

**GENERATING RESOURCES FOR BATTERED WOMEN VIA
COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT: CONNECT, INC.**

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One way to increase economic opportunity for battered women is to work with the community-based organizations (CBOs) that also serve them. Working with community organizations to expand their individual and collective response to domestic violence increases battered women's economic options. For example, informed CBOs are in a better position to help a woman who is faced with the loss of her job or housing because of domestic violence. CBOs with the capacity to combine economic and domestic violence issues are critical to battered women's safety and financial stability. The Community Empowerment Program (CEP) of *CONNECT, Inc.* of New York City is an example of such a CBO capacity development approach.

Structured to address violence against women and their families through a mix of community organizing, capacity building, and development, CEP started in 2001 in specific neighborhoods in Brooklyn. Projects were added in Queens and the Bronx in 2003. **The primary CEP work involves relationship building with, and among, non-domestic violence service providers located in neighborhoods with large foreign-born immigrant populations.**

CEP's method includes: (1) research; (2) one-to-one organizational relationship building; and (3) linking and developing community networks.

With the goal of better understanding the community's perception of family violence, CEP conducts research primarily through

community needs assessments, focus groups, and sidewalk surveys. **Needs assessments** are part of CEP's approach to developing relationships with community-based organizations (CBOs). The assessments help CEP understand the perspectives of community organizations serving battered women and their families. **CEP Focus groups** vary based on neighborhood demographics and have included Men, Youth and Teens, Christian Women, Jewish Women, Healthcare Providers, and Substance Abuse Treatment Providers. CEP also carries out **sidewalk surveys** of neighborhood residents. The surveys provide CEP with information about residents' attitudes toward child abuse and domestic violence, knowledge of existing family violence services, and willingness to respond to a friend or neighbor experiencing family violence.

CEP develops relationships with a wide-range of community, school, and faith-based organizations in each project neighborhood. The organizations include programs that provide mental health and substance abuse counseling, HIV/AIDS advocacy, immigrant services, daycare, and prenatal care. A needs assessment interview often begins the formal networking. CEP uses memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with many of the CBOs to ensure both sides understand the goals and expectations of the collaboration. CEP regularly offers CBOs small grant stipends (usually from \$3500-\$5000), training opportunities, grant writing assistance, domestic violence information, and referral connections to help the CBO respond when its clients are experiencing family violence.

CEP is designed as a short-term, 2-3 year, initiative in each site. Institutionalizing the community-based response becomes critical.

CEP's strategy is to convene and facilitate a network in each project site comprised of organizational representatives and community leaders. The network provides educational opportunities, resource sharing, and sponsorship of community events and dialogue. At the Brooklyn site, for example, the ongoing network has some 45 partners meeting once a month. Discussion topics have varied from VAWA's impact on immigrant women to male privilege. The network also helps recruit new members.

Lisa DeGeneste, CEP Director, emphasizes that individuals and organizations in every community have the potential to respond to family violence. A community approach means battered women can get information and help from the places where they feel comfortable – which may mean a small business such as a beauty shop or the local library. Building such a network requires openness to working with many types of organizations and sustaining interest and awareness of those involved.

LESSONS LEARNED:

1. Community research can be used to raise awareness, build relationships and tailor domestic violence responses. Convincing a CBO that domestic violence is an important issue and that the organization can respond to it is a basic challenge of community-based

advocacy. CEP's approach to community research has been successful in meeting that challenge. The organizational needs assessments provide concrete opportunities for each CBO to identify and define what they would like in a partnership with CEP. The research process helps CEP gain insight into what the community is thinking, tests CEP's perceptions, and allows CEP to plan and tailor a menu of possible family violence responses based upon community-defined needs. This approach has led community organizations to hold focus groups of Haitian, Caribbean, and Hispanic women to understand their experiences, to provide emergency funds for housing and food for battered women, and to develop a brochure on maternal-fetal health for Caribbean immigrant women.

2. Community organizing around family violence takes time and a diverse, skilled, staff. CEP is a linking, networking, and capacity-building catalyst for neighborhood organizations, residents, and survivors of domestic violence. Community events, workshops, MOU established collaborative projects, research, relationship building, network development and training are time-consuming and require skilled workers. CEP staffing is diverse, particularly with respect to race, ethnicity, gender and age. A core of five employees teams with some 12-15 consultants working in community, on training, and research. Funding comes primarily from New York City Council awards.

--Andrea Farney, NRC DV Policy Analyst

For more on *CONNECT's CEP approach* go to www.connectnyc.org. Research requests can be directed to 212-683-0015. Related policy and practice guidance can be found in: *“Early Childhood, Domestic Violence, and Poverty: Helping Young Children and Their Families,” Paper Series, Susan Schechter Project Director and Series Editor. Titles in the Series include: (1) Helping Young Children Affected by Domestic Violence: The Role of Pediatric Health Settings; (2) Young Children Living with Domestic Violence: The Role of Early Childhood Programs; (3) Domestic Violence and Family Support Programs: Creating Opportunities to Help Young Children and Their Families; (4) Police in the Lives of Young Children Exposed to Domestic Violence; (5) Working with Young Children and Their Families: Recommendations for Domestic Violence Agencies and Batterer Intervention Programs; (6) Young Children's Exposure to Adult Domestic Violence: Toward a Developmental Risk and Resilience Framework for Research and Intervention. Available at: <http://www.uiowa.edu/socialwk/publications.html> and www.vawnet.org and by calling the NRC DV at 800-537-2238.*

Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence is an ongoing initiative to help domestic violence organizations collaborate more effectively in their communities and build visions, policies, and practices that respond to the current realities facing battered women and their families, especially those living in poverty. The BCS Newsletter serves as a forum for sharing economic advocacy-related projects involving domestic violence programs. Let us know what you think of this newsletter. We want to hear from you. Send an email to acf@pcadv.org or call 1-800-537-2238 and ask for Andrea Farney, BCS Newsletter Editor.