three teens were sentenced to 90 days in jail and three years probation in addition to having to graduate from a one-year course on violence prevention at the Men’s Program of Marin Abused Women’s Services (MAWS). But many still feel the boys should never have been arrested. “I think [the punishment] sucks,” says Matt Reagan, a 15-year-old sophomore at Novato High. “I don’t think their whole entire future should be ruined because of one mistake.”

Lisa’s mom, Stephanie, however, calls the sentence “a slap on the wrist.”

**A new awareness**

As the debate over who’s to blame rages on, so does the hotel-room party scene in Novato—and the sexual abuse. Cathy Rath, project manager at Transforming Communities, a division of MAWS that works to prevent violence against women and girls, says one local police officer told her, “We get calls all the time. A young girl is at a party, she likes some guy there—and the next thing you know there are five guys on her.”

In response, organizations and schools around Marin County have launched a number of programs aimed at combating—about teen drinking, dating abuse and consensual sex. “Rape crisis centers are teaching girls what it means to be safe, strong and free,” says Donna Garske, executive director of MAWS. “But the message to boys is not as strong as it needs to be.”

While everyone else is trying to understand the laws—and each other—Lisa is struggling to put her life back together. Some of her friends have stuck by her, but many people refuse to talk to her. Last September, she returned to Novato High for her junior year, intent on ignoring the stares and whispers. “Some days I just couldn’t do it and would have to go home,” says Lisa. In October, she changed schools.

Recently, Lisa spotted Robert at the movies with friends. “I turned to look at him, and my mouth just dropped,” she says. She ran for the bathroom. “Are you okay?” asked a friend. “Don’t touch me!” Lisa answered. “I need to get away from everybody.” Leaning against a wall to catch her breath, she looked up as Robert’s female friends came in. They stared at her. As she bolted out the door, one said, “Oh, it’s that bitch!”

“While they were in jail I didn’t have to worry about bumping into them,” Lisa says. “Now I do. I think they’re pathetic. I think everybody in this whole town is pathetic. It makes me sick that so many people were down on me because I [stood up for] myself.”

On campus, students say they’ve learned from this experience. “You have to be assertive,” says Carly. “Make sure you have a friend with you at a party, someone who will take care of you.” As she points out, trouble can hit when you least expect it: “You don’t think when you’re going to parties that you could be getting yourself in trouble. You think you’re going to a party to have fun.”

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**RAPE TALK: How can date rape be stopped? Join our forum, led by psychologist Dr. Robin, in Reality Check on our site on AOL (keyword: Teen People).**