



**Choose Respect Promotes
Healthy Relationships
Among Youth**

Grant Program Enters its Second Year

By Rocio Robledo

With the growing rate of violence among youth, many communities are trying to find different ways to help teach youth about violence prevention. The Choose Respect program is designed to reach today's youth with messages about healthy relationships. However, its messages are not just relevant to dating – the skills that youth use to develop healthy, respectful relationships are the same skills that they can use in other aspects of life.

Consequently, the initiative offers the opportunity for communities nationwide to increase the number of youth who are prepared to be healthy, safe and independent members of society.

The Choose Respect program was developed by the Division of Violence Prevention of the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The program promotes broad community efforts to help youth ages 11 to 14 form healthy relationships to prevent dating abuse before it starts. This national effort is designed to motivate youth to challenge the harmful beliefs that exist about dating abuse and take the necessary steps to form healthy relationships.

In Illinois, the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority (IVPA) has funded six grantees to facilitate a variety of Choose Respect activities in their communities. Each of the six communities – Waukegan, Marshall, Highland, Cicero and two Chicago neighborhoods – are provided with technical assistance as they implement their own creative ideas to promote healthy relationships among teens, prevent teen dating violence and engage youth leadership in violence prevention.

IVPA is now partnering with the Illinois African American Coalition for Prevention (ILAACP), Illinois Center for Violence Prevention (ICVP) and Mujeres Latinas en Accion to ensure that the implementation of the Choose Respect program is a youth-led and culturally sensitive application that benefits diverse groups.

The six communities

Each of the six participating communities is geographically and culturally diverse. In May 2008, the Choose Respect staff set up a train the trainer training that took place in Bloomington. The training was designed for all the sponsors, supporters and youth leaders who are participating in implementing and promoting the Choose Respect program within their communities.

Cathy Palmer, pastor at Truth and Life Center Ministries in Chicago, says many of the agencies have shown great enthusiasm for being a part of the Choose Respect initiative. “They feel that it will be a great opportunity to stop violence among youth within their communities,” Palmer says. “Our goal with the help of the Choose Respect initiative is to collaborate with more schools to promote healthy relationships in order to prevent violence, especially amongst youth. We also want to use the opportunity that Choose Respect has offered us to also provide information to the community about the resources our organization has.” Palmer explains that the program allows her to offer a safe haven for youth and their families, especially those that are victims of violence.

Ongoing Efforts

The six community grantees and their partner sites have been working on innovative ways to implement the Choose Respect curriculum in their communities to effect change in how healthy relationships should be formed and maintained.

According to research from the CDC, one in 11 adolescents report being a victim of physical dating violence. Even more startling, adolescents who report dating violence are also more likely to report binge drinking, suicide attempts, physical fighting and current sexual activity.

The Choose Respect staff plays an advisory role and provides much of the technical assistance to the grantees in the form of curriculum related to diversity/cultural proficiency, assistance with youth

engagement, and community partnerships that provide services in domestic violence and sexual assault. Choose Respect messages are supported by a variety of materials including e-cards, posters, bookmarks and pocket guides, and are distributed through a mix of innovative learning tools.

In April 2009, the Illinois Choose Respect Grant Program will enter its second year and plans to engage a new group of communities to implement its program. According to Mujeres Latinas en Accion/ Latin Women in Action, in order for Choose Respect to be effective in any community, several key factors including diversity, youth engagement and available services for domestic violence and sexual assault victims need to be constantly present. Participating organizations plan to take results from the six grantee communities and further expand the Choose Respect program.

For more information about Choose Respect Illinois, visit chooserespect.org.

Robledo is Program Coordinator for Mujeres Latinas en Accion/ Latin Women in Action.

