

**PEACE  
OVER  
VIOLENCE**  
ONE ON ONE, ONE BY ONE



ADVOCACY

**TEEN DATING  
VIOLENCE AND  
SEXUAL VIOLENCE  
POLICY PILOT PROJECT  
AT MIGUEL CONTRERAS  
LEARNING COMPLEX  
SEPTEMBER 2009**

Funded by The California Endowment

## MISSION STATEMENT

**Building healthy relationships,  
families, and communities free  
from sexual, domestic and  
interpersonal violence**

## PROJECT TEAM

Emily Austin

Lili Herrera

Abigail Sims

Leona L. Smith

Frank Blaney

Trina Green

Ralph Tabares

D'Anthony Allen

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# Peace Over Violence

## Teen Dating and Sexual Violence Policy Project Overview

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Peace Over Violence, (formerly the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women) a social services/social change organization that works to prevent and respond to domestic and sexual violence, began a teen dating violence policy project at Miguel Contreras Learning Complex (MCLC), part of Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), in October 2007. This project was made possible by a generous grant from The California Endowment. Originally designed as a project in which administrators adopt a teen dating and sexual violence prevention policy on campus, the approach at MCLC evolved to become a youth-driven, grass-roots policy movement that challenged the campus to prevent teen dating and sexual violence. This paper reviews the process of the pilot project and summarizes lessons learned from working on teen dating and sexual violence issues in a concentrated manner by describing the pilot site characteristics; defining the policy project, explaining prevention activities; reviewing successes and challenges; and, finally, providing recommendations to others who are seeking teen dating and sexual violence policy change in school systems.

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# Peace Over Violence

## Peace Over Violence's Work in Teen Dating and Sexual Violence Prevention:

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Peace Over Violence (formerly the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women) developed the nationally-recognized violence prevention program, In Touch With Teens (ITWT), in 1991, in response to the growing awareness of violence in teen relationships. ITWT training and prevention programs engage teens in education, advocacy and organizing in order to help teens create violence-free relationships. POV is active in advocating and advising policy change for local, regional and statewide shifts in teen dating violence prevention, education and intervention. In Touch With Teens has been implemented in high schools, middle schools, juvenile detention centers, and other community based youth organizations. Initially funded by the Office of Criminal Justice Planning in 1992, the program has grown to include Students Together Organizing Peace (STOP clubs), YouthLEAD leadership development project, Peer 2 Peer counseling, My Strength (for young men) and Be Strong (for young women). Peace Over Violence continues to stand in the forefront of the movement for relationship and sexual abuse prevention for teens.

## Where—Pilot Site Characteristics:

The school system selected for the project, LAUSD, is unique in California and the nation for several reasons. Los Angeles is a large, sprawling city, with a diverse and segregated population. LAUSD is the largest school district in the state and the second largest school district in the nation. Working on the district-level to advocate for policy change has proved extremely difficult, especially given the recent single-minded focus on academic achievement and the challenges of the current economic crisis. LAUSD includes over 723,000 students, 35,000 staff, and over 200 high and middle schools. Because the huge and unwieldy nature of LAUSD, POV proposed to launch the policy project on a campus-specific basis to serve as a pilot that could then be expanded to scale.

MCLC was our selected partner school because of the progressive and innovative campus organization, and the opportunity to serve a community with limited resources. MCLC is dedicated to smaller learning environments and integrating social issues into academics—thus providing an opportunity for POV to work with a smaller campus within the large LAUSD school district. MCLC was established in 2006 and is named after labor union organizer, Miguel Contreras. It is composed of three different small learning communities: ( 1 ) The Academic Leadership Community, ( 2 ) Social Justice, and ( 3 ) Business & Tourism. The complex also encompasses a separate school called the Los Angeles School Of Global Studies (LASGS), which currently holds one of the highest standardize test scores in the area. Peace Over Violence primarily worked on policy development and environment change with LASGS with a student body of 350 students. The school serves a largely Latino population, over 85 % identified as Hispanic or Latino in the 2000 Census.<sup>1</sup> Also, the majority of students are from families with low socio-economic status, given that over 81% of families in the community are enrolled in the subsidized school lunch program,<sup>2</sup> and 63.5% of children in the surrounding community are living in poverty.<sup>3</sup>

MCLC was a brand-new school in 2007, when POV approached administrators to partner in this project. During the pilot project period, POV has observed MCLC grow as a campus in the number of students and prestige. POV experienced some of the growing pains with MCLC, such as budget cuts, union strikes, and high faculty and staff turn-over. The policy project has adapted to these challenges with MCLC staff members and administrators. Further, POV's access to the campus has grown each year.

<sup>1</sup> United States 2000 Census Data, Zip Code Tabulation Area 90017 ( available at [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFacts?\\_event=Search&geo\\_id=&\\_geoContext=&\\_street=&\\_county=90017&\\_ciTYTown=90017&\\_state=&zip=90017&-lang=en&\\_sse=on&pctx=fph&pgsl=010&show\\_2003\\_tab=&redirect=Y](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFacts?_event=Search&geo_id=&_geoContext=&_street=&_county=90017&_ciTYTown=90017&_state=&zip=90017&-lang=en&_sse=on&pctx=fph&pgsl=010&show_2003_tab=&redirect=Y)).

<sup>2</sup> Children's Scorecard data Profile, Zip Code 90017 (available at [http://thechildrenscouncil.net/MapGallery/OlddataStructure/OLDZIP/zip\\_90017.pdf](http://thechildrenscouncil.net/MapGallery/OlddataStructure/OLDZIP/zip_90017.pdf)).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

Through providing TDV/SV Policy Prevention Activities such as, technical assistance, education, and youth programming, POV worked to create campus social norms change.

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## What–TDV/SV Policy Project Description: A Youth-Driven Campaign

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The Teen Dating Violence and Sexual Violence (TDV/SV) Policy Project was a campus-specific project that worked to empower youth to demand TDV/SV prevention and intervention services on campus, and trained staff and administrators about TDV/SV response and prevention in schools. Through providing TDV/SV Policy Prevention Activities such as, technical assistance, education, and youth programming, POV worked to create campus social norms change, so that schools have the expertise and information to positively prevent and intervene in teen dating and sexual violence situations. POV worked with violence prevention policy experts, stakeholders, and gatekeepers to move TDV/SV policy in schools forward on the local, state and national level.

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## How–TDV/SV Prevention Activities:

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Teen Dating and Sexual Violence Prevention Activities at MCLC aimed at empowering and developing leadership in youth to effect the campus environment and pressure administrators, teachers, and parents to acknowledge and respond to dating violence, and promote healthy relationships.

Youth in the policy project have been trained in TDV/SV prevention, facts, and bystander accountability with the goal of changing the campus environment by becoming leaders in violence prevention. In September 2008, POV provided a youth leadership summit for students that focused on developing advocacy and public speaking skills. More students were recruited to the program through their advisory teachers. POV facilitators taught *In Touch With Teens*, a relationship violence prevention curriculum, for youth ages 13-19 to two advisory classes (approximately 45 students) once a week during the school year. After receiving training and materials, these students began to craft their own approach to TDV/SV prevention and re-interpret POV's messages and lessons to better suit their campus and student population.

Youth started their own STOP Club (Students Together Organizing Peace Club), a student-run club promoting peace on campus, with the support of a sponsoring teacher and POV facilitators. The STOP Club to produce a series of campaign events. This culminated in 2009 with a campus-wide assembly on peace and violence prevention that featured STOP Club written plays on healthy and unhealthy relationships produced in partnership with the school's drama department. Students also organized a campus poster and door decorating campaign that encouraged students and staff to decorate their doors and create posters that talked about TDV/SV and community resources with the goal of preventing TDV/SV and educating the campus-at-large about relationship violence.

During the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years, POV staff members worked with student leaders to organize Denim Day in L.A, a city-wide campaign to raise awareness and educate the public about rape and sexual assault, and Denim Day LAUSD, a district-wide campaign. Both years, student leaders made presentations on teen dating violence in several classrooms, designed shirts, and distributed flyers. The campaign gained momentum each year and solidified POV's presence on campus.

Currently, POV staff members teach a Peer 2 Peer counseling class a school-based program that trains young people in basic counseling and referral skills related to adolescent specific issues. The class runs twice a week, and helps the youth trained serve as resource people, leaders and activist on campus. STOP Club remains active on campus. STOP Club student leaders participated in an intensive Youth Over Violence training during the summer, where they developed a deeper understanding of the principles of violence prevention and honed their public speaking and presenting skills. These student leaders made a commitment to volunteer with POV as student speakers during the next school year. In September 2009, STOP Club student leaders participated in a Leadership Luncheon where they discussed their plans and goals for the year.

Overall, POV worked closely with over 100 students, and intensely worked with a core group of 12 student leaders. The entire campus of MCLC, over 2,500 students, were reached through the project on-campus.

POV trained over 50 parents on teen dating and sexual violence during three parent orientation sessions, also, POV trained school staff members and administrators during class room presentations. POV will be training staff members again during professional development days during the current school year.

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## Successes and Impact:

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POV consulted with Harder+Company Community Research (Harder+Company) to develop evaluation and impact tools, and Harder+Company reported back findings based on key informant interviews and focus groups with students and staff. The findings show that both students and school staff indicated that the TDV/SV prevention activities at their school have had a positive impact on the campus by introducing some social norms change, educating students and faculty, and developing youth leadership.

The TDV prevention activities impacted the student leaders as they became more aware of teen dating and sexual violence and became motivated to help others.

The following are comments from student leaders:

- "At first I didn't take it seriously, but now I do. It has helped me help other people."
- "STOP [Club] has made me realize that violence is very bad, it also motivated me to participate in my school."

**"At first I didn't take it seriously, but now I do. It has helped me help other people."**

- Student Leader

**“Prevention activities have changed how we treat each other – it can affect someone if you say something bad to them. It has kind of changed what I look for in a relationship – because you have to get to know that person really well.”**

- Student Leader

**“There has been a slight change. The knowledge is there. If we keep it up, I believe there will be a larger change.”**

- Staff Member School

**“I’m actually pretty surprised The Policy Project it turned out so well. I didn’t think it would have as much impact as it did.”**

- Staff Member School

- “[TDV prevention activities] changed what I think is acceptable. I used to think that the victim should get blamed because it was her fault – now I see it really is not her fault.”

One student leader indicated that involvement in the teen dating and sexual violence prevention activities changed the way he/she interacts with his/her peers and said, “Prevention activities have changed how we treat each other – it can affect someone if you say something bad to them. It has kind of changed what I look for in a relationship – because you have to get to know that person really well. That way you know how they really act when they’re mad or something is really bothering them.” School staff members also expressed that student leaders’ participation in the TDV prevention activities gave students an opportunity to take a leadership position.

Students reported that through the localized Denim Day campaign they were able to provide information regarding teen dating violence to students at their school. One student stated, “...because of Denim Day, there were [a] lot of students who were involved and they were really into the info that they have learned.” They encouraged students to report dating violence if they or someone they know are experiencing it and provided the POV hotline number. One student leader indicated that they saw some changes in students’ behaviors and reported, “Actually, I saw some changes in school – not big ones, but I saw the girls not hitting the guys anymore when they were fooling or joking around. I saw more changes in how the girls reacted.” Similarly, school staff reported that through Denim Day the student body knew and recognized POV. It increased knowledge about teen dating violence among the student body and encouraged students to think about it more critically. Students also learned how to support friends who are experiencing teen dating and sexual violence.

Additionally, as a result of teen dating and sexual violence prevention activities on campus, such as Denim Day and other large scale outreach campaigns, school staff members were more knowledgeable about domestic violence and teen dating violence issues and they wanted to learn more about it. One school staff member stated, “There has been a slight change. The knowledge is there. If we keep it up, I believe there will be a larger change.” Student leaders also noted that the prevention activities have positively impacted teachers and school staff. One student leader reported, “I think it made [teachers] feel like they could help other students, by bringing these things to the school. If students need help they can talk to a teacher. I think they got more information (they knew some), but I think they learned as well.”

Overall, all school staff members indicated that they were satisfied with TDV/SV prevention activities at their school site. One teacher felt that it exceeded his/her expectations and said, “I’m actually pretty surprised the policy project it turned out so well. I didn’t think it would have as much impact as it did.” Students interviewed also indicated that they were satisfied with their involvement in the TDV/SV prevention activities. One student leader stated, “I learned a lot, and I view things differently now. I’ll be involved with POV in the next years to bring the message to other youth.”

POV has continued to work on state and national teen dating and sexual violence prevention policy work. On the local level, POV presented on policy change to the Los Angeles City Council and LAUSD. On the state level, POV worked with The California Attorney General’s Office to publish a model policy in 2008. And on the national level, POV advised and contributed to a national TDV/SV model policy working group.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned:

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Two of the primary of the challenges encountered by the student leaders were that some students did not take the topic of teen dating violence seriously and other students did not feel comfortable with the topic because they were dating violence survivors.

A third challenge of the TDV prevention activities on campus was the need for greater teacher and administrator buy-in. Teachers often advised other student groups and they may have considered POV's TDV/SV prevention work with the students as a competition to their student groups and policy/social change issues. One school staff member reported, "Teachers believe other issues are more important (immigration, gang violence, etc.). So teachers are more concerned with these issues amongst the students and are doing their own thing."

Additionally, the school administrative staff members were spread thin, and they had less time to help promote or support the activities of an outside agency like POV. Challenges experienced by POV facilitators included the difficulty of scheduling training for MCLC staff members, as well as difficulty recruiting parents for teen dating and sexual violence workshops.

Also during the pilot project, MCLC experienced a high level of leadership turn-over, such as changes in principals, supervising counselors, and teachers. POV had to reintroduce programming and goals to these new leaders. In essence, POV has had to develop new relationships with administrators at MCLC every year of the project.

Finally, POV facilitators experienced a slow and gradual acceptance of dating and sexual violence prevention programs on campus, and facilitators had to adjust expectations to move with the building interest in prevention programs. After two years of developing relationships with the students and staff members, POV is recognized on campus and consulted as an expert in dating and sexual violence prevention by staff members and the student body.

## Recommendations:

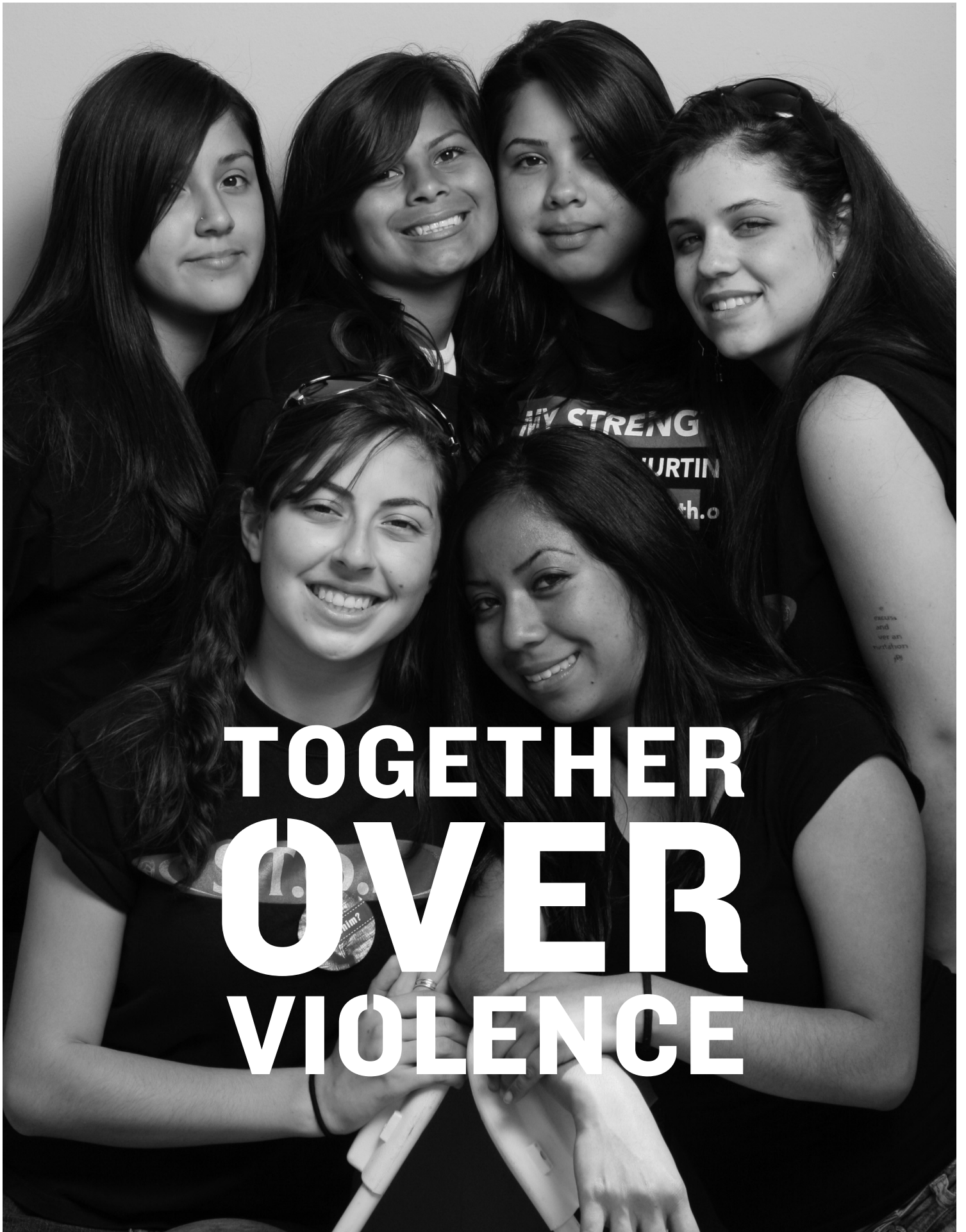
### For Agencies Seeking Teen Dating and Sexual Violence Policy Changes in Schools

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- **Develop a close relationship with a school, teachers, counselors, and administrators:** Developing a close relationship with a campus advocate to bring the outside agency's services onto campus. This advocate is someone who sees the value of the programs and can understand the impact on the students, and can be a teacher, counselor, or an administrator. It is also important to align violence prevention services and programs with the appropriate interested stakeholders, such as working with parent groups, student services, or health teachers. It is important to meet with school administrators to explain the agency's goals and programming. Working closely with a campus advocate will help you schedule the appropriate meetings and get access to the students and staff members.
- **Remain flexible in scheduling and goals:** When working with school systems, flexibility and adaptability are a must. Demands on staff members and students are large and stressful in school districts—where the focus on academic achievement is trying to also balance with positive socialization and safety concerns. By adapting to each school's environment and recognizing that different campuses have different needs, the trust the school has for your agency grows.
- **Become an active resource:** One of the best ways to develop and nurture a school relationship is through giving back to the school community as a resource and expert in relationship and sexual violence. POV staff works with schools on TDV/SV issues and interventions when needed, providing services to youth who experience violence and friends and families affected by relationship violence. POV has become the resource to call when staff recognizes unhealthy relationship behavior because the agency provides services to teens and knows the local resources. Through POV's 24-hour hotline, the Los Angeles Rape and Battering Hotline, and emergency services, the agency remains a resource for schools. Become the teen dating and sexual violence resource for your school system by being knowledgeable and available.
- **Make your campaign truly Youth-Driven:** To change a campus environment, you must have teens help teens. POV saw changes in perception and increased bystander accountability when teens took on relationship and sexual violence prevention as their own cause. Engaging youth is an art form, and the tenets of that form are to give them the tools (training, information, methods), create an active dialogue that uses critical thinking skills (groups discussions, not lectures), and give them the opportunity to be leaders—give them responsibility, support, and space to develop their voices and creativity in the campaign. The role of the agency is to mentor and guide youth into leadership positions. Social norms change is created through positive and supportive adult-teen relationships.

- **Use existing resources:** There has been a significant amount of work done in teen dating and sexual violence prevention during the past five years. Contact your state coalitions on domestic and sexual violence to access model school policies for your state and the nation. One California resource is the February 2008 Attorney General's Office Guide To Addressing Teen Dating and Sexual Violence in a School Setting, written by POV. Become familiar with the resources available and adapt them to your schools and communities.

- **Policy change is all around you:** Policy is not just a legislative change or an act of City Council; policy is everything that affects lives and the normal course of business, school and family. Black and white policy change (changes on paper at an official level) does not necessarily equate to changes in attitudes and behaviors in the target community. Effective policy change must engage the stakeholders and consumers in the issue. School system policy change should have a two prong approach—both a top down change (black and white policy changes such as, formal adoption of a policy, changes to school handbooks and bulletins on a school or district level), and grass-roots organizing, a bottom-up approach with is informed by the community. It is important to remember that, changes in school environment impact the family and the wider-community. Effective change in schools will be felt beyond the campus walls.



TOGETHER  
OVER  
VIOLENCE

## CONTACT

metro headquarters  
605 west olympic boulevard, suite 400  
los angeles, california 90015

213 . 955 . 9090 office  
213 . 955 . 9093 fax  
213 . 955 . 9095 TDD

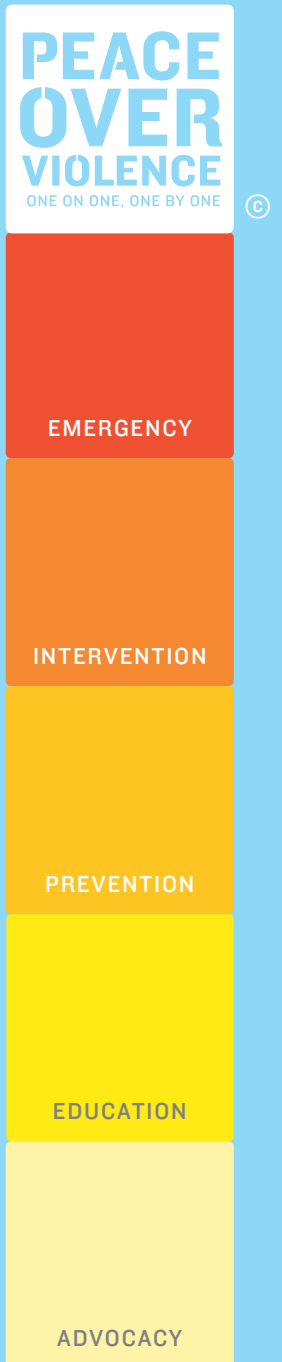
west san gabriel valley center  
892 north fair oaks avenue, suite D  
pasadena, california 91103

626 . 584 . 6191 office  
626 . 584 . 6193 fax  
626 . 584 . 6193 TDD

24-hour hotlines  
213 . 626 . 3393  
626 . 793 . 3385  
310 . 392 . 8381

video phone  
213 . 955 . 9249  
626 . 584 . 6118

[peaceoverviolence.org](http://peaceoverviolence.org)  
[youthoverviolence.org](http://youthoverviolence.org)  
[info@peaceoverviolence.org](mailto:info@peaceoverviolence.org)



Design by

Daniel Pizarro  
German Carvacho