



Ending Our Silence

The Semi-annual Newsletter of the African American Domestic Peace Project - West Palm Beach

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Domestic Violence in West Palm Beach

Amid the tropical paradise, intimate partner violence is claiming lives of African American women at an alarming rate.

Mothers Against Murderers Association

Catalyzed by personal loss, a local resident establishes a community-based organization to help others in their time of grief.

AADPP - West Palm Beach

Project Lead Rev. J.R. Thicklin seeks to raise awareness about domestic violence and galvanize the Black community to take ownership of the problem.

A Word from IDVAAC's Co-Executive Director

Dr. Oliver J. Williams, Co-Executive Director of IDVAAC, shares his vision for the AADPP both locally and nationally.

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The African American Domestic Peace Project: Bridging the Gap

AADPP Underscores Communities Domestic Violence Responsibilities While Connecting Local Populations with Resources

IT'S JUDGEMENT DAY. And for Ebony Jenkins, a 35-year-old mother of two, today is bittersweet. Two years ago, Ebony's husband shot her in the head. And for two years, Ebony has also lived in the same community, without family, otherwise alone, and with no "safe haven" from this volatile situation. Ebony's husband has also continued to live unsanctioned in the community. Although law enforcement and the advocacy community are both aware of her situation, Ebony has received no help or support and has lived in fear for her life. Indeed, she is fortunate to be alive.

Today, Ebony will face her husband in court. As she enters the courtroom alone, Ebony's emotions intensify as she sees the first two rows filled with supporters who have come out to offer encouragement - not for her, but for her husband. Feeling intimidated, helpless, and confused, she nervously makes her way to her seat, just a few

feet from her husband and a short distance from his company of family and friends.

Although the specifics have been changed, this scenario is based on an actual event and is all too common for victims of intimate partner violence. Unaware of the resources around them, many battered women in the African American community do not receive the assistance they so desperately need and have no one to help them navigate the systems and



supports that may already exist. For some, these supports can be the difference between life and death.

Fortunately for Ebony, there was an advocate present who witnessed her plight and contacted the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC), which was able to connect her with people who could advocate on her behalf, link her to existing supports nationally and within her community, connect her to legal systems, and help her develop a plan. Sadly, there are countless other battered women who have not been able to make that connection. Ebony's case illustrates a very real challenge facing many battered women of color: Although many communities have a coordinated community response for victims of domestic violence, these "mainstream" systems and services - whether intentionally or inadvertently - often do not reach into the African American community or other communities of color.

The African American Domestic Peace Project (AADPP), a recently launched IDVAAC initiative, seeks to help communities bridge the gap for these women. The brainchild of Dr. Oliver Williams, Ph.D., IDVAAC's Co-Executive Director, the AADPP's

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mission is to develop a community education strategy to address domestic violence within African American communities across the country. The AADPP does not intend to replace current community based efforts. Instead, it aims to enhance these efforts through engaging the local African American community at large to take an active role in reducing intimate partner violence. "We know there are several good organizations that are working hard within the community and doing a great job," says Dr. Williams. "The challenge is to develop a collaborative approach that connects these organizations and makes it easier for battered women to be informed and to access the resources that are available to them."

A hallmark of the AADPP is its inclusive approach to developing a coordinated community response that specifically addressed the needs of African Americans. "Every community should have a comprehensive, well-publicized, and easily accessible system of supports for African American women and families," Dr. Williams asserts. Although the AADPP will connect with traditional domestic

violence programs to participate in the initiative, outreach efforts will also target a range of community stakeholders, including churches; health and mental health providers; community leaders and other individuals, service providers, and organizations that aspire to create healthier environments and desire to mitigate violence in their communities.

In launching the initiative, IDVAAC has identified seven locations as the first communities for the AADPP: Birmingham, Alabama; Dallas, Texas; Detroit, Michigan; Greenville, Mississippi; Hartford, Connecticut; Memphis, Tennessee; Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota; Oakland, California; and West Palm Beach, Florida.

In addition to collaborating locally, the AADPP will partner with other national organizations that are concerned about the well-being of African Americans and all people of the African Diaspora. Within the next five years, Dr. Williams expects to extend the AADPP to 50 cities across the country and become a viable conduit for meeting the needs of African American battered women in communities nationwide.

For more information about the AADPP, contact Dr. Williams at 1-877-NIDVAAC (1-877-643-8222).

A Look at Domestic Violence in West Palm Beach

TO THE AVERAGE OBSERVER, tourist, and outsider, Palm Beach may seem to be a tropical paradise. The hub of this urban paradise is West Palm Beach, with a population of just over 100,000 residents. South Florida is commonly referred to as a melting pot, and West Palm Beach fits that description. When isolated from the rest of Palm beach County, the city's racial composition is 44% white, 31.6% black; and 21.6% Hispanic. Yet, as a whole, the county of Palm Beach is far less diverse. Blacks comprise only 13.8% of the population and Hispanics a mere 12.4%, while whites account for 70.6% of its residents.

Despite the picturesque images of beaches, palm trees, and high rises, West Palm Beach has had more than its share of domestic violence incidents. In 2009, Palm Beach County recorded over 6,400 reported domestic violence crimes, according to the statistical data from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Domestic violence has increased across the country and there is no exception in Palm Beach. Yet, the effect in Palm Beach's African American community is somewhat alarming. Although black residents make up less than one-sixth of the total population, this group accounts for a larger percentage of domestic violence related crimes. Financial issues are a particular concern among African Americans. Unemployment and the economy are recognized as significant contributing factors in the increase of domestic violence incidents and ensuing police calls, creating a

ripple effect in reporting abuse, as well as an increase in crimes and robberies. The Florida Agency for Workforce reported that Palm Beach County's unemployment rate rose to 12.3% in November 2010 (2.5%

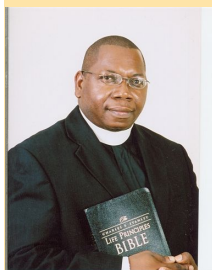


higher than the national average for the same period); and with an alarming foreclosure

rate, there is a rise in domestic violence and other crimes. In some case, divorced couples are still cohabiting due to the economy or the inability to sell their home at a profitable margin.

Further, the rise in intimate partner violence has become deadly, with increases in domestic violence related homicides, homicide-suicides, and familicides. In 2009, there were 18 intimate partner homicides reported in Palm Beach County, according to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Again, intimate partner homicide rates for black women are disproportionately higher than those of other races, according to the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. The city would do well to embrace the report's conclusion that progress in reducing intimate partner homicides will depend in part on contributions from public health professionals. Public health actions should emphasize primary prevention, such as efforts against underreporting, which is probably the foremost weakness in law enforcement database, as well as secondary prevention,, which focuses on early identification and intervention for violent couples identified through encounters with legal and health-care systems.

AADPP West Palm Beach



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS AN EPIDEMIC in American Society as a whole, and even even more so in the African American community. As an African American, born and raised in the "Deep South," I am all too familiar with the unwritten code of secrecy: "What happens in our house, stays in our house." Unfortunately, it is this mindset that has permeated the African American community and has served as a barrier to our ability to identify and confront the issues of domestic violence.

Although I am well aware that domestic violence crosses every racial, ethnic, and socio-economic line, research has shown that African Americans disproportionately experience domestic violence. According to the Violence Policy Center's 2010 annual report, Black women experience domestic violence at a rate this is nearly three times that of their white counterparts.

Palm Beach is no different. Raising the issue is crucial, and I am excited to be a part of the African American Domestic Peace Project. It is my hope that through Palm Beach's collaboration with the AADPP, we will (1) raise awareness; (2) take ownership of this issue in our community; (3) help develop and enhance a more culturally relevant strategy and response to domestic violence, both in prevention and intervention; (4) provide culturally relevant education and solutions; and (5) galvanize the efforts of social and community resources in building a collaborative with various stakeholders, including faith communities and law enforcement. I look forward to building collaboration within our community and helping to foster a relationship that will bring peace in our homes and in our communities.

Rev. J.R. Thicklin is Founder and Executive Director of Destiny by Choice, a grassroots organization that raises awareness about domestic violence in West Palm Beach's African American community.

Local Organization Provides Special Support to Families Impacted by Murder

DEVASTATED FAMILIES, shattered dreams, and other forms of pain that come with senseless acts of violence are what caused Angela Williams to found Mothers Against Murderers Association (MAMA) in West Palm Beach, Florida. The organization was established in 2003 with a mission to assist parents and guardians of murder victims. The impetus for starting MAMA was Ms. Williams' personal losses of family members to senseless acts of violence - all involving guns. Since 1999, she has buried eight young family members, all who were murdered in Palm Beach County.

The mothers and families who have sought MAMA's services have lost family members through various forms of violence, including domestic violence. MAMA provides support to those who are grieving through a range of services and programs, including its "healing circles," which are held on the first and third Thursday of each month.

Engaging Our Community to Help Battered Women



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AFFECTS all races; yet, African Americans face a unique set of circumstances related to the issue. Statistics show that African-American women experience intimate partner violence at rates 35% higher than their white counterparts; and in 2005, African Americans accounted for almost one-third of intimate partner homicides nationally (www.idvaac.org/press/factsheets.html).

Although there are conventional systems currently in place to address domestic violence, such as police departments, hospitals, and domestic violence organizations, frequently the African American community is not strongly or positively connected with these systems and often views them as last resorts. In addition to the high incidence of domestic violence among African Americans, there are several major challenges the community faces in reaching Black battered women and providing them with services that are relevant to them. One challenge has been raising awareness of the issue among social service providers, as well as getting the attention of policy and community leaders, and obtaining funds to maintain existing programs. Another hurdle is that some members of the community do not want to acknowledge that domestic violence is an issue for African Americans. Furthermore, many directors of shelters and other related programs do not always want to devote meager resources to cultural sensitivity.

The African American Domestic Peace Project (AADPP) seeks to engage and inform our community about domestic violence and the community's responsibility to take ownership of the problem - both locally and nationally. Locally, we will focus on mobilizing the African American community in affiliate cities to improve responses to domestic violence by acknowledging the problem, taking ownership, and using our collective voice to reduce violence; creating and supporting "safe spaces" for battered women; developing leadership around the issue; and encouraging partnerships with allies, programs, and systems. Nationally, the project will endeavor to develop learning communities that speak to how African Americans address domestic violence.

The project also helps to continue IDVAAC's efforts to prevent and raise community consciousness about the impact of domestic violence on African Americans; and to educate and connect our communities on this important issue.

Dr. Oliver J. Williams is Co-Executive Director of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community and Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota, St. Paul.

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In addition to supporting parents, MAMA's work also focuses on offering quality programs for youth that are designed to turn them away from committing violent acts and point them toward positive and productive choices. Among the assistance it offers are toy drives and back-to-school bashes for youth and families in the community. Also, the organization takes part in community forums addressing domestic violence, and is a strong and vocal advocate about senseless violence and injustices in our society.

MAMA has provided and continues to provide very special support to those mothers and family members impacted by the losses of loved ones due to murder. For more information, call the organization at 561.842.8230, or visit its Web site at www.mothersagainstmurderersassn.org.

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