

# The PEACE REPORT



The semi-annual newsletter of the African American Domestic Peace Project

Issue IV, Fall 2017

## ‘THEY HAVE A DREAM’

DV advocates hope to change the world – one person at a time

**M**INNEAPOLIS – If you can save a man, you can save the world.

Domestic violence advocate Dr. Oliver J. Williams knows this optimistic ditty is easier to vision than to execute. But he believes it’s a start.

And he has faith.

“I heard a speaker say once that if you can save a man, you can save a family. And if you can save a family, you can save a community and then a city and, ultimately, the world,” Williams said. “It’s all inter-connected. We just have to identify the pieces and figure out how to put them together to change the world.”

That’s where the African American Domestic Peace Project comes in, Williams said. The organization,

an offshoot of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, is branching out on its own and has big plans, big goals and big dreams, he said.

AADPP activists are marshaling domestic violence advocates from around the U.S. to strengthen partnerships, compare ideas



and share information about best practices for tackling the problem, Williams said.

The organization also is partnering with existing community stakeholders – i.e., churches, civic groups, health and service providers and government agencies – to unify local initiatives and fortify efforts to develop collaborative, culturally specific solutions to domestic violence.

“What I’ve said over the last 25 years or so is that we need more resource centers within each city,” he said. “That’s why AADPP is focused on creating more community-based programs in each city –

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AADPP will connect with existing stakeholders to forge partnerships, fortify local initiatives and develop best practices that can be exported to other cities.

# ENDING OUR



# SILENCE

## HUNDREDS SET TO ATTEND CONFERENCE TO OVERCOME DV

**G**REENVILLE, Miss. – For the second summer in a row, hundreds of domestic abuse activists and community leaders will convene for a two-day conference in the Mississippi Delta to develop strategies on overcoming intimate partner violence and sexual assault in communities of color.

The “Secular and Faith-Based Communities” conference will focus largely on developing more effective ways to prevent, treat and eliminate domestic abuse, said Dr. Patricia Davenport, executive director of Our House Inc., a domestic violence awareness agency and one of the event sponsors.

“Our objective is to educate faith-based leaders about the need for partnerships with secular advocacy programs,” Davenport said. “One thing we share is our desire to help [abuse victims]. Faith-based organizations are here to try to get [victims] closer to the Lord... But in order to save their souls, they have to save their lives first.”

The conference, set for Aug. 14-15, will start by orienting faith-based leaders and secular community activists about abuse and violence prevention, Davenport said. With constructive dialogue, collaboration and education, leaders will be better equipped to assist victims, survivors and others at-risk of becoming abuse victims, she said.

For information about the “Secular and Faith-Based Communities” conference, contact Our House Inc. at (662) 334-6873 or visit [www.ourhousevoices.com](http://www.ourhousevoices.com)

Davenport said this goal can best be achieved by mobilizing all stakeholders vested in the battle against domestic abuse, including: social workers, counselors, law enforcement officials, survivors, advocates, students, community and faith-based leaders, public officials and teachers, among others.

Without joining forces and collaborating, the generational cycles of violence in Mississippi’s communities and beyond will never be broken, she said – especially in rural areas, where such efforts are rare.

“This is a major conference that is being hosted in the rural community, and generally you don’t have that,” Davenport said. “Larger urban cities are having conferences like this all the time, but lack of funding means [few] are seen in rural areas.”

Funded in part by the Office of Violence Against Women, the conference will include community workshops, panel discussions and speeches from experts on how to best understand, prevent, treat and

reduce domestic violence and sexual assault, she said.

Key conference topics include:

- How domestic violence shelters and community agencies can work together with African-American, faith-based organizations.

- How faith leaders and supporters can promote individual, family and community healing.

- How religious leaders can help overcome a conspiracy of silence in some churches and faith-based institutions.

- How advocates can encourage men – including men who batter – to get engaged in the battle to end interpersonal violence.

- How advocates can strategize to overcome sexual exploitation of black youth and create safe spaces for healing.

The conference, co-sponsored by the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC), is part of an effort to break the “one-size-fits-all” approach to domestic violence services, Davenport said – an approach that frequently overlooks the culturally specific needs and experiences of African Americans.

Besides Our House and IDVAAC, other conference sponsors include New Life Church, the African American Domestic Peace Project, and the Mississippi Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

# BOSTON



## EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT SEEN AS KEY TO REDUCING ABUSE

“If you see something, say something.”

While this public safety credo focuses largely on terrorism, Rev. Traci Jackson Antoine says it could just as easily apply to domestic abuse.

Violence in the home often is a family's dirty little secret, she said, and many family members take a “what happens at home stays at home” approach. Unfortunately, that doctrine fosters a cycle of silence and shame when it comes to domestic abuse, she said, ultimately keeping the scourge in the closet and fueling more family abuse and generational violence.

It is this tradition of silence – rooted somewhat in African American's longstanding mistrust of law enforcement and an unjust judicial system – that must be overcome if the cycle of domestic abuse is going to be reduced in Boston and throughout the U.S., advocates say.

And that's where Jackson Antoine and the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts come in. In partnership with The Center for Hope and Healing, Casa Myrna and the Boston Police Department, the Urban League developed a domestic and sexual violence training and education program in 2014.

The initiative was created to improve

**For more information about domestic violence programs run by the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts, call (617) 442-4519 or visit <https://ulem.org>**



*Rev. Traci Jackson Antoine makes a point during a meeting on domestic abuse.*

outcomes for victims of domestic and sexual violence for underserved African American communities in Boston, said Jackson Antoine, director of sexual and domestic violence for the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts.

The program trains clergy and public service officials about strategies on how to prevent domestic abuse and intervene when it comes to sexual or intimate partner violence. One of the key training modules: cultural awareness.

“Our first responders have a cultural understanding and sensitivity to the black communities,” said Jackson Antoine. “Victims need people that offer services that mirrors their culture, language and faith.”

In serving victims, survivors and perpetrators, the program also operates on several other principles, notably:

- Victims who are educated about abuse and violence prevention will

recognize red flags and warning signs earlier and, therefore, will seek help sooner.

- Poverty and a lack of income are major contributors towards violence. Getting a job boosts self-esteem, independence and financial status.

- Survivors and victims who develop confidence and self-sufficiency will become empowered to build a pathway toward healing and personal fulfillment.

- Victims who become more knowledgeable and aware about domestic violence will seek a more coherent and coordinated community response to violence in general

Jackson Antoine said such positive outcomes could be extended to more victims and survivors if advocates had a healthier commitment from institutions, foundations and government agencies. From that, she said, would come stronger and healthier families and communities throughout America.

# FIRST CHOICE SOCIAL SERVICES HELPS BUILD HEALTHIER FAMILIES

When 25-year-old Ben Wilson was released from federal prison, he returned to the dating world feeling much like a fish out of water. Ultimately finding his footing, though, he soon found himself in a relationship with an older woman with a child, placing him in a disciplinary, father-figure role.

Inexperienced in his newfound duty, Wilson started to abuse his partner physically and emotionally as a way to control her and establish his position as an authority figure.

Those abuses were reported to his parole officer, ultimately landing Wilson in a batterer's intervention program run by First Choice Social Services Agency. While he was initially slow to engage, Wilson tentatively began to connect, participating more in meetings, providing constructive feedback and taking on a leadership role.

"He would hear other men deny or minimize the [domestic] violence they inflicted and would speak out to try and hold them accountable," said the agency's founder and executive director, Bridget Vinson-O'Neal.

After completing the 24-week program, Wilson was so inspired and transformed that he decided he wanted to help other men who engage in abusive behavior.

Some two years later, he is doing just that.

Today, Wilson speaks out against domestic violence at events throughout the city and facilitates the same batterer's intervention program that reformed his own life.

It's the kind of success story that Vinson-O'Neal loves to trumpet.

But Wilson's transformation is only one of countless others First Choice Social Services has seen. Through its community efforts and programs, the agency is bringing domestic violence out of the shadows and building stronger,



*Healthy children and strong families are the key focus of First Choice Social Services.*

Courtesy photo

healthier families, Vinson-O'Neal said.

"While there are other agencies around, ours offers more of a hands-on approach," Vinson-O'Neal said. "Our partner-advocate programs provide group settings for partners to come in and speak with other women who are still with their abuser and choose to stay [with their abuser]."

In other words, men like Wilson are learning to nurture and support rather than neglect and abuse. And women are getting the tools, support and knowledge they need to understand what their partners are learning in the intervention program – thereby helping them to heal and to participate in their partner's (abuser's) accountability process.

Such programs speak to a key principle in First Choice Social Services' philosophy: As traumatic and disruptive as domestic violence can be, victims and perpetrators who put in work can change their lives for the better – with a little help from committed advocates like those at First Choice.

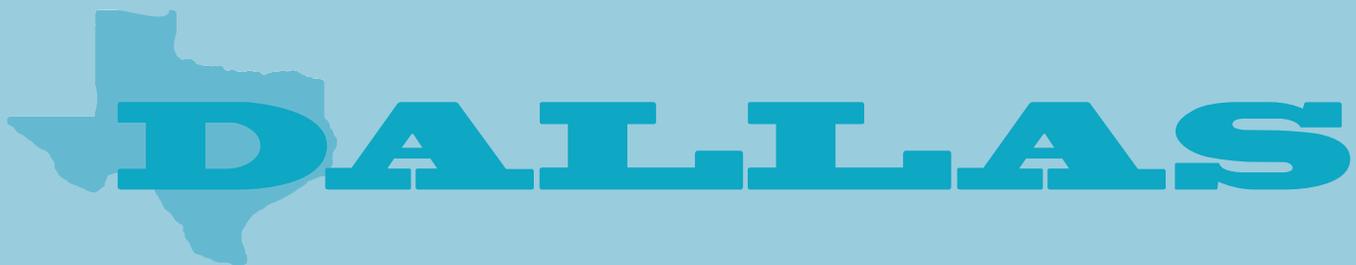
In fact, Vinson-O'Neal said it's not uncommon for agency workers to drive long distances to reach clients and communities, 70 percent of whom are African American.

"We frequently travel 50 miles outside of Dallas to provide services in rural communities," Vinson-O'Neal said, because "domestic violence affects everyone."

Additional resources would allow the agency to sustain such services in rural areas, expand its reach into other areas where programs are limited, and provide more robust services to an even larger number of clients, she said.

*Ben Wilson is a pseudonym used here to honor privacy rights.*

**For more information about First Choice Social Services, call 972-468-0631 or visit [firstchoicesocialservices.org](http://firstchoicesocialservices.org).**



# ‘SISTERS AGAINST ABUSE’ PROVIDES HOPE, HELP, HEALING



*Sisters Against Abuse Society provides more than 3,000 hours of counseling and support group services each year to survivors of domestic violence.*

For a while, it probably seemed that the “better life” Natalie Moise’s fiancé promised her in the U.S. would never come.

Moise, an aerobics instructor and hotel worker in Haiti, was happy to escape the island’s devastation after the 2010 earthquake and jet to the U.S. on a fiancé Visa and a dream of a better life.

Despite all its hope and promise, however, her new life in America was no bed of roses. The man who’d promised Moise a better life sexually assaulted and beat her. The beatings continued even after she became pregnant with his child and married him. When the beatings were extended to the couple’s two-year-old, however, Moise took action.

She contacted Sisters Against Abuse Society (SAAS), a nonprofit agency that offers hope, help and healing to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. The group helped Moise get an attorney, gain legal status in the U.S., and offered

her love and support as she divorced her abusive husband.

Today Moise, who speaks three languages, works for the federal government, lives in a safe home with her child and is in a new, healthy relationship. She continues to attend the agency’s monthly support and counseling groups, offering the same kind of love, support and insight that helped her escape her own abusive relationship some years before.

Moise’s story, while inspiring, is not unique. Sisters Against Abuse Society provides services to more than 250 women each year through 3,000-plus hours of support groups and counseling for victims and survivors of domestic violence.

“We [also] do conference calls for women who can’t join or attend the support groups,” said LaDonna Combs, the nonprofit’s founder and president.

This inclusiveness is a defining feature of Sisters Against Abuse Society. Although its services are

Christian-based, the group welcomes people from all faiths and understandings. In other words, they make sure they “meet people at their needs,” Combs said – in particular, the needs of women of color.

“In Detroit, we have no culturally specific services for black and brown women that have barriers that are historically specific,” Combs said. “They often have to travel far, and some don’t trust to leave their communities because of barriers.”

The agency also provides a prevention program for young boys, teaching them about acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in intimate relationships. These services, Combs said, could prevent some of the initial incidents of violence.

“If you get [boys] at a point where they feel love with the women in their lives, they’ll understand that the women they’re hitting is somebody’s mother, somebody’s sister, somebody’s best friend and cousin,” Combs said. “It teaches them conflict resolution at an early age.”

Combs obviously is proud of the work her group does, and of the positive results advocates frequently get, but she knows there’s so much more to be done – work that requires increased resources and personnel to maintain and expand support programs.

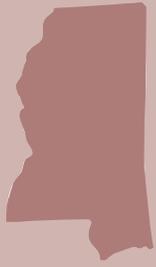
Such sustained education and intervention is the best way to have a sustained, long-term impact on domestic violence in the U.S., she said.

*Natalie Moise is a pseudonym used here to honor privacy rights.*

**For more information about Sisters Against Abuse Society, call (248) 943-7632 or visit [sistersagainstabuse.com](http://sistersagainstabuse.com).**



# Detroit



# Greenville/ Cleveland, MS

## PROGRAM URGES MEN TO JOIN 'FRONTLINES' AGAINST DV

If the battle against domestic abuse is ever to be won, it's going to need more male soldiers on the frontline.

While this view may be rife with controversy – as it could portray women as powerless victims reliant on male saviors – some advocates say men are needed to overcome domestic violence because no one understands male behavior like another man.

It's a reality that Dr. Patricia Davenport has come to embrace. And she is working to help export the concept throughout Greenville and its surrounding areas.

Davenport, executive director of Our House Inc., is committed to bringing more men into community conversations about sexual assault and domestic violence. Why? Because domestic violence has multiple victims, she said.

"Domestic violence is not just a crime against women," she said. "It's a crime against our communities and society."

The agency's partnership with a team of faith-based leaders – many of whom are survivors of domestic violence – urges men to speak out against abuse and assault, she said. By inviting men to share their personal stories, other participants are encouraged to do the same, leading to a free and open dialogue that invites analysis and positive change.

Under another Our House program – Men Against Spousal Harm (MASH) – perpetrators attend a 26- or 52-week behavior modification program designed to help men learn how to deal with power issues, accept responsibility for toxic and unlawful behavior, and



*Our House's partnership with faith-based leaders urges men to stand up against domestic abuse.*

Courtesy photo

develop and maintain healthy relationships.

Davenport said domestic violence and sexual assault frequently are learned behaviors – and what can be learned can be unlearned. The agency's ultimate goal, she said, is to break generational cycles of violence.

Our House seeks to break that cycle by teaching young people that healthy relationships are not violent or abusive. The agency has had so much success with its youth programs – boosting self-esteem and teaching healthy conflict resolution – that several former participants have returned to become mentors at Our House, Davenport said.

Those successes can be attributed largely to the agency's presence in school systems and around school grounds, said Ozell Pace Jr., the agency's culturally specific healthy relationship advocate.

Although the organization's influence and successes are vast – spanning across 11 counties – financial resour-

ces are always limited because, as Pace said, "everyone is picking from the same pot."

Increased resources would be used to expand the nonprofit's presence in schools, hire additional staff, and train more advocates to fulfill the agency's mission of eliminating domestic and sexual violence through intervention, prevention, prosecution, victim protection and sustainable restoration.

The agency's ultimate goal, advocates say: A world free of interpersonal violence.

"We are not afraid to speak out against violence against women, children and men. We empower our survivors by letting know they are not alone," Davenport says in a message on the agency's website. "It takes prevention and intervention services to end the cycle of violence. We believe that our voices will bring a healing to the hurting."

"It is time for peace."

For more information about  
Our House Inc., call  
(662) 334-6873 or visit  
[www.ourhousevoices.com](http://www.ourhousevoices.com)

# MEMPHIS



## HEALING WORD COUNSELORS SEEK TO REPAIR, REBUILD LIVES

If anyone knows the intrinsic power of the Healing Word Counseling Center, it's Sheila Pointer.

Some 10 years ago, Pointer attended an annual grief and remembrance service at the center and issued a horrifying confession: her husband had murdered her daughter and then committed suicide, leaving Pointer devastated and traumatized.

Immediately comforted by counselors and attendees, Pointer started attending the center's support programs and, over the years, slowly began to rebuild her life.

In fact, the program was so successful in helping her heal that Pointer decided to pay it forward. Today she leads a Healing Word support group that helps other parents that also lost their children – and she has been doing so for nearly a decade.

Pointer is one of hundreds of women who receive mental and emotional health screenings from the agency each year to make their lives healthy and whole, agency advocates say.

Each year, the Healing Word Counseling Center provides emotional health screenings to more than 700 survivors, two-thirds of whom are referred to physicians or other agencies, counseling or support groups. The agency's mission is to help people tackle and overcome their emotional challenges so they can lead healthier, more fulfilled

**For more information about the Healing Word Counseling Center, call 901-370-4673 or visit [www.memphishealingcenter.com](http://www.memphishealingcenter.com).**



*Healing Word Counseling Center provides emotional and mental health services to help make survivors' lives happy, healthy and whole.*

lives.

And it all starts with a telephone call.

"When people call the center, our navigators send them to a church closest to them," Pastor Dianne Young said. After a review, a peer advocate liaison (PAL) decides if the person will be placed in a mental or behavioral health center, support group or other facility, she said.

Beyond placing people in the proper support systems, these services help erase the stigma frequently associated with seeking mental health care, Young said. Removing the stigma helps encourage more people to seek treatment, she said, helping to resolve some of the emotional and mental health issues that can foster intimate partner abuse.

And this, Young believes, is also a job for places of worship.

"We need the church to be part of

the solution," she said. "They need to deal with people with mental, behavioral and emotional problems, because these things lead to higher problems in society."

That's why the Healing Word Counseling Center makes the church the hub of delivery services; it is symbolically a place where people can find comfort, security, safety and understanding.

Young said she's witnessed firsthand the positive difference Healing Word has made in the community through its education programs, partnerships and support services. With more support and resources, Young believes the transformative work that Healing Word Counseling Center does could spread far beyond Memphis and western Tennessee.

*Sheila Pointer is a pseudonym used here to honor privacy rights.*

# ASHA PROJECT HELPS REPAIR, HEAL LIVES OF ABUSE VICTIMS

**D**eirdre McCann probably thought she was out of danger when she ended a violent, five-year relationship with her controlling, jealous boyfriend.

Unfortunately, the mother of four was tragically wrong.

One night after McCann ended her relationship, her ex-boyfriend climbed into her second-floor bedroom window, pulled out a pistol and fired, hitting McCann eight times. She survived only by lying on the floor, holding her breath and playing dead.

Several months and countless surgeries later, McCann was released from the hospital and assigned to a domestic violence shelter. It is there that the Asha Project – an African American, culturally specific domestic violence program – stepped in to help.

Asha's workers provided crucial emotional and logistic support, helping McCann navigate her way back to safety and security. And when her ex-boyfriend was finally caught, Asha

advocates continued supporting McCann, accompanying and comforting her at several court hearings during his trial and afterwards.

McCann's story, while tragic, is not unique to Asha advocates.

Since its founding in 1989, the Asha Project has worked tirelessly to transform the lives of people who've found themselves in dangerous and abusive relationships like McCann. Every year, the nonprofit group services between 150 and 200 people, in addition to the many inmates they also help and serve.

To advance that mission, Asha created the Sistah's Gourmet Coffee Shop & Deli in 2008 to help transform victim's lives. The deli sought to restore lives and communities by providing customer service training to help survivors find jobs, become self-reliant and transition into new lives with confidence.

The deli was closed in 2011 due to lack of funding, but the popularity and success of the program has recently

sparked a Sistah's Cafe redevelopment plan, said Asha's founder and CEO, Antonia Drew Vann. She said such venues provide a sanctuary for abuse victims who frequently are wary of programs outside their ethnic comfort zone.

"There are populations of victims, particularly those in African American communities, who need help and will not seek it outside of their community," Vann said. "They're not going to go to a program where people there don't look like them or feel like them."

Which makes programs like Asha's that much more critical, she said. Without such programs, many victims will go untreated or under-treated, Vann said, exacerbating the problem of domestic violence in the community and leaving victims broken and dispirited.

Asha's partnerships with other entities – such as that with the Milwaukee Police Department – help strengthen its programs, but insufficient funds often limit the scope of those services. That's why more resources are key to reducing domestic abuse in Milwaukee and improving and increasing services to victims, she said.

Additional funds "would support culturally specific infrastructures... within communities to increase their ability to deal with the issue," Vann said. "A fresh approach to current strategies used, independent of the criminal justice system," also would make a huge difference, she added.

*Deirdre McCann is a pseudonym used here to honor privacy rights.*



*Since 1989, the Asha Project has worked to transform the lives of people who've found themselves in dangerous and abusive relationships.*

**For more information about the Asha Project, call 414-252-0075 or visit [www.ashafamilyservices.org](http://www.ashafamilyservices.org)**

# MILWAUKEE





# Gainesville

## ‘EMPOWERED TO LIVE’ HELPS CLIENTS LIVE THEIR BEST LIFE

One afternoon some years ago, an elderly woman walked through the doors of Empowered to Live’s domestic violence program and told a riveting story.

When she finished, several things were clear: she had been beaten and abused for years by a violent husband; the beatings were so severe that she was forced to use a cane just to get around; years without counseling or other treatment had forced her to suffer in pain and virtual silence.

The woman, whose husband had since died, came to Empowered to Live seeking awareness and solace, hoping to learn more about the resources available to victims of intimate partner abuse – resources that largely were unavailable when she was younger.

She found many of her answers – and a place she could refer generations of women in her family – at the Empowered to Live the Life You Choose Rebuilding Program.

Since the program’s inception in 2006, advocate R. Tracey Hickmon has asked potential clients two primary questions: “Are you living the life you choose? And if not, is domestic violence the reason why?”

For those who answer “no” to the first question and “yes” to the second, the agency’s rebuilding program offers domestic abuse survivors support and resources to help them repair and restore their lives.

While the program focuses on serving the marginalized and largely under-



*Empowered to Live’s rebuilding program offers domestic abuse survivors the support and resources they need to repair, heal and transform their lives.*

served African American community in Gainesville, Florida, it helps anyone suffering from domestic abuse.

The need, however, is especially critical in black communities, Hickmon said. While African Americans make up about 24 percent of the city’s population, they account for 63 percent of all the domestic violence reports made to the Gainesville Police Department, she said.

That’s why Empowered To Live works each day to transform lives and reduce domestic violence – a mission Hickmon said can’t easily be realized without the faith community. So the agency created Faith Communities Coming Together to STOP Intimate Partner Violence, giving survivors a safe place to attend worship and seek spiritual guidance for strength and healing.

Hickmon said the engagement of men also is key to reducing domestic abuse – so the agency created Men on Board Against Domestic Violence, which coaches men to stand up to domestic violence and teaches them how

to help other men take responsibility for their behavior.

In the program, men are urged to speak openly about their relationships, while learning to engage, educate and mentor other men to reduce violence against women. The program’s guiding principle: violence against women and girls will end when men decide to end it.

Empowered To Live also exists to help participants heal. Each year, the agency supports more than 50 victims and survivors in their journey to healing. Hickmon would like to expand the program to help more people, but that takes more resources, she said. With more financial resources, the agency could “hire an assistant in order to better serve clients, provide incentives for participants recruited for needed focus groups, and [improve] marketing/brand development.”

Expanding the program to help more survivors heal also would help create and sustain healthy families and productive communities in Gainesville, she said.

**For more information about the Empowered to Live the Life You Choose Rebuilding Program, call 352-393-7685 or visit [www.impowered2live.com](http://www.impowered2live.com)**

# DESTINY BY CHOICE HELPS EMPOWER LIVES, BUILD FUTURES

**L**atheira Sigler's experience at Destiny By Choice was so powerful that it ultimately transformed her from domestic violence victim/survivor to domestic abuse author/advocate.

In her book, "Secrets of a Minister's Wife," Sigler shares intimate details about her life as a domestic abuse survivor, referencing the cycles of violence, detailing the warning signs of abuse and describing what a healthy relationship should look like.

Since receiving support services from Destiny By Choice, she's dedicated much of her time to the organization, becoming one of its leading volunteers. Revived and renewed, Sigler's transformation brought with it new passions and inspirations – and a restored passion for service.

It is stories like Sigler's that fuel the agency's drive to expand its programs and serve more people, despite scant resources.

Since opening its doors in 2000, Destiny By Choice has deployed its meager, less than \$150,000-a-year budget to provide domestic violence services, educate clergy on how to help abuse victims, and inspire victims to build a life filled with hope and healing.

The agency's president & CEO, Dr. J.R. Thicklin, has dedicated nearly a quarter century to reducing domestic violence while empowering and helping transform the lives of people affected by it.

**For more information about  
Destiny By Choice, call  
(561) 439-3145 or visit  
[destinybychoice.org](http://destinybychoice.org).**



*Destiny By Choice provides domestic abuse services, educates clergy on how to help victims, and inspires survivors to build a life filled with hope and healing.*

*Courtesy photo*

"We've helped people that have been in domestic violence situations who have gone on to start their own domestic violence outreach," said Thicklin, also pastor emeritus at Kingdom Harvest Ministries. "We've had stories of people who have come to us broken, confused, looking for safety, and we've assisted those individuals."

Such support and assistance extends far beyond just the client, Thicklin said – it has the ability to speak to generations.

Domestic abuse is a "social ill" that often is part of a generational cycle of violence, fatherlessness and hopelessness, Thicklin said. This ill disproportionately affects African American women in West Palm, where black women – although a small percentage of the population – account for the highest number of domestic violence cases.

To help address that need and broaden its influence, Destiny By Choice Inc. partners with other service agencies in the area, Thicklin said – but the need is too great and the resources too few. With additional

funding, Destiny By Choice, Inc. could become the full-service center of Thicklin's dreams. The center would provide more on-site trainings and services, boost its number of staff and clients, and provide tool kits for families with information on relationships, self-esteem, and other life issues to help people navigate their lives as victims and survivors.

The need for organizations like Destiny By Choice is critical to the well being of West Palm's black families and communities, Thicklin said.

"It's important to be culturally specific in our understanding of domestic violence and how we approach it and help victims," Thicklin said. "How we respond is different. We recognize that [African American] women are less likely to call the police because of the historical relationship there."

Thicklin said Destiny By Choice's philosophy can be summarized in the words of William Jennings Bryan, who said: "Destiny is not a matter of chance. It is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved."

## West Palm Beach

# DUAL PROGRAMS SEEK TO SERVE PERPETRATORS AND VICTIMS

An abusive, alcoholic father and a young life filled with pain and neglect left Albert Hayes bitter and violent, a man more committed to isolation than social engagement.

His burgeoning rage ultimately would spill over into his relationships with women, making him hostile and abusive – twin cancers that eventually landed him in prison on charges of domestic violence.

Over the years, his anger and desolation worsened and his life became more embittered. Until one day, at age 36, he “got tired of being sick and tired” and walked into the Casteel, Williams & Associates for help – a decision that transformed his life.

Casteel, Williams & Associates – a counseling and treatment agency that provides mental health, drug dependency and domestic violence services – helped Hayes understand his rage and supported him as he built a path to restoration.

“A big piece of Hayes’ problem was post-traumatic stress disorder,” said Dr. John Casteel, the agency’s founder and executive director. “He realized it came from his father, and that being

able to trust other people was a big issue for him.”

The agency looks at how anxiety, depression, PTSD and other mental health conditions exacerbate signs of childhood abuse and other social maladies. Agency programs help workers diagnose disorders that often contribute to domestic violence – a critical step in tailoring approaches to overcome those challenges.

After 18 months of diligent, painstaking effort to overcome his PTSD, Hayes was able to forgive and reunite with his father, whom he hadn’t spoken to for more than 20 years.

Such programs for perpetrators of violence are key to reducing domestic violence, Casteel said. The control that perpetrators exert is frequently rooted in a need to protect themselves, he said, and the violence they inflict often is an outcome of a mental health disorder that needs to be treated.

“People don’t know how to deal with the emotional and psychological effects (of trauma). They don’t have the skills,” Casteel said. “Services for perpetrators are needed. If you don’t help them, you’ll continue to have victims.”

Such victims of domestic violence are treated in an affiliated nonprofit called Helping Overcome Personal Emptiness (HOPE), run by Casteel’s wife, Adrienne Casteel.

HOPE specializes in providing safety, solace and security to African American women who are victims of intimate partner violence. Adrienne Casteel said HOPE’s mission is to ensure that black women are protected and supported without discrimination – a focus that’s especially vital in the agency’s coverage area in Pierce County.

She said Pierce County not only has a high crime rate, but also has the largest population of domestic violence in Washington state – a fact that’s largely fueled by poverty.

“Often, victims [of domestic violence] rely on partners for financial support, and they’re often single, young mothers,” Adrienne Casteel said, pointing to the intersection between poverty and domestic violence. Victims often are young mothers who are uneducated and have a history of childhood trauma from their parents, she added.

Places like Pierce County, where these cycles of violence continue, have limited services and resources to address the needs of poor and minority women, she said. So when the system isn’t there to help the most vulnerable and afraid, HOPE steps in to help the victims.

*Albert Hayes is a pseudonym used here to honor privacy rights.*



Dr. Carolyn M. West speaks during a women’s empowerment conference as Dr. John Casteel looks on.

For more information about Casteel, Williams & Associates, call 253-536-2881 or visit <http://casteelwilliams.com/>. For information on HOPE, visit <http://hope4wa.wixsite.com/ad-vocacy/adrienne-casteel> or call (253) 202-4025

# TACOMIA

# 'THEY HAVE A DREAM'

*Continued from Page 1*

programs that will collaborate with other programs to develop best practices that can be exported elsewhere.”

Once community-based programs are evaluated and vetted, AADPP will create a national digest of effective domestic violence programs that can be used to tackle the problem in other cities around the country, Williams said.

“The members of the domestic peace project are practitioners in the field and experts in their communities,” he said. “They know what works and what doesn’t because they’re doing the work and getting results on the ground, at the granular level. Those are the kind of programs and efforts we need to explore more fully.”

That also is one thing that distinguishes the domestic peace project from IDVAAC, Williams said. Where IDVAAC was more of a scholarly, public policy institute, AADPP represents the practical aspect of how that research and policy is executed at the service level, he said.

“In IDVAAC, a large part of the work was academic – information-gathering, research, study and analysis. And that has its place,” he said.

“But today, many people are calling for more grassroots efforts and solution-based programs within each community because policy efforts don’t always trickle down to the street level.”

Williams said AADPP will help develop



*Members of the African American Domestic Peace Project.*

more comprehensive, locally based initiatives that key community stakeholders – churches, schools, recreation centers, civic centers, barber and beauty shops, etc. – can deploy to address the problem.

One such program seeks to reduce domestic violence by changing the behavior of the male perpetrator, Williams said. Maybe not every perpetrator can change, but some can and some have. And it’s how you approach that man, interact with that man and frame the support of that man that can impact his circumstances, attitude and behavior.

“People get epiphanies at different times in their lives. You never know who will change or what inspires that change. Maybe he’s a first-time father who wants to set a better example for his son. Maybe he wants to be alive to see his daughter graduate from college or get married. You just never know.”

“Some people say all it takes is the will. And will is important, I believe that,” he added. “But I think it’s the will and the skill. Our goal is to provide the skill.”

Williams said stronger partnerships between domestic violence advocates and faith-based institutions also could help develop those skills.

“Churches have ministries on substance abuse, homelessness, teenage pregnancy and various other issues that negatively impact

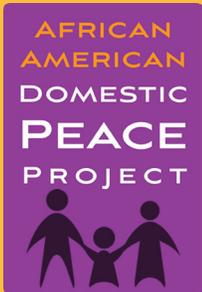
personal and community health – why not create ministries addressing domestic violence?” he asked.

“If AADPP can strengthen connections in the faith community, women can be nurtured and supported in spirit and in love and men can be educated and confronted – and they both can learn to deal with their issues from a spiritual and a faith-based perspective as well as from a functional perspective,” he said.

Williams said AADPP’s plan to develop programs such as these is crucial to reducing domestic violence, creating healthier families and plotting a steady course for a stronger America.

And building a better world. “People shouldn’t see this as just a fight against domestic abuse, as important as that is,” Williams said. “Healthier families and communities means fewer homicides and suicides, less crime, reduced incarceration rates, lower rates of drug abuse, lower rates of infant mortality and morbidity – even lower taxes.”

“If our collective mission as a society is to build a better world, it has to start with the fundamental concept that we’re all part of the human race and we’re all in this together,” he said. “As Dr. King once said, ‘If we don’t learn to live together as brothers and sisters, we’re doomed to perish as fools.’”



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*Editors: Dr. Oliver J. Williams and Gregory J. Huskisson.  
Writer: Dorany Pineda.  
Designer: Arman Olivares.  
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