



# Monthly Visions

Reflection  
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## Facilitating Youth Theater Program 2009

By Betty Huang, Youth Arts & Activism Community Action Team Member

It was like a déjà vu moment. One year ago, I was learning the basics of dating and domestic violence and exploring these topics that are generally taboo in society. This time, I was the one standing in front of a group of peers and facilitating the discussions and activities at the New Visions Youth Theater Program, an annual program committed to developing youth leaders in dating/domestic violence prevention. The tension and reluctance of the participants to talk about such a serious topic suddenly became my responsibility to break down, as opposed to my own emotions that I had been struggling with. In this moment, I realized how much we need more dialogue on a serious topic such as dating and domestic violence. The desire of the participants to take action against dating and domestic violence was stifled by contradicting messages about relationships from parents, the media, and society. Dialogue was halted by discomfort and insecurity of what the norm of relationships should be.



Betty Huang with participants @ Youth Theater Program 2009  
(in the middle in hooded shirt)

At first glance, it seems obvious what is right and wrong. When comparing disagreements and fights between couples to dating and domestic violence, we found a grey area— there was no distinctive line to draw conclusions from. The causes are so deeply rooted that without knowing, we had all accepted behaviors that validate dating and domestic violence. An issue so obviously unacceptable in society is also sustained through the same set of social expectations. The biggest struggle in the learning process wasn't about learning how to treat a partner, but trying to understand why perpetrators can both love as well as hurt their partner. And so, we began to work through the convoluted beliefs and emotions surrounding relationships.

The most difficult task was creating a working definition of dating and domestic violence. Every year, we would begin with a paragraph, almost a list of the types of dating and domestic violence mixed in with the causes and the many consequences into a haphazard statement. Each meeting, we would re-visit the definition and revise it—putting out the unimportant and unnecessary, and putting in more appropriate terms and phrases that were learned each day. By the end, the definition is short and direct, a completely new creature that no longer reveals stumbling, insecure words, but a forthright and concise definition addressing the thoughts we are afraid to say and the questions we were afraid to ask.

They say you retain 90% of what you teach. Facilitating the Youth Theater Program developed skills to verbalize what I had been taught in the previous year into concrete ideas and concepts as well as helping to prevent and raise awareness by empowering others to communicate about dating and domestic violence. The Youth Theater Program did more than make me think—it made dating and domestic violence a problem that we can begin to solve, whether it be at the stage of beginning to discuss the topic or empowering visions of a feasible end.

**New Visions** is a community-university partnership whose mission is to inspire and support sustainable community action for ending violence against women in Asian communities of Southeast Michigan. Affiliated with the University of Michigan School of Social Work, we work with local Asian communities and domestic violence-related agencies to achieve one vision: "Asian women are safe, and Asian communities are free of violence."

## Reflection

### Participating in Youth Theater Program 2009

By Heba Ansari, Youth Theater Program 2009 participant

New Visions Youth Theater Program (YTP) is an intensive program with the goal of enlightening youth from Southeast Michigan on preventing dating/domestic violence. I am a proud participant and an active new member of YTP.

YTP consisted of sessions centered around understanding dating/domestic violence (e.g. definition, prevalence, root causes, socio-cultural factors, etc), especially within Asian and Asian American communities. The four-hour long sessions were led by a combination of peer facilitators, who have previously went through YTP, and two staff members from New Visions.



Heba Ansari @ Youth Theater Program 2009  
(on the right)

During the first few sessions, the facilitators gradually introduced the issue of dating/domestic violence. We focused on what it meant to each individual and we shared what we already knew about dating/domestic violence. I really had no background information on dating/domestic violence, except for the information mentioned in Health class. The discussions helped everyone actively participate and express their opinions in a safe and effective manner. Dating/domestic violence tends to be a topic that is avoided in conversations and assumed to be a "private matter". One of the most important lessons we learned in the course is that it isn't a "private matter" and needs to be discussed openly.

Throughout the program, the group of participants also engaged in many hands on activities as well. One such activity was "human sculpting." In this activity, the participants were divided into groups and each group had to portray what dating/ domestic violence us using their own

bodies. All the groups were able to view each others' sculpture, make comments, and discuss them with the sculptors. This brought the characters to life in my eyes and helped everyone talk about domestic violence as presented in the sculptures.

Besides the hands on activities, our group began a "working definition" of dating/domestic violence. The working definition captures what we think dating/domestic violence is but is revised as we progress through the program. The working definition we developed changed each session. This process helped add a new dimension to the whole program. As we continued to develop our working definition, the sessions focused on the types of abuse and who it involved. Mini discussions led by the facilitators probed into our thoughts and we began to take things a little farther and deeper. Discussions began to last longer and even drew in modern cultural references.

The end of the program impacted me the most. We watched the video called, " Domestic Violence: Faces of Fear," which was about the causes domestic violence, and those who were abused. The hardest parts to watch were the pictures of those who were abused and how the abuse had affected their lives. One woman went as far as to check her rearview mirror for her abusive husband as she drove to work, even though he was dead. The video focused on how to help those in an abusive relationship, the counseling that many people need, and how companies are working to address/prevent domestic violence among their employees. Theater, acting, and delving into a character were important lessons to be learned. Some improvisation exercises helped us take different roles and learn different techniques better.

Overall I had a great experience with YTP. I would highly recommend it to anyone who was interested! I learned so much from the program but I still have a ways to go. I plan on continuing my involvement in New Visions and learning more in the near future.

## Reflection

### Facilitation Youth Theater Program 2009

By Milliza Malabanan, Youth Arts & Activism Community Action Team Member

As an Asian-American female living in the United States, I believe it is safe to say that my experiences growing up have been far from the "American standard." My parents have set forth rules that they have grown accustomed to back in the Philippines. Needless to say, the culture clash between my generation and theirs' have caused many disagreements. My multi-cultural experiences have pushed me to gain an interest in other cultures and diversity; for three years in high school, I dedicated much of my time to working with people from all the corners of the world. As time progressed, I decided to expand my horizons and delve into a new cause. At the annual Asian Pacific Islander American High School Conference hosted at University of Michigan, I was offered an invitation to attend a New Visions' program geared towards youth that allowed us to explore the causes of dating violence and work on ways to prevent it. More specifically, our form of prevention was through the arts.



Milliza Malabanan (left) and Patrick David  
@ Youth Theater Program 2009

As a youth participant my first year, I was able to delve into dating violence and I was able to get a basic understanding about prevention and the many forms that prevention can take. Through the discussions and the long hours, the group created a sketch, "Days of Our High School Lives" which is about a girl who is going through an abusive relationship and her friend's attempt to help her. Through this experience, I was able to really gain a real passion for preventing dating violence from becoming problematic to future Asian-American youth. Luckily, I have been able to continue on with New Visions as a member of the Youth Arts and Activism Team (YAACAT). For the past two years, I have been a member of YAACAT. In my time being a CAT member, I was able to meet many new people and facilitate dialogue with many youth who have also been given the opportunity to join the Youth Theater Program.

In my combined three years of participation with New Visions and their youth programs, I believe the most impactful experiences came from being a facilitator. I do not think there is anything more fulfilling than being able to teach others about a cause you really believe in. In working with diverse youth, I feel that I have been able to make an impact on future generations of Asian-Americans. Even though it may be a smaller number at a time, I feel that the work that New Visions does is progressing. Being a facilitator also helped me review all the same things I learned while I was a youth participant; it allowed me to see things from a different perspective and better understand the different topics we covered. I remember as a participant, a lot of the videos on dating violence we watched were very heavy and were hard to take in. However, being able to see them a second and third time allowed me to really understand where all the survivors were coming from, and it gave me a better understanding of why the cycle of violence continues on today.

I truly believe that the efforts of New Visions to prevent the continuation of domestic and dating violence within the Asian-American communities of Southeast Michigan is a very important work in our communities. I strongly encourage others to join the group, whether youth or adults, New Visions has many other Community Actions Teams that are open to people from different backgrounds. This is a great experience and more people should take this opportunity to help make a difference in their communities.

## Reflection

### Learning about Domestic Violence

By Hye-min Min, Leadership for Safe Asian Communities (LSAC) Project Working Group Member

What do you think about while watching movies that portray women who are being abused by their husbands/partners and are trying to escape from them such as in movies like, *Sleeping with the Enemy* and *A Cry for Help: The Tracy Thurman Story*? Do you think that this kind of violence does not happen around you? Before I participated in New Visions' Leadership for Safe Asian Communities (LSAC) project, I thought that domestic violence only happened in movies, or at least not around me.

One day, my friend asked if I would be interested in participating in a domestic violence prevention project. At that time, I was not interested, because the word, 'domestic violence' was something that I have never heard from anyone around me. I thought domestic violence only happened to someone special. However, I would later learn that it was not.

For the past three months, I have been participating in a series of training for the LSAC project, which is aimed at developing leaders in domestic violence prevention amongst Asian community-based and faith-based organizations. Ann Arbor Chinese Christian Church and the Korean Church of Ann Arbor are participating in this project. A total of five members, including myself, from these churches have been involved in these trainings. After we complete the trainings, we will be creating domestic violence prevention discussion groups at our churches. These discussion groups will be a place where men/women gather on a regular basis to learn and dialogue about domestic violence and explore ways to prevent it.

The movies I watched about women being abused by their husbands/partners were not just works of fiction. Since participating in the training, I have learned that between 41% and 60% of Asian women in the U.S. are estimated to experience violence from their intimate partner sometime in their lives. I have always thought that there is no excuse for violence towards women no matter how minor the injury may be. However, I was really shocked to learn just how many women are experiencing domestic violence. This fact alone motivated me further to be involved in the project. I wanted to know more about the facts and problem Asian women are facing due to domestic violence.

Through the training, I learned what domestic violence is, its root causes, and socio-cultural factors that contribute to and reinforce domestic violence. I also learned what prevention is and the role of organizations and communities in preventing domestic violence. I also had a chance to visit SafeHouse Center, which is a local domestic violence organization in Washtenaw county working to help those who are abusive relationships, to learn about what they do and how they help women/men who are abused by their intimate partners. The most impressive time was meeting with a guest speaker who survived through domestic violence. While listening to her, I truly felt domestic violence an issue that all communities and society should try to solve together.

Everyone agrees that we need to protect women from the domestic violence but they are not sure how to do it exactly. Therefore, there is a program like New Visions trying to make people recognize the seriousness of domestic violence and the need to prevent it. I hope there would be more funding and volunteers to help New Visions create more prevention programs. I believe that small movement can make a huge difference.

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