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## ***Healthy Family Relations: A Community Response to Domestic Violence***









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## ***Healthy Family Relations: A Community Response to Domestic Violence***

*Binu Sebastian, MSW, RSW & Liza Lorenzetti, PhD (c), RSW*

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## The North of McKnight Domestic Violence Initiative

An introduction:

In 2010, the United Way of Calgary and Area held several roundtable discussions with the residents of the North of McKnight Communities. The intention was to gain a better understanding of the issues and challenges that residents face. The results of these discussions were documented in the North of McKnight Residents Committee's **1000 Voices Report**. The issue of family violence emerged as a key community priority. Every level of the community, including leaders, residents, members of media and businesses stepped up to initiate discussions, explore biases, question beliefs about healthy relations, and

most importantly, challenge each other to speak out and take action.

The United Way of Calgary and Area has proudly supported many grassroots, community-led activities and events to raise awareness and promote action to prevent domestic violence. Communities hold important roles in promoting well-being, equity and happiness for all members. The primary intent of this booklet is to highlight the important roles that we can all play in shaping beliefs, attitudes and social norms that support healthy peaceful families and non-violence.

This handbook provides a quick overview of the building blocks to develop healthy and non-violent relationships and communities. It also gives community members some tools that they can use to become involved in violence prevention within their homes, communities, schools, faith communities and other places where they gather. *Lalita Singh (United Way of Calgary and Area) and Atiya Ashna (North of McKnight Resident).*



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## Benefits of Living in Healthy and Happy Families

This handbook discusses some important building blocks of healthy and non-violent relationships and communities. It also gives community members some tips and tools on how they can become involved in violence prevention within their homes, communities, schools, faith groups and other places where they gather. There are many benefits to building families and communities that are healthy, harmonious and free from violence.

Here are a few:

- ✓ Children will grow up in healthy and violence-free environments
- ✓ Women and men will live with equality and dignity within families, in communities, and beyond
- ✓ Elders will feel safe and respected among their family members
- ✓ Neighbours will not remain passive about domestic violence, but will become engaged bystanders
- ✓ Men and boys will be positive role models and will experience emotional well-being
- ✓ The cycle of violence will be broken for the next generation
- ✓ Healthy, peaceful and harmonious relationships will become a new social norm within society
- ✓ Hope will flourish!

Imagine living in a community that is free from violence... A community rooted by peaceful and collaborative family and community relationships..! This dream can become a reality.... The first step to reach this goal is understanding that *each and every one of us has a role to play in preventing domestic violence!*

## Who is the Community?

*Community* cannot be defined in one way. When we think about who is in our community, we may consider our neighbors, faith communities, sports and cultural affiliations, schools, workplaces, interest groups and some of the other places where we spend our time. From a prevention perspective, communities can also be viewed as networks or social hubs which can act as conduits for social change.<sup>8</sup>

The work of promoting healthy and harmonious relationships must begin in the places where people spend their time. Our communities are the places where daily life is practiced and key environments to learn and role-model the work of violence prevention.<sup>25</sup>



- ✓ *There are many ways to define community*
- ✓ *Neighbourhoods, faith, culture, social, and educational groups are examples of communities*
- ✓ *Many of us belong to multiple communities*
- ✓ *By coming together, communities can build healthier people, caring families, stronger community relationships, safer and welcoming neighborhoods*



## How Do We Create Healthy Relationships?

- By honoring the right of everyone to lead a life of happiness and freedom, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, class, color, age, abilities, and religion
- By living free from fear, intimidation, guilt and shame in our personal relationships
- By ensuring the physical, psychological, spiritual and mental growth and development of each and every one of us in society
- By securing a brighter, happier and safer future for our next generations
- By role-modelling to our youngsters about healthy relationships, non-violence and equality
- By making our communities kinder and safer places where people feel a sense of belonging
- By growing our children in environments that are free from abuse, and instilling in them the values of compassion and care for others, positive communication and healthy self-esteem
- By treating our senior family members with care and supporting their sense of happiness and well-being in the latter parts of their lives.



## LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgendered and Queer (LGBTQ) community members suffer from stigma and discrimination, which can also impact their interpersonal relationships.<sup>16</sup> Societies are increasingly becoming receptive of people's diverse sexual identities and are willing to talk about violence that affects these members of our community. Prevention efforts should include everyone.



**Northwest Network** – <http://nwnetwork.org>  
**Seattle, United States**

*Northwest Network reaches out to those experiencing abuse in in LGBTQ communities, using various tools such as advocacy, workshops, and community awareness.*

NW Network works to end abuse in lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer communities. Their approach is survivor-focused, with an aim to advancing equality and respect for all people, and the creation of loving, inclusive and accountable communities.

They work with LGBTQ survivors to strengthen their own social networks and actively resist abuse. Their services include support for survivors, advocacy, community engagement, youth programs and training. Their **relationship skills** seminars consist of clarifying values, analysis of power and liberation, negotiation skills, accountability, boundaries, conflict strategies and strengthening support networks. In addition to these, they also host **People of Color Relationship Skills** classes.

With a strong belief that healthy relationships are the foundation to abuse prevention, their **FAR out** (Friends Are Reaching Out) program works very closely with survivors and their family members (and other supporters) to cultivate a culture of open communication and sharing. In addition, their **VIP (Voices in Power)** project is specifically designed for LGBTQ youth. VIP training centers on issues of violence and crime, such as dating violence, bullying, hate violence, assault, exploitation, theft, police harassment and youth in the sex trade.



## Men's Action Network Calgary (MAN-C)

*Building capacity of men and boys from diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds to take leadership in violence prevention in their respective communities and the broader community.*

Men's Action Network Calgary (MAN-C) is a community-led initiative supported by the Ethno-Culture Council of Calgary (ECCC) - [www.eccc Calgary.com](http://www.eccc Calgary.com) ECCC brings together men from diverse cultures and backgrounds to build and support their leadership roles in violence prevention. 'Most men do not condone violence, but a majority of violence is perpetrated by men' – with this belief, MAN-C's Collective Cultures model invites men to work alongside women and collaboratively with community and institutions to create the conditions for healthy relationships and a society free from violence.. Research, reflection and community



engagement are the principle pillars upon which MAN-C activities are designed and carried out. MAN-C's philosophy includes an intersectional approach to violence prevention that accounts for the impacts of gender inequality, immigration, racism, intergenerational trauma (etc.) on relationships and well-being.

MAN-C believes in a three-fold strategy; 1) investing in men's leadership roles through healing, personal transformation, capacity building and social action 2) reaching out and working collaboratively with communities and various institutions, and 3) building a research-informed approach to working with men and boys. MAN –C values reflective practice and intercultural dialogue as methods to enable men to gain better insights into the underlying beliefs and practices that lead to violence in relationships. MAN-C activities include: Speak Out and Act!, which are MAN-C's signature violence prevention community events, MensTalk, which are peer-dialogues among men, and work with gender equality work with young men through sports and recreation.

## What is Domestic Violence?

While healthy relationships are a foundation for peaceful and harmonious families, domestic or family violence is a barrier to building healthy families and safe communities. Domestic violence can include emotional, verbal, physical, sexual, financial and spiritual forms of abuse and neglect. This can impact women, children, men, seniors, parents, extended family members, and others who share relationships of trust and/or are (inter)dependent upon one another in and various ways.

### Domestic violence is:

- **A personal issue:** It affects the lives of everyone involved, the victim/survivor, the offender, those who witness it, condone it or feel helpless to stop it.
- **A family issue:** It affects the well being of every member of the family – parents, children, grandparents, uncles, aunts... It takes the joy and happiness out of the household.
- **A social issue:** It can be a learned behaviour that is passed along to the next generation.<sup>20, 23</sup> Society pays a high cost for domestic violence including social and economic costs.<sup>24</sup>
- **A public health issue:** It can rob people of their sense of mental health and well-being, and creates additional burdens on healthcare system and other systems and services in our communities.<sup>4</sup>



*Understanding the risk factors and root causes of domestic violence will help us take action to prevent it.*



**Domestic violence can be the result of a combination of factors such as:**

- ✓ *Child abuse and/or witnessing domestic violence in the home or extended family<sup>26</sup>*
- ✓ *Gender: women and girls are more likely to experience injury, sexual abuse or death from a spouse or intimate partner<sup>9</sup>*
- ✓ *Age: women ages 20-24 are more likely to experience domestic violence<sup>6</sup>*
- ✓ *Social conditioning including traditional values and beliefs that perpetuate gender inequality and rigid masculine norms<sup>25</sup>*
- ✓ *Parental mental health, community violence, and alcohol misuse<sup>27</sup>*
- ✓ *Lack of legislative and judicial protections, community violence and economic disadvantage<sup>3, 19, 16</sup>*

## MEN'S LEADERSHIP WITHIN FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

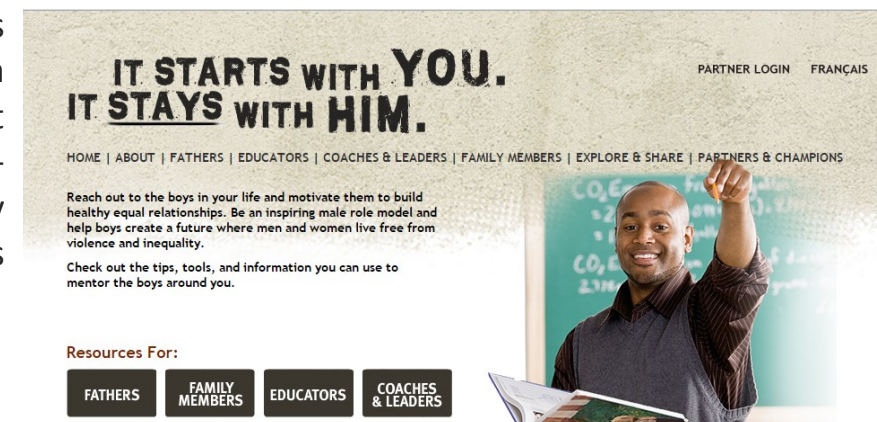
*There is now a growing consensus that men and boys should be actively involved in domestic violence prevention. They are now considered not just as part of the problem, but as part of the solution as well.*



**It Starts With You. It Stays With Him** - [www.itstartswithyou.ca](http://www.itstartswithyou.ca)  
Ontario, Canada

*Using a variety of social media tools effectively, they aim to educate men and boys about healthy and equal relationships*

It Starts With You. It Stays With Him, an initiative by the White Ribbon Campaign, calls men to inspire and educate boys in their lives about the significance of healthy relationships with women and girls. They state that most of the men, in their roles as fathers, uncles, teachers, friends, coaches –or others - are in a position to positively influence boys and younger men. Objectives of this initiative are to teach young men the importance of setting healthy boundaries and cultivating respect across genders. The program also focuses on consent in intimate relationships. They effectively use social media tools to spread awareness.





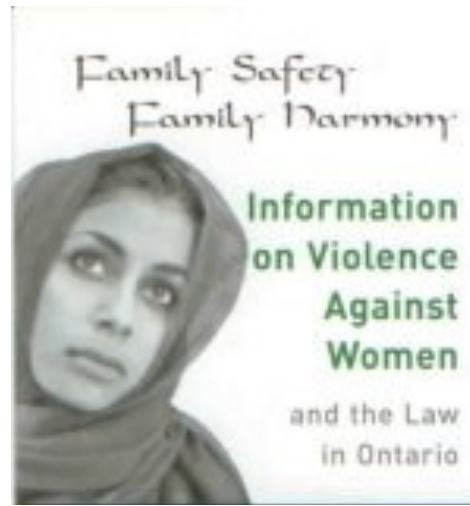
MFSP is a community-based project to address domestic violence in the Muslim community.<sup>1</sup>

Their objectives are:

- ✓ to establish and promote dialogue between the Muslim community members and mainstream violence prevention agencies;
- ✓ to facilitate an environment of mutual understanding and respect;
- ✓ to enable and promote the mobilization of the Muslim community on the issue of family violence;
- ✓ to empower Muslim women to define and articulate their needs and social realities;
- ✓ and to enable the collaborative development of prevention and intervention materials and services that meet the needs of Muslim women.<sup>1</sup>

The Muslim Wheel of Domestic Abuse sets the tone for how religion has been used as a tool for domestic abuse. (Please visit the following link to refer to the Muslim Wheel of Domestic Abuse - [www.lfcc.on.ca/muslim\\_wheel\\_of\\_domestic\\_violence.html](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/muslim_wheel_of_domestic_violence.html))

Also see **The Peaceful Families Project** - [www.peacefulfamilies.org](http://www.peacefulfamilies.org) (Great Falls, United States) for another example that includes training tools for faith leaders.



## Why is a Community Approach Important in Creating Healthy Family Relationships?

- *When someone experiences family conflict or abuse, they most often turn to those who are closest to them—extended family, friends, and neighbors—before reaching out to an outside organization.*
- *Families that experience violence are often disconnected from traditional service providers and isolated from services offered outside their immediate neighborhood.*
- *Community members often know which families need help within their communities.*
- *Those who participate in the same community will be more likely to understand the values, traditions, teachings and practices within their communities as they pertain to family relationships.*
- *Most community residents and leaders do not agree with domestic violence and want to help.<sup>11</sup>*



## Promoting Healthy Relationships and Preventing Domestic Violence

Successful community-based initiatives are guided by a **shared vision, willingness, preparedness, capacity and commitment** to make change happen! This includes leveraging existing resources, capabilities and skills to serve the purpose of promoting healthy relationships and preventing domestic violence. Careful planning is needed, including developing ways to evaluate if our actions have been successful.

Adopting a community-based approach to violence prevention includes “finding and building on community assets, using culturally appropriate messages and services, and cultivating and supporting local leaders who can advocate for and sustain change”.<sup>11</sup>

### Broad strategies include:

- *Changing social and community conditions that contribute to violence*
- *Raising awareness of the problem of domestic violence and establishing social norms that make violence unacceptable*
- *Building networks of leaders within a community*
- *Connecting community residents to appropriate and culturally safe services*
- *Making services and institutions accountable to community needs.*<sup>11</sup>

Break the Cycle’s main campaigns are **loveisrespect** (enabling youngsters to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy dating relationships and to seek help to leave unhealthy relationships) and **Start Talking** (providing teachers, teenagers, parents and other stakeholders with tools to identify and reach out to those who are experiencing dating violence). **Teen DV Month** (using Valentine’s Day as an opportunity to raise awareness on dating violence) and **Global Youth Service Day** are other youth-oriented programs.

### FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES

*The approach documented below is one of many initiatives that encourage faith-based communities and religious leaders to lead the work of violence prevention within their communities. Religion and faith have an active influence in the lives of millions of people. Therefore, religious leaders are best positioned to positively influence conversations on interpersonal and family relationships.*



**The Muslim Family Safety Project (MFSP)**

[www.lfcc.on.ca/mfsp.html](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/mfsp.html)

London, Ontario, Canada

*An initiative within Muslim communities to address domestic violence*



## YOUTH AND SCHOOL-BASED

### COMMUNITIES

The focus is on youth, healthy relationships and the prevention of dating violence.



### Break the Cycle

[www.breakthecycle.org](http://www.breakthecycle.org)

California, United States

Break the Cycle strives towards empowering youth to prevent dating violence. They provide training to young adults and develop safety plans with those who are in abusive relationships.

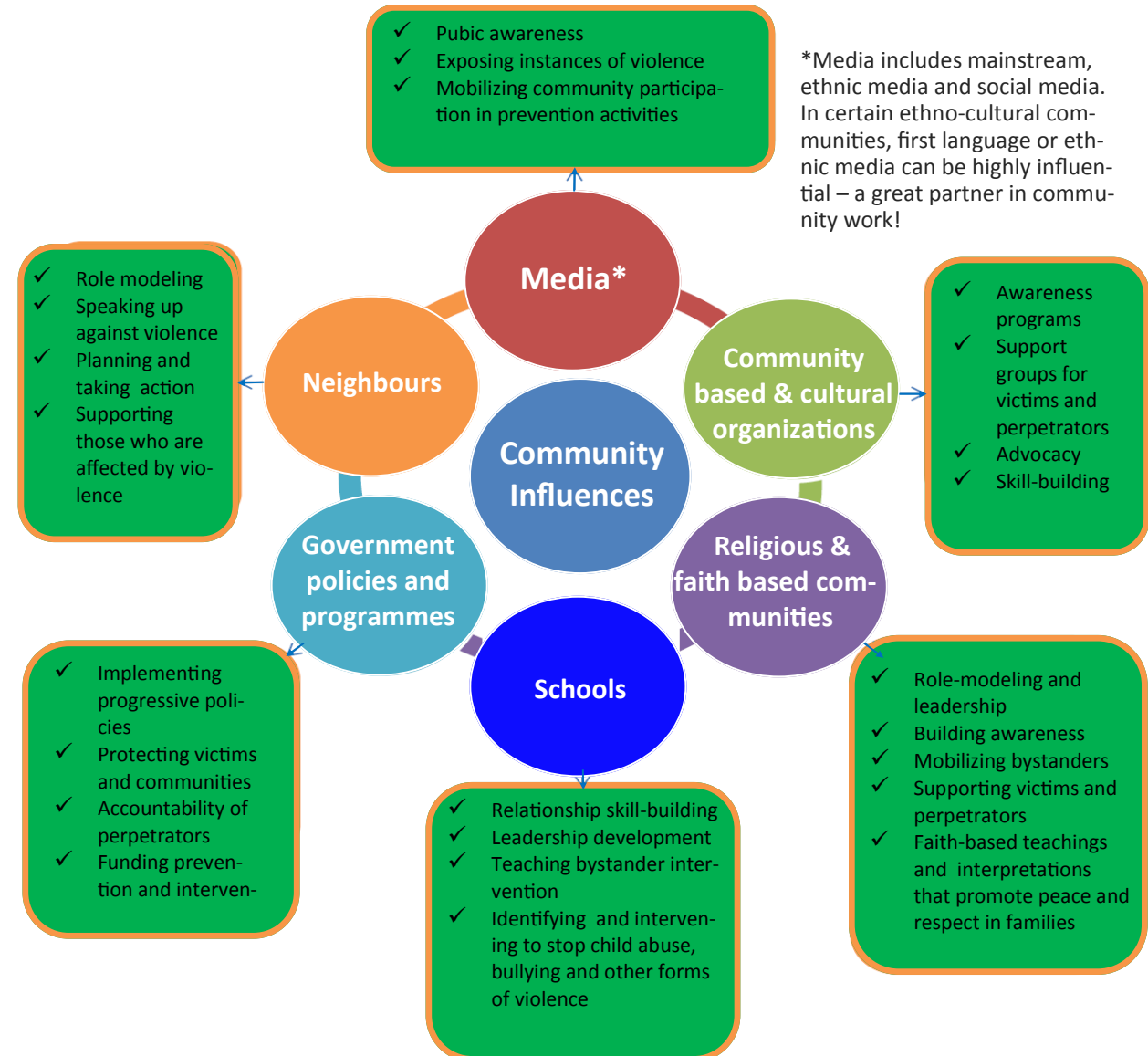
Break the Cycle provides tools and resources for youth. Their interventions range from organising public campaigns to advocating for effective policies and programs. The campaign is built on the belief that everyone is entitled to lead a safe and happy life regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, race, class or other areas of diversity. Their continuum of support includes helping youth to identify the warning signs of abuse, developing safety plans and providing legal services for those who are already in the cycle of abuse.



where they encourage youth to speak out about dating violence in order to promote schools safety. The program teaches young people to distinguish between what are healthy, unhealthy and abusive behaviours.

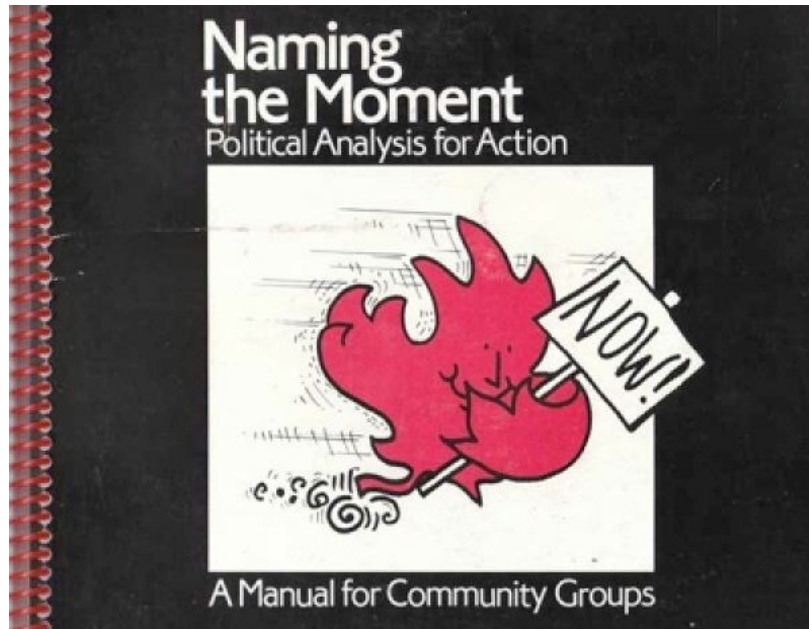
## Community Influences

Community members can engage key stakeholders and positively influence them to become part of the solution to domestic violence! Both individual and collective efforts are needed. Community members can work with institutions such as governments, faith-based organizations, cultural, sports and other community-based associations, schools and the media to support prevention messages, initiatives and policies. Here are some examples as to what roles these institutions can play.



## Planning for Community Action

Effective community action happens through good planning. While there are many approaches to community planning, a Canadian handbook called “Naming the Moment” [NTM]<sup>2</sup> provides a quick and easy guide to creating an action plan on any important social issue. Much of the original NTM content has been adapted for this handbook.



The term “Naming the Moment” encourages communities to assess the various strengths and challenges that create a platform for action in the current moment of NOW...!

Naming the Moment is comprised of four phases of analysis and action.<sup>2</sup> A fifth phase, not mentioned in this manual, focuses on evaluating the process, actions and proposed and actual outcomes. This phase has been added here to the NTM approach.

## SASA! Raising Voices -

<http://raisingvoices.org>

### Kampala, Uganda

*This project is a community-based approach to address the imbalance of power between women and men, girls and boys.*

*With a strong belief in three core elements – activism, innovation and influence, they strive to make a difference in the lives of women and girls.*



SASA! is a community mobilization approach developed by Raising Voices (for preventing violence against women). Their main focus is to address gender inequality.

Raising Voices believes that three elements are critical to prevent violence against women:

- ✓ **Activism** - awakening critical thinking and inspiring change in homes, communities, schools, organizations and government.
- ✓ **Innovation:** Rigorously studying and learning from the implementation of this work as inspiration for further innovation in violence prevention, and
- ✓ **Influence:** sharing unique experiences in high-level dialogues in order to shape the prevention field and create global conditions for success.

The **Violence Prevention Learning Centre** is a creative SASA! program to train activists to work for social justice through sharing their insights and evolving new approaches.





## PLACE-BASED CAMPAIGNS

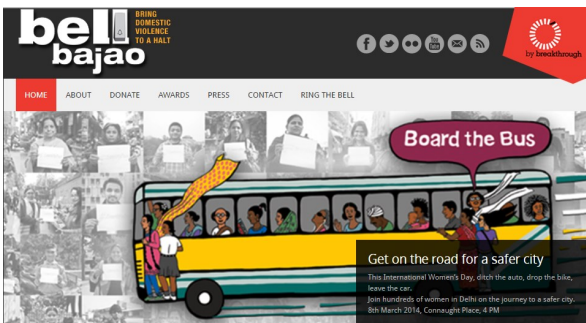
*The focus is on creating greater awareness on the issue of domestic violence by making this a public issue, rather than a private one.*



**Bell Bajao - Ring the Bell** - [www.bellbajao.org](http://www.bellbajao.org)  
**New Delhi, India**

*Using cultural tools in communities, Bell Bajao urges men and boys to 'ring the bell' or to take action whenever they witness violence against women.*

Bell Bajao, Ring the Bell, is a campaign which calls men and boys to take a stand against domestic violence. This campaign focuses on the important roles that men and boys can play to address domestic violence. It calls them to 'ring the bell' whenever they witness violence in their neighbourhoods and communities. One of their flagship programs is to engage communities through **street plays, games and other available cultural tools** to spread the word about gender based violence. The underlying message is that men and boys should proactively get involved as and when they witness violence against women.



They request men and boys to make a promise that they will take concrete action to end violence against women. As part of reaching out to men at the global level, they are mobilizing one million men to make a promise that they will take a concrete action to prevent violence against women. The fundamental perspective of the campaign is to have men and boys as allies, partners and leaders of the change that we all want to see in our families and communities.

*Use this approach to create a community-based domestic violence prevention plan...*

### **Phase 1 – Identifying our interests and ourselves**

- Who are 'we' and how do we see the world?
- How do we define our community?
- How have our values and perspectives been shaped by our race, gender, class, age, sexual orientation, religion, etc.?
- Does our group include people most affected by the issue(s) we are working on?

### **Phase 2 – Naming the issues**

- What current issue is most critical to the interests of our community?
- What are the opposing interests around this issue?
- What are our short and long-term goals?
- What is the history of the issue that we want to address?
- What have been the critical moments of the past that have influenced us until now?

### **Phase 3 –Assessing the forces**

- Who are our supporters and who is not with us on this issue?
- What are their views and perspectives?
- What are the strengths and challenges of both (all) sides of this issue?
- What about the uncommitted, how do we get them involved?
- What stakeholders do we need more information about?



Close to Home - [www.c2home.org](http://www.c2home.org)

Massachusetts, United States

*Close to home focuses on developing conversations on domestic violence within communities and places communities at the center of prevention efforts. They believe that knowing our neighbours in our own streets go a long way in addressing domestic violence*

Using the key message ‘work with us to prevent domestic violence’, Close to Home initiative calls for a community- driven response to domestic violence. The focus is on changing community norms that perpetuate domestic violence. Close to Home contends that every stakeholder in a neighbourhood or community has a role to play in preventing domestic violence, be it youth, residents, families, friends, neighbors, civic leaders, and organizational partners. Close to Home uses five components in their approach:

- 1) learning about domestic violence in one’s own community,
- 2) discussing and reflecting on domestic violence in one’s own life and immediate surroundings,
- 3) developing skills to respond to and prevent domestic violence,
- 4) developing and implementing solutions to domestic violence, and
- 5) building strong meaningful connections with others.

Specific programs are tailored for youth, community leaders, and other community residents. **Digital Storytelling** is an innovative program for members to share their perspectives and stories about domestic violence with others in their community. **‘Are you talking?’** is a public awareness program which invites community members to share any simple thing that they did to address violence. Key strategies for Close to Home interventions include: identifying where people turn for support, the importance of working with multi-cultural communities, exploring existing social networks, carrying out community assessments, building organizational and institutional partners, mobilizing community strengths and other areas of prevention.

#### Phase 4 – Planning for action

- How has the environment (social, political etc) shifted from the past to the present on this issue?
- What future shifts can we anticipate with our actions and the broader social/political environment?
- How do we build on our strengths and address our challenges?
- Whom should we be forming alliances with?
- What actions could we take?
- What are the constraints and possibilities of each action?
- Who will do what and when?

#### Phase 5 – Evaluating the process, actions and proposed/actual outcomes

- What did we do and what happened?
- Who took on what roles?
- What changed as a result of our action(s)?
- What did we learn?
- What did others (for instance, our community) do or say about these actions?
- Did we ask them for feedback?
- What should we do next?



## NEIGHBORHOODS

*These models are based on the belief that relationships with neighbours and active community involvement can go a long way in preventing domestic violence. These initiatives focus on making domestic violence a community issue.*



### **North of McKnight Residents Committee (NMRC) -** [www.facebook.com/NorthOfMcKnightResidentsCommittee](http://www.facebook.com/NorthOfMcKnightResidentsCommittee) Calgary, Canada

*NMRC focuses on supporting community residents to take leadership roles in addressing community issues, including domestic violence.*

North of McKnight Resident Committee is a collaborative of community leaders or representatives from ethno-cultural, local community Associations, faith groups and other local resident led groups from North of McKnight Communities; with a vision of “one people with a unified voice, living in friendly, vibrant and inclusive communities.

NMRC is working to unite and mobilize the residents of Castleridge, Saddleridge, Falconridge, Martindale, Taradale and Coral Springs and Sky View to take collective action to strengthen the social and cultural fibre and to meet priority needs of their community.

## Strategies to Promote Healthy Relationships and Prevent Domestic Violence



There are various promising practices that can provide information to communities who want to plan action or create initiatives to build healthy relationships and prevent domestic violence within their neighbourhoods or community environments. While there is no ‘one universal approach’ that can work in every community and context, becoming familiar with existing initiatives can assist communities to build their own effective strategies.

While promising practices are important tools... what is successful in one community may not work in another.

***In the arena of primary prevention, some existing and emerging community-based strategies are listed below.***

### **Community Bystanders**

*Bystander models call for those who witness violence to make a meaningful intervention and help stop the cycle. This approach can be practiced by all community members.*



Who is an engaged bystander? She/he is someone who takes action to prevent domestic violence. Engaged bystanders can be parents, neighbours, friends, children, teachers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, coaches and members of your faith community or complete strangers. We all have a role to play, and learning the proper skills will assist us in becoming violence interveners! Educating ourselves, seeing prevention as our responsibility and finding the courage to act are important starting points.

When thinking of bystanders, individuals usually come to mind. Whole communities or institutions (such a neighbourhood or a school) can become bystanders.<sup>21</sup> **This means**

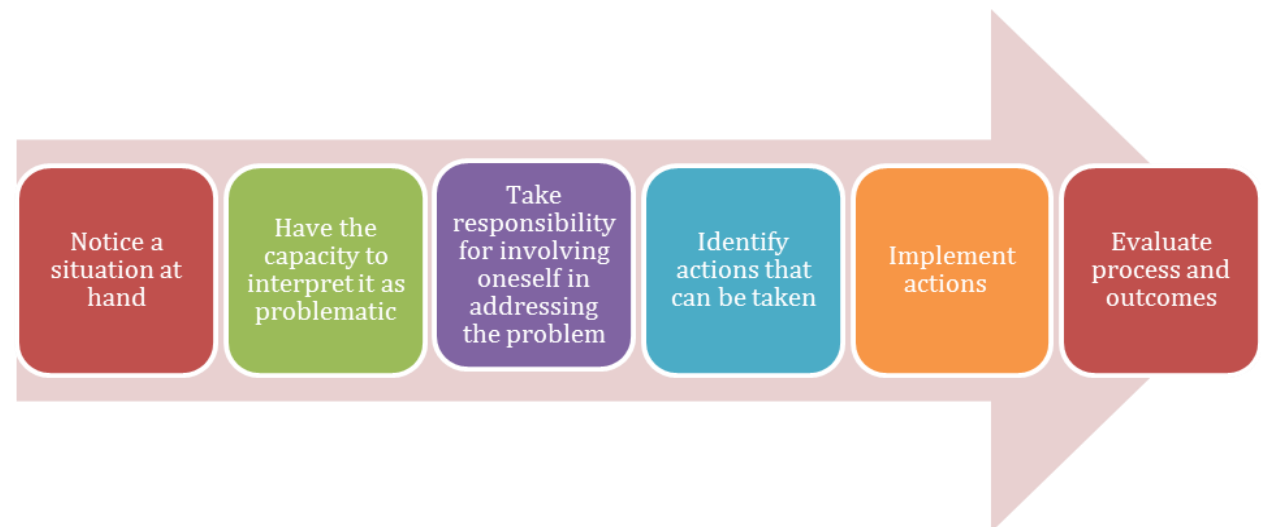
**that a collective decision can be made that violence will not be tolerated in any given community.** It then becomes everyone's responsibility to take action to make this happen.

“Simply put, a *bystander* is somebody who observes an act of violence, discrimination or other unacceptable or offensive behavior. The terms ‘active’ and/or ‘pro-social’ bystander are commonly used to refer to the individual who takes action to intervene in response to the observed incident. By contrast, ‘passive’ bystander refers to individuals who observe an unacceptable or offensive behaviour and fail to act or intervene”<sup>21</sup>

Communities that want to develop a collective bystander approach must assess their community members’ readiness and willingness prior to moving forward. Bystander engagement models are effective ways to involve community members of all ages in taking roles to prevent domestic violence or other forms of violence such as bullying in schools.

Latané and Darley (1969) developed a five-stage approach to teach community members how to intervene as bystanders. This approach has been used and adapted by many groups since then. Here are the steps: 1) notice a situation at hand, 2) have the capacity to interpret it as problematic, 3) take responsibility for involving oneself in addressing the problem, 4) identify actions that can be taken, and 5) implement actions. An additional step not identified by Latané and Darley (1969) is *evaluating the process and outcomes*. This step offers the opportunity to assess whether our actions have had any impact, what the impact was, what we have learned, and what we may do next time.<sup>15, 21</sup> These steps can be practiced through role plays or other activities to enhance their effectiveness.

### **Bystander Engagement Model**



(Adapted from the original Latané and Darley, 1969)