

## Beyond April and October

*Some Ideas for Gender Violence Prevention Campaigns Throughout the Year*

By Ben Atherton-Zeman

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Across the country, rape crisis centers and domestic violence programs busily organize vigils, fold purple and teal ribbons, and respond to last-minute requests for educational programming. By November and May, staff and volunteers are ready for a month-long vacation.

Still, sexual assault and domestic violence do not stop during certain months – neither should we stop educating and raising awareness.

Granted, our movement's resources are limited. Prevention and education activities often take a back seat to direct services and emergencies. Despite this, there are some examples of year-round, local public awareness programming that take very little effort and seem to raise a great deal of awareness. What follows are some examples of such local programming, although it is by no means a comprehensive list (if you have any suggestions for this list, please email them to me).

Utilizing volunteer time and some donated funds, your agency may be able to map out annual, local campaigns that are quite effective (any of these would make terrific intern projects!). Indeed, these campaigns have proved "newsworthy" by local media and have garnered media attention, thereby doubling the outreach – the campaign raised awareness, and so did the media coverage of the campaign.

Please note: Statewide and national campaigns may already be in place in your community – care should be taken not to conflict in message content or form with those campaigns. Also, many ideas similar to these can be found through the National Domestic Violence Awareness Project (<http://dvam.vawnet.org>) and National Sexual Assault Awareness Month initiative ([http://www.nsvrc.org/saam\\_new/index.html](http://www.nsvrc.org/saam_new/index.html)). These ideas are intended to supplement, not to replace, such information.

### January:

Start off your year with a simple, low-cost, low effort outreach idea. The **Bookmark of the Month Club** features a different sexual assault or DV warning sign on each bookmark (or healthy relationship tip if you prefer). Each bookmark is a different color, printed on card stock, cut and sent to libraries (including school libraries), bookstores, and anywhere else that chooses to distribute them. Some of your monthly bookmarks might feature the impact of domestic and/or sexual violence on marginalized communities, including GLTB or older adults. The cost is minimal – mostly postage, which you can avoid if you have volunteers that frequent your local library (although mailing is easier since they have to arrive monthly). Be sure not to print the year on the bookmark since then you can use them in subsequent years.

January is also **Stalking Awareness Month**, so perhaps your first bookmark can focus on that issue.

### February:

Of course, try to organize a college or community performance of the **Vagina Monologues** (<http://www.vday.org>)! But if you're not doing that (or even if you are), sell or distribute **Healthy Relationships Valentine's Day Cards** (see attached). These cards can be sold in local high schools or communities along with flowers – school groups can be the sellers and can raise some funds for the agency if they're printed reasonably well on card stock. If you like the logo (a heart with an equal sign)

make those into buttons. They'll provoke great conversations when folks ask, "What does that mean?" and can be worn around the year.

As with many of these ideas, they will require planning time long before February. If possible, make a timeline starting six months before with to-do lists, so you aren't rushed at the end.

February is also **African-American History Month**. If possible, organize an awareness campaign about sexual assault and/or domestic violence in the African-American community. Partner up with an organization in and/or serving that community if you don't work for one yourself.

### **March:**

Sometimes your message "delivery system" is as important as the message itself. Using bookmarks and over-the-road banners to supplement more "traditional" methods of outreach such as flyers can increase your audience and reach new populations.

Consider the small plastic frame called the "**Point of Purchase (POP) Display**." Used widely by the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, these frames hold an 8-inch by 11-inch flyer, and can be "adopted" by local businesses. Each month, or several times per year, you can design a new **flyer** to put into the frame – or, if you've got an event going on, put that flyer in! Supplement each POP display with a business card holder containing hotline cards. Some POP displays are available with business card holders attached, but they're more expensive. The least expensive ones I've found are at <http://www.displays2go.com>, but let me know if you find ones that are less expensive.

As with the bookmarks, consider "specialty" fliers for these frames. For example, in March you can have a **Women's History (Herstory) Month** flyer, connecting the visibility of historical women to violence prevention. POP displays are best if given to stores that volunteers frequent – a volunteer can be in charge of five or more businesses that have agreed to "adopt" displays. Volunteers shouldn't be in charge of too many of these – the idea is to put them in businesses that they frequent on at least a weekly basis, otherwise the displays tend to be put to the side (if they are consistently put to the side, politely ask for them back).

### **April:**

Of course, this is **Sexual Assault Awareness Month** – for ideas, go to <http://www.nsvrc.org>, state sexual assault coalition websites and other allied organizations. If you work for a domestic violence program, consider calling your local rape crisis center and see how you can collaborate – your **Bookmark of the Month** and/or **flyer** can reflect how batterers can sexually assault their victims and use sexual assault as part of a pattern of power and control. Or, write a **letter to the editor** or **column** in your local paper describing such a connection, expressing support for your local rape crisis center and encouraging community involvement in both issues.

### **May:**

Most sexual assault and domestic violence is committed by men, so why shouldn't men take the initiative in seeking solutions? In some communities, men have publicly signed a **Mother's Day Men's Pledge** to never commit, condone or remain silent about men's violence against women. This pledge is signed as a gift to men's mothers, sisters, daughters and other women in their lives, as a Mother's Day present to try and help rid the world of men's violence against women. The men's names (and sometimes, boy's names) can then be published in a local newspaper that donates the ad space – or, each man can contribute

money towards the cost of the ad. A lower-cost alternative is to design a flyer with the names and post it. (Run the names by local advocates first, unless you don't mind known rapists and batterers signing the pledge!)

A local pro-feminist men's organization that has done this quite successfully is the Men's Resource Center of Western MA (<http://www.mensresourcecenter.org>). Their website has some examples of signature ads they've done. The White Ribbon Campaign in Canada is the source for the "never commit, condone or remain silent" language (<http://www.whiteribbon.com>).

#### **June:**

**Father's Day** is another day around which to organize voices of men utilizing Father/Son walks or Father/Daughter walks to raise funds for a local rape crisis center or domestic violence program. The national group, "Dads and Daughters" works to stop men's violence against women from a father's perspective (<http://www.dadsanddaughters.com>). Or, print Father's Day cards that celebrate fathers that model healthy forms of fatherhood. In West Virginia one year, ads were printed in the newspaper that read, "If you know a father who resolves conflicts through negotiation and fairness rather than by using violence and control, don't just pat him on the back this Father's Day. Make the decision to do the same." Copyright-free clip-art images of fathers and men are available on the Web that one can use.

#### **July:**

Although not as immediately useful for rape crisis centers, the **Silent Witness Display** is a stunning visual depiction of domestic murder. These life-sized, red wooden silhouettes of domestic murder victims are available in all 50 US States – find your state coordinator by going to <http://www.silentwitness.net>. Each Witness has a story of a murder victim from that state printed on a shield in the front of the Witness.

Silent Witnesses can be displayed in schools, on streets, in the mall or at the library. In Concord, MA, area businesses "adopted" a Silent Witness for a month at a time – they would bring them out to their sidewalk every morning and bring them in at night. When it rained or was windy, they'd take them in and display them in the store itself (the Witnesses are free-standing). At the end of the month, business owners were reluctant to part with "their" Witness.

Other displays that can be easily put up include the **Clothesline Project** (see below), or **Photo Displays** in plastic frames (perhaps the same Point-of-Purchase Displays used for flyers). There are many traveling photo displays and art exhibits, or you can create your own. A domestic violence shelter in Auburn, Maine took photos at community events and displayed those photos in area restaurants. The photos told stories of how community members could make a difference, and included messages about healthy relationships and warning signs of abuse as captions. The display moved from restaurant to restaurant every month, with one photo on each table near the salt and the ketchup.

#### **August:**

The summer features many community **parades** and it's always good to organize a **float** in your local parade. Gloucester, MA organizes men to carry large paper-Mache hands that say things like "Helping," "Hugging," and "Playing," with a float saying, "Hands are Not for Hitting – Gloucester Men Against Domestic Abuse" (<http://www.strongmendontbully.com>).

The Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (<http://www.ricadv.org>) put up **Over-the-Road Banners** in rural towns. These banners can be expensive initially, but can be moved from town to town

every month and hung for that month. In Acton, MA the banner from a DV program read “No one has the right to control the life of another human being” on one side and “Domestic violence and healthy relationships are everyone’s business – to help or get help, call...” on the other. Sometimes there is a minimal cost to hang the banner, and certain towns have rules and regulations about hanging, banner size, etc. – check your Town Hall for details. Perhaps the month the banner is up can coincide with a Silent Witness display or other event in that town.

August also begins **orientations in local colleges** – they usually are required to cover issues like sexual assault and dating violence. Use this opportunity to introduce them to your services by connecting with the New Student’s Program at your local college, if you haven’t already. They may want you to come give a short presentation or skit to incoming first-year students.

### **September:**

This is often a month when you can give **assemblies in high schools** on sexual assault and dating violence prevention. Theatre-based education is ideal for this sort of assembly – groups that perform plays such as The Yellow Dress (<http://www.deanasfund.org>), You the Man (<http://www.addverbproductions.com>), and Voices of Men (<http://www.voicesofmen.org>) are available or you can write your own.

High schools are also a good place to display the **Clothesline Project** (<http://www.clotheslineproject.org>), a striking visual display of multicolored shirts with writing and designs on them. Each shirt includes the voices of victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, incest, homophobic violence and victims attacked for political reasons, and murder victims, depending on the color of the shirt. Sets of shirts are usually available in your area, or you can start a Clothesline Project of your own after you have several shirt-making days.

### **October:**

Tired of folding purple ribbons all month? (Or teal ribbons all April?) Purchase **self-adhesive ribbons** instead at <http://www.theribbonlady.com> - \$28 for a roll of 100 gives you time to do other things like organize your vigil, survivor speak out, or walk. Sexual assault programs can collaborate as noted above in April.

Another possible tie-in is with the **Breast Cancer Awareness Month** (also October). Why wear a pink ribbon next to your purple ribbon when you can have one **pink-and-purple ribbon**? (“The Ribbon Lady” can custom-make them for you with notice.) Framingham, MA held a press conference one year announcing that women’s health groups were working with domestic violence programs to promote the pink/purple ribbon. Called **“Domestic Violence and Women’s Health – Making the Connections,”** this event featured speakers and handouts that drew the connections between the two issues – work with your local Breast Cancer Awareness folks to see if you can duplicate the event.

### **November:**

In Lewiston, Maine a few years ago, area agencies collaborated on the **Holidays Shouldn’t Hurt** Campaign. This campaign featured flyers with different faces saying, “All I want for the holidays is to feel safe in my home.” (A different slogan could be adopted for sexual assault awareness.) The faces can be white women, women of color, young and old women, teens, families and men. Care should be taken to dispel the myth that “holiday stress causes violence” – media coverage of this campaign may try to come at it from that direction.

November 25<sup>th</sup> is also the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/news/vawd.html>), and begins Sixteen Days of Activism Against Gender Violence (<http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/16days/home.html>). Thus, the opportunity exists to connect local violence with the international movement for violence prevention.

### **December:**

If you're not still busy with the "Holidays Shouldn't Hurt" campaign, why not have a **speaker** or a **movie night?** Educational videos on sexual assault, domestic violence and other forms of violence against women are reviewed at the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence ([http://www.vawnet.org/NRCDVPublications/TAPE/OtherResources/NRC\\_Videolist.php](http://www.vawnet.org/NRCDVPublications/TAPE/OtherResources/NRC_Videolist.php)), or you can rent a Hollywood film and discuss the accuracies and inaccuracies contained within.

There are plenty of excellent speakers in our movement, including survivor speakers like Katie Koestner (<http://www.campusoutreachservices.com>). Or, host a performance of "That Takes Ovaries," a celebration of gutsy women that includes an interactive portion where community women speak about their bold and brazen acts (<http://www.thattakesovaries.org>).

Of course, if we organized ALL these events, we would have one or two people come to each one! But each event will reach different community members, and if our outreach is diverse in nature, we will get the word out and slowly change our culture until this violence hardly happens at all.

*Ben Atherton-Zeman has worked for thirteen years in the movement to end sexual assault and domestic violence. He has organized many of these events suggested above, with varying degrees of success. Ben currently makes his living performing a one-man educational comedy, "Voices of Men" in high schools, colleges and communities – the play covers sexual assault, domestic violence and objectification using celebrity male characters. He lives with his partner Lucinda in Acton, MA, and can be reached at [benazeman@hotmail.com](mailto:benazeman@hotmail.com).*