

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE
Domestic Violence Prevention Grants

2007 – 2008



Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services

May 1, 2009

“It is a group that is well worth my time.”

~Youth support group participant from WISE~

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Executive Summary

Legislative History

Act Number 65 of the 2007 Legislative Session, the FY08 Appropriations Act, allocated \$190,000 to the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services to fund one-time grants for organizations serving domestic violence victims in order to implement prevention programs with children exposed to domestic violence. These funds were specifically allocated for programs designed to prevent domestic violence and to target the needs of children in families affected by domestic violence. Through a comprehensive and competitive grants process, six projects were selected and funded through this resource.

The Six Funded Projects

Battered Women's Services and Shelter (BWSS)/Project Safe Choices – Washington County

- Support Groups for Pregnant and Parenting Teen Mothers at Brook Street School
- Support Groups for Middle School Boys
- Project Safe Choices Group

Chittenden County Collaborative Project (Women Helping Battered Women, Women's Rape Crisis Center, Project Safe Choices) – Chittenden County

- Middle School Outreach

Clarina Howard Nichols Center (CHNC)/Project Safe Choices – Lamoille County

- Project Safe Choices groups for boys

Project Against Violent Encounters (PAVE) – Bennington County

- *How's It Working For You?* Groups for troubled and/or abused teens ages 14-18

Voices Against Violence/Project Safe Choices – Franklin and Grand Isle Counties

- Support groups for Battered Mothers and their Children
- Project Safe Choices Co-facilitated Prevention Education Presentations
- Education and Prevention Support/Peer Leadership

Women's Information Service (WISE)/The Haven Homeless Shelter - Northeast Windsor County

- Support Group Programs for Youth and Children who have been exposed to Domestic Violence at The Upper Valley Haven homeless shelter

Findings and Best Practice Themes:

Collectively, the six projects funded through this one-time grant reached approximately six hundred and three (603) Vermont children and teens and twenty-one (21) adults/parents. Several best practice themes emerged from the work of these pioneering projects. These themes are best categorized into three major areas: *Approaches to providing direct services, support and prevention education to children exposed to domestic violence, Collaboration, and Technical Assistance.*

1. Approaches to providing direct services, support, and prevention education to children exposed to domestic violence:

- Programming must include a balance of information and support.
- Female/male co-facilitated support groups and prevention education presentations provide an effective model for children and teens.
- Programming has a greater impact when it is flexible; consistent and delivered over time; creative and interactive; and guided by input from the group members.
- On-site, domestic violence-specific, programming at partnering youth-service organizations is an effective model for delivering support services to children and youth.

2. Collaboration:

- Collaboration with community partners is critical to ensure comprehensive programming for children and youth.
- The most successful collaborations were ones where partners had compatible missions and ongoing conversations about their projects.

3. Technical Assistance and Training:

- Ongoing technical assistance is paramount to the success of projects.
- Project Staff were most successful and confident when they had a basic level of knowledge in domestic and sexual violence and child development.

Recommendations

Based on the high level of success and the lessons learned from these individual projects, the Center for Crime Victim Services and the Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence recommend the following to further the work of preventing domestic violence in Vermont.

1. The Vermont Legislature continues to support domestic and sexual violence programs designed to prevent domestic violence and target the needs of children in families affected by domestic violence.

2. The Vermont Legislature continues to support programs which:

- Provide a balanced approach that includes support for children and youth concerning their personal experiences, information about the dynamics of domestic and sexual violence, and accountability for their own behavior;
- Present a female/male co-facilitated model for delivering support groups and prevention education presentations;
- Are flexible and responsive, consistent, delivered over an extended period of time, guided by input from the group members, innovative and interactive;
- Further develop the promising practice of delivering on-site, domestic violence-specific, programming at partner youth-serving organizations.

3. The Vermont Legislature continues to support collaborative programming in order to:
- Ensure comprehensive programming for children and youth;
 - Broaden the networks of support for children and youth struggling with issues of domestic violence.

4. The Vermont Legislature continues to support the provision of technical assistance and training to projects of this kind in order to:

- Ensure the success and sustainability of these projects;
- Ensure a high level of staff knowledge and professional capacity;
- Decrease the rate of staff turnover.



Introduction

Vermonters understand that in order to end domestic violence, we must reach out to the children and youth in our state who have been affected by it. We must reach children and teens who live each day with fear and uncertainty to let them know that they are not alone and that they have places and people to turn to for support. We must reach future perpetrators of domestic violence with messages about how to respect their partners and how to choose to behave differently from the adults in their lives in ways that may be unsupported by the culture around them. We must reach out to victims with the message that they are never to blame for the abuse that they endure and with information about where to find help. It was with this understanding that the Vermont Legislature admirably set aside funds for FY 2008 for domestic violence prevention programming for children exposed to domestic violence.



Legislative History

Act Number 65 of the 2007 Legislative Session, the FY08 Appropriations Act, allocated \$190,000 to the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services to fund one-time grants for organizations serving domestic violence victims in order to implement prevention programs with children exposed to domestic violence.¹ These funds were specifically

¹ Sec. 78b. APPROPRIATION FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION

(a) There is appropriated the amount of \$190,000 from the general fund to the center for crime victims services (sic). The center shall use the funds to present grants to organizations that provide services to victims of domestic violence. These funds shall be used for programs that are designed to prevent domestic violence and are targeted at the needs of children in families affected by domestic violence. At the end of fiscal year 2008, any unexpended portion of this appropriation shall be carried forward and used for the same purpose.

allocated for programs designed to prevent domestic violence and to target the needs of children in families affected by domestic violence.



Grant Application and Award Process

Immediately following the completion of the 2007 Vermont legislative session, the Center for Crime Victim Services (CCVS) worked closely with the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (VNADSV) to create a competitive grants process by which existing domestic violence service programs could apply for these funds. In August of 2007, a *Request for Proposals* (see Appendix A) was distributed to member Programs of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, SafeSpace, and Deaf Vermonters Advocacy Services. Applications were received by the end of September and reviewed by a peer review panel including several professionals with expertise in primary and secondary prevention and the impact of domestic violence on children. Six applications were submitted, and all six applications were reviewed, scored and accepted by the committee. The review committee agreed that the provision of technical assistance in the area of program development was paramount to ensure the success of these new prevention projects. The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence was given responsibility to meet with and provide ongoing support for the six projects throughout the life of the grant.



Request for Proposal Requirements

The grants process created space for four to six projects to be accepted for amounts up to \$40,000 each and to be administrated by CCVS. The *Request for Proposals* required applicants to propose sustainable, creative, comprehensive, and collaborative prevention projects targeted toward children up to 18 years of age who had been exposed to domestic violence. Applicants were encouraged to collaborate with community partners to create new and innovative programs designed to support children affected by domestic violence. These programs could include: comprehensive community or school based support groups, art/theater/music projects, groups to enhance bonds between mothers and children, programs that encouraged healthy relationships and nonviolent conflict resolution, and group or individual work with children in domestic violence shelters, transitional housing programs, or homeless shelters.

In their proposals, applicants were asked to provide: organization, staff and contact information, a detailed project description, plan for outreach and identifying child participants, timeline, evaluation plan, budget, and budget narrative.

The six chosen projects were judged according to the following criteria:

- Demonstrated comprehensive work with children exposed to domestic violence;
- Demonstrated effort to collaborate with other professionals or experts;
- Demonstrated ability to reach children and youth within a short time frame;
- Demonstrated innovation and creativity;
- Level of support to families in transition and fostering connection between children, their non-offending parent and siblings;
- Demonstrated value and feasibility of replicating the program beyond this one-time funding source;
- Demonstrated creative strategy for evaluating program effectiveness.



Support and Technical Assistance

Beginning with a project-wide orientation meeting in January of 2008, staff at the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (VNADSV) provided ongoing technical assistance to the six selected prevention projects. This included developing a project timeline and final evaluation report template, scheduling and facilitating regular meetings of project staff to update and share resources, and providing ongoing individual support around issues of collaboration and program development.



Additional Requirements

Child Abuse Reporting Policies

Each project was asked to develop a child abuse reporting policy with their collaborating partners. These policies were developed in order to provide clarity around child abuse reporting in the context of the project work. They designated protocol outlining which agency and staff would be responsible for reporting any child abuse and also identified how information would be shared with victims.

Evaluation

Beginning in early 2008, projects received individual and collective technical assistance from the VNADSV to develop templates for final reporting as well as project evaluation. Each project designed evaluation tools by which they could collect information on the effectiveness of their programs. Despite the diversity of their projects, the group was able create two universal outcomes on which to evaluate their programs:

- As a result of participating in your project, how many participants reported knowing more about healthy relationships?
- As a result of participating in your project, how many participants reported that their actions and ideas about relationships have changed?



The Six Funded Projects

Battered Women’s Services and Shelter (BWSS) – Washington County
Chittenden County Collaborative Project – Chittenden County
Clarina Howard Nichols Center (CHNC) – Lamoille County
Project Against Violent Encounters (PAVE) – Bennington County
Voices Against Violence – Franklin and Grand Isle Counties
Women’s Information Service (WISE) - Northeast Windsor County

All six awarded projects were led by VNADSV member programs and staffed by Children’s Program and Prevention Education staff at those programs. The projects were clear in their focus to reach out to children and teens affected by domestic violence and develop programs, which emotionally supported these children while preventing domestic violence. Several projects provided support groups for children and teens; all included prevention education components in their work, and all developed programming which was innovative and different from anything they had created in the past. Four of the six projects chose to collaborate with Project Safe Choices (PSC). PSC is a statewide program housed at Spectrum Youth and Family Services that provides services to boys who are violent or at risk for becoming violent. Battered Women’s Services and Shelter (Washington), Clarina Howard Nichols Center (Lamoille), Chittenden County Collaborative Project (Chittenden), and Voices Against Violence (Franklin, Grand Isle) all worked with PSC to deliver groups and prevention education opportunities for local boys who exhibited violent behavior or were at risk for doing so.



Individual Project Descriptions and Evaluations

1. Battered Women's Services and Shelter (BWSS), Washington County

Project Focus:

- **Support Groups for Pregnant and Parenting Teen Mothers at Brook Street School (Head Start program), "Finding Our Voices"**
- **Support Groups for Middle School Boys**
- **Project Safe Choices Group**

Project Description:

Battered Women's Services and Shelter (BWSS) focused on three projects as part of their work under this grant: a support group with teen mothers at Brook Street School (a Head Start program) in Barre; a boys' middle school support group at Barre City Elementary and Middle School, and a Project Safe Choices (PSC) group which also met in Barre.

"Finding Our Voices" - Support Groups for Teen Mothers: In collaboration with the Brook Street School Head Start program, BWSS provided programming to pregnant and parenting teen mothers. Fifteen teen mothers, aged 16 to 23, participated in the "Finding Our Voices" groups which met over three semesters for 1 ½ hour sessions. One of the goals of the group was to support each of these young women to "find her voice" on the many life challenges that she was struggling to understand. During the sessions, the participants were able to explore a range of issues, such as early warning signs of dating and domestic violence, effects of media and advertising on women's self-esteem and body image, gender stereotyping, and the effects of domestic violence on children. Additionally, the group members learned important information about keeping their children safe from sexual abuse and discussed strategies for making healthy and beneficial decisions for both themselves and their children.

Support Group for Middle School Boys: BWSS collaborated with a school counselor at Barre City Elementary and Middle School to hold weekly support groups for a total of nine 7th and 8th grade boys. These boys were identified as needing a specialized group, which focused on their personal experiences living in sometimes violent homes, as well as on their own violence and unhealthy behaviors. The curriculum was designed to

explore power, anger, and violence and always included a component on developing healthy relationships with both peers and adults. Topics covered included exploring the *Youth Power and Control* and *Equity Wheels*, stereotypes about boys and girls, sexist images in media, bullying, and healthy communication strategies.

Project Safe Choices: The final program supported by this grant was a collaborative effort with Project Safe Choices (PSC) to facilitate a PSC group for local boys who were identified as being violent or at risk for becoming violent. A BWSS female staff member co-facilitated a PSC group with a male police officer from the Montpelier Police Department. Over the year, nine boys, aged 12-15, were referred to the program - many of whom attended alternative educational institutions because of their behavioral challenges.

Products Created: Funding from the grant allowed this project to create activities and curricula components that were used in various ways across all three areas of focus. Activities were designed that focused on power and control in relationships, gender stereotypes, media influences, and feelings.

Evaluation:

How many kids were reached? Fifteen teen mothers, aged 16-23, participated in the "Finding Our Voices" support group at the Brook Street School. Nine 7th and 8th grade boys participated in the Middle School Boys Support Group at Barre Elementary and Middle School. Over the course of the year, nine young men, aged 12-15, participated in the Project Safe Choices groups facilitated through this project.

Collaboration: Collaboration was essential to the success of each of these three project areas. The support and encouragement from the Brook Street School, Barre Schools and Project Safe Choices helped make these programs viable and impactful. PSC groups continue to run in Barre, as do the Brook Street Teen Mothers group and the Middle School Support Group. Other area schools have heard of this work and are requesting that similar groups be organized in their schools.

Outcomes:

"Finding Our Voices" Group: Each of the young women who participated in group had experienced violence against themselves or against other family members. Weekly meetings provided a safe opportunity for participants to talk about important subjects that were very much a part of their lives but about which they rarely had an opportunity to talk. By the end of their involvement, group members showed evidence of increased self-esteem, resolution and understanding about past violence in their

lives, and of independent healthy decision-making about relationships. One striking example of healthy decision-making was one young woman who, after a particularly detailed discussion of the many forms of abusive behavior, decided that the abuse she was experiencing in a current relationship was no longer tolerable and sought to end the relationship. Another positive impact was felt when two of the young women who had “graduated” from group brought an acquaintance to BWSS for advocacy services.

Support Groups for Middle School Boys: The Barre School Counselor provided excellent feedback reporting on positive behavior changes and attitude improvements among the nine boys who participated in the group. It was estimated that two-thirds of these boys discovered more healthy and respectful ways of handling their relationships with each other and with young girls. The boys themselves exhibited a number of very positive responses that were witnessed and documented. In one instance, after some of the boys disclosed in group that they were aware of a serious fight that was going to happen after school, three of them decided to go to the principal’s office to warn school officials. There were numerous instances where boys were able to freely identify specific fears and name allies to whom they could go for help. After the first semester, all of the boys expressed their desire to return and continue group for the next semester.

Project Safe Choices: PSC group participants were respectful of group co-facilitators during class, a behavior quite different from the disruptive behavior that got them mandated to PSC. Many may have had their first positive interaction with a police officer, as the group’s police officer co-facilitator was a calm, kind and firm role model for them. Group members were held accountable for coming to class weekly, arriving on time and completing homework assignments. The young men learned to communicate verbally in a group setting about issues that were personal and emotional in nature. One young man got to the group on time and with his homework completed despite an assault that was directed toward him the previous night. Another boy in the group took it upon himself to help newer boys understand some of the new ideas they were discussing.

Lessons Learned: In all three project areas, staff was able to model healthy female/male co-facilitation. This model demonstrated how men and women can work together as equals and positively deal with conflict. This is an extremely helpful approach when working with groups of young people on topics of domestic violence. For the Teen Mothers Group, it was clear that the young women grew from having the opportunity to provide input on programming and subject content. Participants also responded to the interactive nature of the group. The Project Safe Choices groups brought up some content challenges for co-facilitators. It was felt that there should be some additional

adaptation of the curriculum to specifically connect *holding the participants accountable for their choices* with the *support they need as victims of violence* through some complimentary mentoring system. Conversations about this dilemma continue across the state and are enlightening and productive.

All three of these groups continue to run in various forms in Barre. Because of their success, there are increased requests for these services by other local schools and organizations.

2. Chittenden County Collaborative Project/ Women Helping Battered Women, Women's Rape Crisis Center, and Project Safe Choices

Project Focus:

- **Middle School Outreach**

Project Description:

Women Helping Battered Women (WHBW), Women's Rape Crisis Center (WRCC), and Project Safe Choices (PSC) developed an innovative Middle School outreach program that used a pioneering collaborative model. WHBW offered expertise in domestic and dating violence and victim perspectives, WRCC brought expertise in sexual violence and victim perspectives, and PSC brought expertise about battering and services for youth exhibiting violent behaviors. Collectively, this group created comprehensive presentations that were designed to be both fun and informational while focusing on several topics relevant to preventing domestic violence.

Partners worked with five schools during this grant period. They were invited to provide programming to students in the Jean Garvin School, Edmunds Middle School, and Hunt Middle School as well as Winooski Middle and High School. Presentations ranged from one-time presentations to regularly scheduled ongoing presentations offered over an extended period of time. Approximately 360 middle school youth, aged 11-15, received collaborative presentations from project partners.

Products Created: partners for this project designed new curricular activities.

Through the use of role plays, experiential activities, brainstorming and discussion, these activities provided creative and interactive avenues for students to explore issues including: power and control in relationships, consent, flirting vs. harassment, gender stereotypes, types of communication, and bystander roles.

Evaluation:

How many kids were reached? Approximately 360 middle school youth, aged 11-15, received collaborative presentations from this partnership.

Collaboration: The benefits of this collaborative project proved to be many. Having three well-respected collaborating agencies allowed each to bring their specific expertise to the presentation content. It also created legitimacy with school teachers and administrators. Another benefit was the ability to utilize staff from multiple agencies, which allowed for co-facilitation from both men and women; an exceptionally effective method of presentation that each individual agency otherwise struggles to achieve. Compatible organizational missions and an ability to engage in open dialogue was an identified strength of this collaboration. Even given this strength, the partnership was at times challenged by the three agencies bringing somewhat differing philosophies to the table. It was also difficult to find time to plan and reflect on the project, given the busy schedules of each staff member.

Outcomes: Students at Winooski Middle and High Schools were chosen to complete evaluative surveys because they received the most consistent and in-depth information of all of the participating students. Of students asked, 60% agreed with the statement "Because of the presentations, I know more about healthy relationships," 60% of students agreed with the statement "Because of the presentations, my ideas about relationships have changed," and 50% of students agreed with the statement "Because of the presentations, my actions have changed." Anecdotally, comments received from school administrators about the success of the project were particularly enlightening. One guidance counselor gave feedback that the presentations were exceptionally successful and that her only regret was not giving the project more time. Another guidance counselor commented that staff did an exceptional job appropriately addressing each age group and that presentations were funny, uplifting, and educational. A staff member at Winooski Middle and High School said that ensuring that presentations were available from WRCC, WHBW, and Project Safe Choices was a priority for her; and that the content of her other activities relied largely on information brought from these agencies.

Lessons Learned: Several lessons were learned throughout the period of the project. Partners were surprised to encounter many students with defeatist attitudes about their ability to impact and help prevent violence. Project partners learned quickly that the best way to engage students who might have generally remained unengaged was by using humor, making presentations fun, and using role plays and interactive activities. An additional lesson learned by partners was that, children for whom the issues hit "too

close to home” had a difficult time participating in presentations. When this became evident, project staff remained with teachers/counselors after presentations to provide resources and support for the individual students and staff. A most significant piece of learning for partners supports prevention education research and revealed that repetition in message, engagement over a period of time, and consistency are all exceptionally important when trying to reach children and youth with prevention information. Project partners felt that greater strides were made in Winooski Middle and High School, where regular ongoing presentations were delivered and where there was one consistent staff member present at all events.

These three vital organizations continue to work together in Chittenden County. They continue to be challenged by having more school requests than staff time to fulfill them. They are consistently seeking resources to enable them to enter more schools and provide more ongoing comprehensive programs to students.

3. Clarina Howard Nichols Center, Lamoille County

Project Focus:

- **Project Safe Choices groups for boys**

Project Description:

A collaborative venture between Clarina Howard Nichols Center (CHNC) and Project Safe Choices (PSC), this project sought to establish several PSC groups for boys residing in Lamoille County who were exhibiting or were at risk for exhibiting violent behavior. The partners began with two areas of focus. First, they sought to establish groups in two alternative schools - the Laraway School and Buffalo Mountain School. Secondly, they sought to establish a community-based boys’ group in Morrisville.

The project’s most successful strategy has been the development of a Morrisville community-based PSC *Intensive Group* whose target population is boys, aged 11-18, who have exhibited violent and/or controlling behavior *and* who have been exposed to violence themselves. Due to staff turnover at both CHNC and PSC, the work in 2008 focused primarily on training and building community relationships. An important relationship, which was established through this project, was with Lamoille County Court Diversion, which will now offer both referrals of boys for the group as well as a trained male co-facilitator for the group. As of March of 2009 four boys, aged 12–15, have been referred to this group and have started to meet at CHNC’s newly opened

public community space. The Children's Program Coordinator at CHNC has been trained to co-facilitate this PSC group.

Establishing the school-based groups proved to be a harder strategy to complete for this project. A PSC group ran at Buffalo Mountain School in March and April 2008 and was co-facilitated by Buffalo Mountain School staff and an Advocate from AWARE (Hardwick's Domestic/Sexual Violence program). This group served eight boys and ran for four sessions. It was ultimately halted when it became clear that the philosophy of the school staff was not congruent with the educational model of PSC. The Buffalo Mountain staff was more comfortable with a therapeutic approach, which conflicted with the emphasis that PSC places on accountability for behavior.

The Laraway School group was never established, due primarily to staff turnover at CHNC. However, as that staff was rehired at Laraway, an unexpected positive outcome was the integration of the PSC curriculum at the Laraway School. Laraway has made use of curriculum components and currently integrates it into other groups in ways that they find helpful.

Evaluation:

How many kids were reached?

This project was able to reach a total of 12 boys, aged 12-15, through its delivery of Project Safe Choices groups. Eight boys participated in four sessions at Buffalo Mountain School and four boys are currently participating in a PSC Intensive group in Morrisville. Several boys have also participated in PSC curricula components at the Laraway School.

Collaboration: A high level of dedication from partners has proven to be a strength of this collaboration and has led partners to commit to productive and open dialogue. The established relationship with Lamoille County Court Diversion has been rewarding and has created a strong foundation for delivering the community-based PSC group for boys as well as for establishing future work together. Also, this collaboration has led to greater exposure of the PSC model in a community where it had previously not existed.

This project has experienced number of challenges as well. The most evident is the disconnected philosophical approach that resulted in ending the partnership at Buffalo Mountain School. The Project leaders took precautions to avoid this during initial training and through ongoing discussions; however, it was clearly the best choice to stop the groups once there was an impasse among agency staff.

CHNC and PSC recently committed time to working through some identified underlying philosophical disparities. Questions about the best way to approach young males who are both perpetrators of violence as well as likely victims led to fruitful discussion, understanding and an agreement to continue the work together.

Outcomes: Because the Buffalo Mountain School program ended abruptly at the behest of Project Safe Choices, no evaluative data was collected. Similarly, no data is currently available from Laraway. The current PSC group has just started and will generate demographics and evaluative data once complete. This group is starting with four boys ages 12-15. Anecdotally, facilitators from Laraway school report that use of the Project Safe Choices Curriculum has been helpful to their students as they address their tendencies to choose violence as a means of problem solving.

Lessons Learned: The most valuable lesson learned through this project was clearly the need to create strong healthy collaborations at the onset of working together. The failures to establish school-based PSC groups and the philosophical questions that arose late in the game about how to best approach boys who use violence both speak to the need to evaluate and come to common agreements on philosophies before starting the work. It is important to note that work with boys who have exhibited violent and battering behavior is new and still in the early years of development. It is not surprising that there is a continuum of philosophies on the best way to reach out to and support these boys to both change their behavior and heal from their own experiences.

The collaborations in this project continue to grow. Given the stretched assets of both organizations, it is the project's hope that they will continue to find the resources to continue the important work of reaching out to at risk boys in Lamoille County.

4. PAVE (Project Against Violent Encounters), Bennington, County

Project Focus:

- *How's It Working For You? Groups for troubled and/or abused teens aged14-18*

Project Description:

Project Against Violent Encounters (PAVE) in collaboration with United Counseling Service (UCS) of Bennington County designed a group called "*How's that Working for You?*" This group was created for youth between the ages of 14 and 18 who had experienced domestic violence. The group ran for three sessions beginning January 2008 and ending in March of 2009 with 19 kids completing the program. Group

members participated in hands-on activities and art projects; and learned new strategies for stress reduction, coping with frustrations, safe dating, breaking up safely, healthy relationships and communications. At the conclusion of each session, group members participated in a 'giving back' project where they were asked to share their knowledge with others. The first group visited Elementary School and Middle School classrooms with PAVE's Youth Educator and taught about healthy relationships and community resources. The second group wrote letters or drew pictures that expressed what they had learned about themselves and addressed these to someone important in their lives. The last group chose to publicly write letters and poems for inclusion in PAVE's newsletter. They hoped that by telling their stories, others would see how domestic violence affects young people and come forward themselves. This was a very difficult and inspiring step for many of them.

Products Created: PAVE created an entire curriculum of activities and exercises for this project. These included art projects, photography, feelings activities, quizzes, scrapbooks, and field trips.

Evaluation:

How many kids were reached? There were twenty-seven unduplicated participants who started the groups throughout the project. Nineteen graduated with the majority of the youth being between the ages of 15 and 16. Participants included pregnant, adjudicated and high-risk teens. The participants were all from Bennington County with referrals coming from these community collaborators: Sunrise Family Resource Center, United Counseling Service, Department of Children and Families, and Center for Restorative Justice.

Collaboration: This project worked closely with United Counseling Service. Other collaborators included the above listed referral agencies, the Bennington Police Department and Special Crimes Victims Unit (where kids went on a field trip), and Bennington College, Community College of VT, and Johnson State College who offered interns for each session. Working with so many collaborators expanded the material and enhanced the information that was shared with group members. It also allowed for the group members to feel comfortable broadening their sphere of trust to include more individuals and organizations.

Outcomes: All participants reported knowing more about healthy relationships after completing the group. All participants (100%) reported that their ideas about relationships changed but they could not guarantee that their actions would change. They reported, however, that they would be more conscious of their actions and more

aware of what and who could be a support to them. Given that 'trust' is an issue for many of the youth who participated in group, it was not surprising that in their *pre-evaluation survey* many youth indicated that they would only go to a friend or boyfriend if they knew someone in an abusive relationship. However, in the post evaluation, the youth stated they would turn to an adult. This was a big step for many of these teens and further indicates that their network of support and ability to trust others grew as a result of their experience.

The trip to the Bennington Police Department was a great experience. The teens learned about consent laws and asked questions regarding the legalities around sexual relationships. As a result of this experience, youth that had only known police in a negative context were able to view officers as part of their support system. They reported feeling validated by the officer who had taken the time to listen to their questions and answer them without it feeling threatening. This was noted in the post evaluation as one of the most positive experiences of group members.

Anecdotally, youth shared letters and poems throughout their experiences. Many chose to have theirs included in PAVE's newsletter. One poem in particular spoke of a young woman's abusive relationship and rape. She decided to include her name because she stated that *it showed him that what he did hurt her but she was able to take her life back*. This seemed a very powerful indication that the project was successful for this young woman.

Lessons Learned: Group members seemed most comfortable in groups where the members were of the same gender. Considering the nature of the content and the ages of these teens, it took longer to garner trust when the genders were mixed. It stifled the amount of information the youth were willing to share-especially among those who were sexual assault victims. Taking field trips to educational and community based resources was a critical element for trust building with community organizations and individuals. This experience exposed group members to positive interactions with the community members and helped strengthen their connections. Engaging the help of interns from local colleges was invaluable to this project. These young people not only shared valuable knowledge, they acted as mentors, and were respected as peers by group members.

A particularly inspiring piece of this project was witnessing the group members *giving back* to the community with either a contribution of their time with younger children in the classroom or the giving of themselves in letters and poems to the public. It helped many of them regain their voice and gain trust. The ultimate success of this project was

illustrated by youth expressing their need for continued support beyond this group. In response, a support group for teen mothers will be starting in the Bennington area in collaboration with Prevent Child Abuse of Vermont.

5. Voices Against Violence, Franklin and Grand Isle, Counties

Project Focus:

- **Support groups for Battered Mothers and their Children**
- **Project Safe Choices Co-facilitated Prevention Education Presentations**
- **Education and Prevention Support/Peer Leadership**

Project Description:

The Voices Against Violence project was threefold: Support groups for battered mothers and their children; collaboration with Project Safe Choices to deliver educational presentations; and the formation of a peer-led education project.

Support Groups: The first component of the project sought to create eight-session support groups for battered mothers, their children and siblings that supported healing as well as the strengthening of relationships. This support/educational model was developed and two pilot groups (one for mothers, one for children) were implemented during the grant period. Primary goals of these groups were to provide a safe place for children and mothers to share their experiences of living with domestic violence and to explore, primarily through art, how their relationships had been impacted. A total of six mothers and nine children participated in support groups piloted through this project.

Prevention Education Presentations: The second component of this project included a partnership with Project Safe Choices. The two organizations teamed up for two separate visits to three classes in Franklin/Grand Isle Middle and Junior High Schools reaching approximately seventy-five students. A male/female co-presenter approach allowed for a dynamic and gender unified perspective on domestic violence. Exercises were interactive and engaged students in identifying and analyzing both abusive and healthy relationships. In addition, Voices Against Violence staff individually reached sixty-three students with similar material. Eight participants completed a PSC community based group during the grant period.

Education and Prevention Support/Peer Leadership: At the time of the grant application, the project had hopes of joining with the *Grand Isle Clean Team*, a coalition

of youth focusing on youth relevant issue, to create a peer-led prevention education project. Shortly after the onset of funding, the Clean Team began a period of restructuring and was not available to participate in the project.

Products Created: Two eight-session program outlines were created for both children's and mother's groups. As the groups progressed, the co-facilitators shifted the agendas to meet the needs of the group participants. Topics for the children's group included: getting to know each other, family, feelings, managing holidays, domestic violence, and handling disappointment. Moms' group topics included: effects of domestic violence on children, how to help our children, talking to children about domestic violence, parenting when you've been a victim of domestic violence, handling anger as a mother, conflict resolution, strengthening relationships with our children and between siblings.

Evaluation:

How many kids were reached? A total of six mothers and nine children participated in support groups piloted through this project. Approximately seventy-five middle/junior high aged students received domestic violence prevention presentations presented by male/female teams with an additional sixty-three students receiving the material from the Educator at Voices Against Violence. Eight boys completed a PSC community based group during the grant period.

Collaboration: The most positive aspect of collaborating with PSC was having a male co-presenter for prevention education with middle school students. This opened opportunities for discussion and learning which otherwise would not have taken place. Difficulty scheduling and staff turnover presented a challenge and resulted in less presentations delivered than was hoped. The incomplete peer leadership component of this project was a disappointment and was due to circumstances out of the control of the project staff.

Outcomes:

Support Groups: Children's group members were excited to find peers with whom they could share some of the most intimate and frightening details of their lives. None of them had ever had the opportunity to sit down with other children and explore their struggles together. All of the children believed that they were somehow responsible for the tensions in the home and that they could have a direct influence on de-escalating or preventing difficult situations. Through their artwork and their shared experiences, the children were able to express their feelings and find commonality in their experiences. Although they were deeply committed to helping their children, mothers were resistant

to participating in the groups themselves. Only a few mothers consistently participated in the mothers' group. There appeared to be personal conflicts between a few of the women and others had scheduling conflicts. However, as mothers observed the positive impact that group had on their children, it seemed likely that they would consider participating in another mothers' support group.

Prevention Education Presentations: It was effective for youth to see a male speak out on the issue of violence against women in a way that was insightful rather than blaming. Student participation and awareness levels increased with this model.

Lessons Learned:

Support Groups: There were several lessons learned in creating these pilot support groups. There were missed opportunities in collaborating with community partners to recruit participants for support group (this awareness will improve recruiting strategies for future groups). It was clear that mothers and children continue to need a great deal of support around the abuse that they experienced, relationship building and parenting concerns that reach far beyond an eight-week group. Mothers require unique nurturing to keep coming to group and to seek the support they want. In terms of curricula development - a flexible group outline, journaling, and creating tangible activities for strengthening family relationships are strategies identified for future work in this area.

Prevention Education Presentations: In this project, pairing a male and female presenter positively changed the dynamics of the educational presentations. Students learned about accountability as well as victimization. Availability of staff and time constraints continue to be an issue when collaborating among crisis based programs.

The domestic violence prevention funding helped to create the foundation that will support the continuation of groups for mothers and children in Franklin and Grand Isle counties.

6. Women's Information Service (WISE), Northeast Windsor, County

Project Focus:

- **Support Group Programs for Youth and Children who have been exposed to Domestic Violence at The Upper Valley Haven homeless shelter**

Project Description:

Recognizing the clear link between domestic violence and homelessness, WISE was able to partner with The Upper Valley Haven (the local shelter for homeless families) to pilot a “site-based” project at the Haven. The collaboration developed model programming for homeless children and teens that have been exposed to domestic violence. Specific program activities and accomplishments of the project included: conducting a six-week children’s group (ages 4-8), establishing an on-going teen group (ages 14-18), and conducting workshops for adult shelter guests, all at The Haven. In addition, the project developed a pilot collaborative model for partners to plan and launch site-based domestic violence programming for children and youth. This model works to overcome many barriers to receiving services at a domestic violence organization (such as transportation and stigma). Through this project, WISE reached sixteen youth and fifteen adults all of who were currently or previously homeless and reside in the Upper Valley region of Vermont.

Products Created: In order to document this innovative model offering on-site, domestic violence-specific, programming at partner organization locations, WISE developed a working manual describing the history, structure, programmatic elements and resources needed to replicate this model in other collaborative partnerships. This manual is designed to honor the strengths, expertise and unique culture that each organization brings to such an initiative and will be a resource for similar organizations and partners wanting to pursue similar ventures.

Evaluation:

How many kids were reached? Through the various groups and other program activities, WISE reached sixteen youth and fifteen adults all of who were currently or previously homeless and reside in the Upper Valley region of Vermont.

Collaboration: A primary goal of this project was to be successful in developing a model by which domestic and sexual violence organizations could collaborate with youth-serving organizations to reach young people in accessible on-site settings where they feel safe and comfortable. The Upper Valley Haven’s willingness to partner with WISE and remain committed to this effort throughout the life of the grant was a huge factor in enabling the project to reach a new population of at-risk youth in the community and to develop a successful model with potential for replication in communities across the state.

Outcomes: 100% of participants in the support groups both articulated and displayed improved inter-relational understanding and behavior. Facilitators had the privilege of witnessing participants grow, empathize, and relate in compassionate and respectful ways. Not only were the participants engaging in and absorbing the lessons on healthy relationships, they were also incorporating those ideas into their daily lives. One of The Haven co-facilitators said, following one particular session of the Teen Group, “...*I think the kids really responded...I’m also so glad some of them actually expressed a need for coping skills! There’s a lot going on in their lives right now...*” Facilitators for both age groups reported a noticeable increase in respect and mutual support among participants and facilitators - both within group settings and out. One participant shared, “... *[learning] how to deal with stuff and emotions, what is helpful and what is not. How to express ourselves with others [were the most important outcomes of group].*”

A particularly exciting aspect of this project was the success of the Teen Group. WISE’s work related to healthy relationships and community building was an ideal addition to The Haven’s teen summer program. Recognizing the new and dynamic modes of communication that youth generally utilize, a significant portion of the WISE group sessions were structured around empowering the teens to develop and maintain a blog: (<http://uppervalleyhaven.blogspot.com>). The blog provided an ideal channel to present group members’ self reflective photography and writing. In addition, group facilitators had an inroad to discussing and modeling safe ways in which to navigate the digital world.

Lessons Learned:

For this project, it was immensely valuable to have an external facilitator, who was not affiliated with either organization, to conduct several meetings across the life of the grant. This helped to ensure that the project stayed on track and that important discussions among key staff took place. This project also recognized the importance of open and on-going communication between group facilitators who were working at different organizations and did not see each other regularly. Unexpectedly, organizational differences between project partners arose while planning workshops for parents. Conversations emerged around whether sessions should be single or mixed gender. After acknowledging that shelters for homeless families may include intact families in which one spouse is abusive to the other, the project decided to create workshops that included **all** adult shelter guests at The Haven. By conducting workshops for all shelter guests, the project was able to achieve many original goals including raising awareness of WISE services, new programming at The Haven, and enhancing staff and resident understanding of domestic and sexual violence and healthy relationships.

WISE and The Haven were able to establish a strong collaborative relationship over the course of this grant. Programming for adult shelter guests was so well-received by families and staff at The Haven that WISE workshops for adult shelter guests have been incorporated into The Haven's on-going required programs. Additionally, the young people at The Haven responded so well to the Teen Group that, what was initially set to be a summer program only in July, ended up expanding to a weekly group that spanned seven months. It is WISE's hope that this model will be replicated in partnership with a range of local youth-serving organizations and by other domestic violence organizations with community partners throughout the State of Vermont.



Findings and Best Practice Themes

Collectively, the six prevention projects reached approximately six hundred and three (603) Vermont children and teens and twenty-one (21) adults/parents. Several best practice themes emerged from the work of these pioneering projects. These themes are best categorized into three major areas: *Approaches to providing direct services, support and prevention education to children exposed to domestic violence, Collaboration, and Technical Assistance.*

1. Approaches to providing direct services, support, and prevention education to children exposed to domestic violence:

- **Programming must include a balance of information and support.**
 - For many children and teens that participated in these projects, this was the first time to have a safe place to talk about their own experiences and gain valuable information about domestic and sexual violence.
 - Many children who participated in these programs had experienced and witnessed violence at home and many had started to integrate violent behavior into their own intimate relationships and friendships.
 - Children and youth who participated in all components of these projects noticeably benefited from a balance of **support** concerning their personal experiences, **information** about the dynamics of domestic and sexual violence, and **accountability** for their own behavior.
 - Where this balance did not exist, philosophical uneasiness arose among collaborators as well as a sense that adjustments needed to be made.

- **Female/male co-facilitated support groups and prevention education presentations provide an effective model for children and teens.**
 - Participants provided positive feedback for having female/male teams providing both support group and classroom programs.
 - As evidenced by several of the collaborations with Project Safe Choices, and the work of BWSS, youth overwhelmingly responded to this team approach because of its balanced and non-threatening dynamic. This format also provided a real-time model of male/female cooperation and conflict resolution.

- **Programming has a greater impact when it is:**
 - Flexible and responds to the needs of group members;
 - Consistent and delivered over an extended period of time;
 - Guided by input from the group members;
 - Designed to include creative, interactive, thought provoking and fun activities;
 - Intentional and creative in designing strategies to keep adults engaged.

- **On-site, domestic violence-specific, programming at partnering youth-service organizations is an effective model for delivering support services to children and youth.**
 - As evidenced by the success of WISE's collaboration with The Haven Homeless Shelter, this pilot model shows promise of providing comprehensive programming in safe accessible locations for youth.

2. Collaboration:

- **Collaboration with community partners is critical to ensure comprehensive programming for children and youth.**
 - Children and youth benefit from services delivered in a comprehensive approach by many organizations in their communities.
 - Collaborations allow children and youth to experience a diversity of appropriate perspectives and broaden their networks of community support.
 - Collaborations allow partner organizations to design balanced and deliberate programming that adheres to best practices.

- **The most successful collaborations were ones where:**
 - Partners had compatible missions;

- Conversations about goals, philosophies and project details were initiated at the onset of the project;
- There was deliberative time set aside for project staff to develop programming and communicate. This time was established early and maintained throughout the projects;
- There was little or no turnover of staff during the grant period.
- **Ongoing challenges for collaborations included:**
 - Staff turnover in several projects which, as expected, caused delays in implementation of programs and gaps in communication;
 - Tight schedules and time constraints, which limited planning and development time.

3. Technical Assistance and Training:

- **Ongoing technical assistance is paramount to the success of projects.**
 - Projects that took advantage of technical assistance provided by the Vermont Network and other outside resources were more successful in overcoming issues related to staff turnover, challenges with collaborators, and programmatic struggles.
- **Project Staff were most successful and confident when they had a basic level of knowledge in domestic and sexual violence and child development.**
 - Fortunately, all six projects were developed and implemented by well-trained and seasoned staff with experience working with children exposed to domestic and sexual violence.
 - In their evaluation reports, projects recommended that all project staff be knowledgeable in domestic and sexual violence and how these issues affect children. Child development, working effectively with different age groups, collaboration, communication, and experience providing children's programming are also essential skills and competencies.



Recommendations

Based on the high level of success and the lessons learned from these individual projects, the Center for Crime Victims Services and the Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence make the following recommendations for furthering the work of preventing domestic violence in Vermont.

- 1. The Vermont Legislature continues to support domestic and sexual violence programs designed to prevent domestic violence and target the needs of children in families affected by domestic violence.**
- 2. The Vermont Legislature continues to support programs which:**
 - Provide a balanced approach to learning that includes support for children and youth concerning their personal experiences, information about the dynamics of domestic and sexual violence, and accountability for their own behavior;
 - Present a female/male co-facilitated model for delivering support groups and prevention education presentations;
 - Are flexible and responsive, consistent and delivered over an extended period of time, guided by input from the group members, innovative and interactive;
 - Further develop the promising practice of delivering collaborative on-site, domestic violence-specific programming at youth-service organizations.
- 3. The Vermont Legislature continues to support collaborative programming in order to:**
 - Ensure comprehensive programming for children and youth;
 - Broaden the networks of support for children and youth struggling with issues of domestic violence.
- 4. The Vermont Legislature continues to support the provision of technical assistance and training to projects of this kind in order to:**
 - Ensure the success and sustainability of these projects;
 - Ensure a high level of staff knowledge and professional capacity;
 - Decrease the rate of staff turnover.



Appendix A

Violence Prevention with Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

TITLE: Violence Prevention with Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

ADMINISTRATOR: Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services

GRANTS: 4 or 6 one-time grants will be awarded, up to \$40,000 each

ELIGIBLE ENTITIES: Member Programs of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, SafeSpace, Deaf Vermonters Advocacy Services

PROPOSALS DUE: September 28, 2007

Legislative History

Act Number 65 of the 2007 Legislative Session, the FY08 Appropriations Act, allocated \$190,000 to the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services to fund one-time grants for organizations serving domestic violence victims in order to implement prevention programs with children exposed to domestic violence.

Sec. 78b. APPROPRIATION FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION

(a) There is appropriated the amount of \$190,000 from the general fund to the center for crime victims services. The center shall use the funds to present grants to organizations that provide services to victims of domestic violence. These funds shall be used for programs that are designed to prevent domestic violence and are targeted at the needs of children in families affected by domestic violence. At the end of fiscal year 2008, any unexpended portion of this appropriation shall be carried forward and used for the same purpose.

Requirements

Successful applications will propose creative, comprehensive and collaborative prevention projects targeted toward children up to 18 who are exposed to domestic violence. Funding should not be used for classroom-based prevention education programs, but could support

comprehensive school-based support groups or projects (art, theater, etc.) with youth exposed to domestic violence.

Examples of prevention projects could include:

- Intensive prevention education combined with supportive advocacy interventions delivered at schools with children who have been identified by the school as living with a battering parent or being at risk for domestic violence.
- Projects which focus support for children exposed to domestic violence around: encouraging respectful relationships, non-violent conflict resolution, safety planning, identifying and reaching out to support networks, information about domestic and dating violence.
- Group or individual work with children in domestic violence shelters, transitional housing programs, or homeless shelters who have been identified as being exposed to domestic violence.
- Groups for children and their mothers, which focus on strengthening bonds between mothers, children and siblings.
- Intensive support for mothers of infants and preschoolers focused on strengthening mother/child bonds, supporting children through crisis and beyond, and supporting non-violent parenting.
- Collaborative interventions with community partners (see list below) such as co-facilitated groups or projects.
- Projects which incorporate innovative and creative mechanisms such as music, art, dance, theater, etc. for reaching a diversity of children who have experienced domestic violence.

Collaborative projects are recommended; possible collaborators might include: Spectrum's Project Safe Choices, parent child centers, child advocacy centers, community mental health agencies, homeless shelters, early childhood educators, guidance counselors, mission driven creative arts agencies.

Application

Please submit a proposal of no more than five single-spaced pages by September 28, 2007 to:

Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services

Attn: Arlene Averill

58 South Main Street

Waterbury, VT 05676

Project Proposal Components

Applicants are expected to provide information in each of the following areas:

- Cover sheet – Providing Name of Organizations, Contact Person, Contact Information
- Project Description
- Plan for Outreach and Identifying Child Participants
- Time Line
- Evaluation Plan
- Budget, including Budget Narrative

Criteria for Selection

Applications will be reviewed by a Peer Review Panel of at least five professionals with expertise about primary and secondary prevention and the impact of domestic violence on children. The Panel will make recommendations to the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services, which is the grant administrator. Four or five projects will be selected based on the following criteria:

- Comprehensive work with children exposed to domestic violence
- Collaboration with other professionals or experts
- Demonstrates ability to reach children and youth within a short time frame
- Innovation and creativity
- Supports families in transition and fostering connection between children, their non-offending parent and siblings
- Demonstrates the value and feasibility of replicating the program beyond this one-time funding source
- Demonstrates creative strategy for evaluating program effectiveness

Technical Assistance

Grantees will receive technical assistance from the Vermont Network Office, including on-site assistance where appropriate.

Evaluation

Please identify in your application what you would like to evaluate or measure about your project. How will you go about doing that?

Reporting

Grantees will present their prevention model to the legislature during the 2008 legislative session. Grantees will also provide information and best practices based on their experience to other Network Programs and direct service agencies.

