



City of Seattle
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New program for teens aimed at preventing violent relationships

SEATTLE— The Seattle Human Services Department (HSD) today announced the creation of a new program aimed at preventing dating violence and domestic and sexual violence, by helping teens build healthy and respectful relationships.

HSD awarded \$257,500 in City of Seattle funds to the Asian Counseling and Referral Service to conduct the program at Washington and Madison middle schools for young people ages 11-14 in partnership with the YMCA, which runs community learning centers at each school.

“In order to stop domestic violence and sexual assault, we need to reach youth as they are beginning to think about dating and before they begin dating,” says Terri Kimball, Director of HSD’s Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention Division. “Helping them learn about healthy relationships and develop skills to navigate out of troubling relationships is a hallmark of prevention work. Involving caring adults such as teachers, parents and coaches is also key.”

As part of the program, youth counselors from the Asian Counseling and Referral Service will conduct 12 to 15 sessions at each middle school twice during the 2009-2010 school year and once in the fall of 2010. The sessions will include presentations and discussion on topics such as healthy relationships, contributors to violence, conflict resolution and media violence.

Counselors will also train students from Garfield and West Seattle high schools to co-facilitate the interactive group sessions, and provide education and information to teachers, school counselors and coaches at both middle schools, as well as to parents of the young people involved. In addition, participating young people will have the opportunity to develop a media campaign about teen relationships with support from SCAN Community Media.

In 2008, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency reported that approximately one in three adolescent girls in the U.S. is a victim of physical, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner. A new study released by research psychologist Shari Miller found that of 2,824 ethnically diverse sixth graders, half were already dating and 42 percent of the dating sixth graders were experiencing aggressive behavior from their partners, including threats, physical and sexual abuse. Researchers suggest that early patterns of abuse may contribute to more violence in later relationships. Primary prevention of violence in these early relationships is critical for healthy relationships—and families—in the future.

The Seattle program is patterned after work done by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Family Violence Prevention Fund. The curriculum for the program is adapted from the evidence-based “Fourth R Project” of the University of Western Ontario.

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