

## **Forging Partnerships in Louisville, Kentucky**

The Faith Community & Community Advocates Together

For a number of years a small group of people of faith and community advocates in Louisville tried, without much success, to collaborate in stopping the violence in our homes. Attempts were made but success eluded us. Building relationships of trust takes time, energy, and patience... commodities that are often in short supply.

Louisville has one of the largest domestic violence and rape crisis centers<sup>1</sup> in the United States. Over the years, it has fostered vital partnerships with the police, the court system, the school system, and the business community. Unfortunately, advocates sometimes shied away from faith communities, and more often than we would like to think, faith communities have not always been helpful in steering vulnerable persons toward the available services.

In the last two years, inroads have been made in bringing faith leaders and advocates together... enough to call this a story of hope and restoration.

It was the community group, MensWork<sup>2</sup>, who has been at the forefront in attempts to bring these groups together. They rightly advocate that men must take responsibility in ending the violence, and until they do, the violence will not stop. They also understand that faith leaders are often the first to hear about abuse. Their commitment to working with secular and faith organizations, together, is essential in stopping the violence.

The coalition group that was originally formed through the efforts of MensWork had some initial success, but eventually saw their efforts fizzle; interest was there, but members found it difficult to give the time that was necessary to form lasting collaborations.

MensWork didn't give up when faced with that initial failure. They were dedicated to bridging the gulf between faith groups and domestic violence advocates. Through their efforts, a strong team was established. Today, it includes a staff member of the Center for Women and Families, several former staff persons, faculty members of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, a faculty member of the University of Louisville Kent School of Social Work, a therapist, a pastor who serves on the Leadership Team of Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network, a hospital chaplain, the executive director of the Kentucky Council of Churches, and the executive director of MensWork.

While not everyone can come to all the meetings, the commitment is there and work is progressing.

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<sup>1</sup> The Center for Women and Families - <http://www.thecenteronline.org/>

<sup>2</sup> MensWork - [www.mensworkinc.com](http://www.mensworkinc.com)

At two different events we used the simulation, *In Her Shoes*,<sup>3</sup> which is an interactive way to follow the stories of victims and survivors of violence as they struggle to find community resources, represented by 17 different stations.

Our goal is to bring advocates and persons of faith together to enable partnerships to form. To do this, we asked community members to stand by the stations they represent in real life... police officers, court officials, pastors, health providers, therapists, and crisis advocates. Participants interact with these professionals as they follow their victim's story. Some of the "stories" end well, some of the stories end tragically. For participants, it is an eye-opener to just what it takes to become a survivor. The simulation can be an emotional, gut-wrenching experience, particularly when they understand that the "stories" they are following are real.

Our first *In Her Shoes* experience was designed primarily for faith leaders. The second event was for seminary students who were involved in Clinical Pastoral Education in area hospitals. This event was debriefed by a supervising chaplain so that it met the needs of those students.

Additional events are in the making:

- A meeting at the crisis center to learn about their services and resources;
- A coffee shop conversation with a survivor (a Presbyterian Teaching Elder);
- A film showing of *Broken Vows - Religious Perspectives on Domestic Violence*.<sup>4</sup>

What we are learning...

1. Congregational leaders do not jump at the chance to hear about domestic violence! A general invitation to an event may not result in many participants. Getting people to the table takes personal invitations.
2. Domestic Violence professionals and advocates also need to learn the resources faith leaders can bring to victims. Sometimes it is to name how faith can heal and sometimes it is to help victims who experience a crisis of faith.
3. A relationship of trust between professional advocates and pastors is critical. The gulf is often wide, as advocates have seen pastors send women back into danger, and pastors fear that advocates and crisis centers may disregard a victim's faith and practice.
4. It does take the whole community, each doing their part, to address the violence in our homes and communities. [see the Desire to Make a Difference Wheel, below, which stresses the importance of the community acting together]
5. This coalition brought together by MensWork has been less successful at making this an interfaith endeavor, but is not giving up on that goal.

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<sup>3</sup> *In Her Shoes* can be borrowed from the Presbyterian Health, Education, & Welfare Association (PHEWA), PC(USA): [www.pcusa.org/phewa](http://www.pcusa.org/phewa) or purchased through the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence: <http://www.wscadv.org/resourcesAlpha.cfm?ald=6388541A-C298-58F6-02A2A6CF514E6448>

<sup>4</sup> *Broken Vows* can be purchased from the FaithTrust Institute:  
<http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/store/01tA000000M7rSIAS>

This story is far from over. There is much to be done. Hope...Yes, there is plenty of Hope!



Coordinated Community Response Material derived from:

Domestic violence Institute of Michigan - Desire to Make a Difference Wheel

Developed by Mike Jackson & David Garvin

[http://www.pharos.nl/documents/doc/workforcare\\_module10.pdf](http://www.pharos.nl/documents/doc/workforcare_module10.pdf) page 20

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