



# Ending Our Silence

The Semi-annual Newsletter of the African American Domestic Peace Project - Dallas

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**Mind Spa**

*Domestic violence expert and batterers intervention counselor, teaches strategies to help victims of domestic violence gain peace of mind.*

Page 2

**Domestic Violence in Dallas**

*A snapshot of the major challenges to addressing the needs of battered women and their families in Greater Dallas.*

Page 3

**AADPP - Dallas**

*Project Lead Jennifer King seeks to increase services and resources for African Americans impacted by domestic violence.*

Page 3

**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.*

Page 4

## 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. Dr. Oliver Williams, Ph.D., IDVAAC's Co-Executive Director, the AADPP's mission is to develop a community education strategy to address domestic violence within African

*continued on page 2*



*Bridging the Gap, continued on page 2*

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 the following locations as the first communities for the AADPP: Montgomery, AL; Oakland and San Francisco, CA; Stamford, CT; West Palm Beach, FL; New Orleans, LA; Boston, MA; Detroit, MI; Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN; Cleveland-Greenville, MS; Memphis, TN; Dallas and Houston, TX; and Norfolk, VA.

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).*

## **The Mind Spa Seeks to Offer Peace of Mind in Difficult Times**

**WHAT IS PEACE** of mind and how do you get it? So often we are plagued by problems - some real and some imagined, and at times like these the mind is in turmoil. Victims of domestic violence often don't address their mental health needs because far too often they are simply trying to survive.

Most people possess innate coping abilities to deal with problems they face; but it is comforting to know that there is place located in Dallas that helps domestic violence victims cope during these tumultuous times.

The Mind Spa teaches strategies that focus on peace of mind at home, on the job and in the community. These services are provided at no cost. The Mind Spa has a dual focus of providing domestic violence education and prevention strategies to the African American Community at large in addition to intervention services for domestic violence offenders. To this end, The Mind Spa has worked diligently to establish an accredited program for court ordered domestic violence offenders.

Larry Washington, a domestic violence expert, is the owner and founder of The Mind Spa, which is located just outside Dallas, in Desoto, Texas. Washington is a former facilitator for the Batterers Intervention and

*continued on page 3*

Prevention Programs (BIPP). Domestic violence offenders are typically court ordered to attend BIPP as a condition of their community supervision. These programs serve as an intervention for domestic violence offenders in which they must attend a minimum of 18 weeks for a total of 36 hours of programming in a group setting.

In 2010, The Mind Spa hosted a series of Town Hall Meetings in African American communities to explore perspectives on domestic violence and to provide education regarding domestic violence to the community. The Town Hall Meetings focused on topics of concern that would lay the framework for the community to recognize what domestic violence is and how it manifests itself in the African American community. In addition, the event engaged participants in developing solutions and effective strategies to address the issue of domestic violence among Dallas' African American population.

Panelists for Town Hall Meetings included Dr. Oliver Williams, the Executive Director of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC), Mildred Muhammed, a domestic violence survivor and former spouse of the "DC Sniper," and Dr. Naim Akbar, author and recognized expert on the psychology of Africans.

For more information on the programs and services of The Mind Spa, contact the organization directly at 972.780.5644.

## AADPP Dallas



AS THE DIRECTOR of Family Violence Intervention Programs at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice-Community Justice Assistance Division (TDCJ-CJAD), I understand first hand the myriad challenges battered African American women face as they seek culturally relevant resources for themselves and their families. As TDCJ-CJAD has oversight responsibilities for the Batterers Intervention and Prevention Programs (BIPP) that domestic violence offenders are typically court ordered to attend, this experience affords me keen insight into the need for effective and culturally relevant services for batterers.

I had the pleasure of facilitating several of the Town Hall Meetings also echoing the sentiments of panelists who spoke about how domestic violence in the African American Community has been a social disease that communities just don't talk about. In many cases, I've seen victims of domestic violence not even consider themselves victims of abuse. Of course the most common type of abuse people recognize is the physical abuse victims are subjected to, not realizing that there are many other forms of abuse or tactics that domestic violence offenders use to establish and maintain control over their victims.

It is my hope that The Mind Spa will continue working with TDCJ-CJAD demonstrating that they are in compliance with state guidelines and with IDVAAC to further develop programming specific to African Americans. This will not only end the violence against the partners of those men who successfully complete the program, but hopefully those men will also become domestic violence prevention advocates for the African American community in a campaign to "End Our Silence".

*Jennifer King is Director of Family Violence Interventions at Texas Department of Corrections in Austin, Texas.*

## A Look at Domestic Violence in Greater Dallas

WITH A POPULATION OF nearly 1.2 million people. Dallas is the third largest city in Texas and the ninth largest city in the United States. The area has a multicultural population that is 50.8% White and 25.9% Black, with 17% identifying as another race and 2% identifying as multiracial. Although 22.7% of Texas residents live below the poverty level, Dallas' poverty rate is significantly higher at 30.5%. More than 80,000 of Dallas' Black residents are living in poverty.

Dallas County has a series of barriers to effectively addressing the needs of battered women. The lack of availability of emergency shelter for battered women is especially severe. According to the 2010 Dallas County Community Plan, the county has a total of 239 shelter beds, yet, it receives nearly 20,000 reports of domestic violence each year. In fact, a shelter

*continued on page 4*

# 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](http://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.*

A Look at Domestic Violence , continued from page 3

program in Dallas recently reported that nearly 700 women were turned away last year alone because there simply were not enough beds to house them.

The increasing diversity of the population also presents challenges in effectively serving battered women from multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This pt will require the various systems that connect with battered women - law enforcement, social services, health care providers, and others - to increase their knowledge of cultural and linguistic issues that impact intimate partner violence and, develop meaningful responses toward helping battered women and their families. to overcome them.

## Ending Our Silence

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