



September 28, 2009

A new dialogue on domestic violence

The Mary Byron Project, a national not-for-profit organization located in Louisville, invites you to begin a new conversation about domestic violence.

Why do we need a new conversation?

There is no shortage of news about violence against women, from high profile cases such as the vicious assault on Rihanna to the recent tragic report of a former Kentucky legislator arrested for the murder of his ex-fiancée, Amanda Ross. But when the initial tragedy fades from public view, we are left with new victims but few new solutions. After we shake our heads and try to make sense out of the senseless, we go back to our own concerns and the next big headline, not understanding why this crime deserves more attention, and many more answers.

The Mary Byron Project, Fostering Innovative Strategies to End Domestic Violence, wants to change this. This organization, named for a victim of violence, was founded in 2000, seven years after the terrible murder of this beautiful young woman, and six years after a solution, VINE, was invented to prevent other women from suffering her fate. VINE notifies citizens when criminals are released from jail. Any citizen may be notified of the release of any inmate, but we know that domestic violence victims are the ones most likely to be injured or killed when their abuser is released. A bank robber doesn't blame the teller for his incarceration, but the abusive partner believes that the victim is to blame, and, when released, he or she may decide to punish the victim for the crime.

Our community did more than mourn Mary's death. Our community took action, and with the political will of Jefferson County government, the private sector's interest in this case, and the Byron family's commitment, men, women, and children in the state of Kentucky and in 47 more states are safer today. We made a difference then and we intend to make an impact now.

Louisville and Jefferson County will become the center of a new national conversation about domestic violence at our Summit to End Domestic Violence, the Mary Byron Project Showcases Innovative Solutions That Work from Nov. 8-10, 2009. This conversation will not revolve around a celebrity victim, or a well-known political figure accused of a heinous murder. Rather, we are gathering together innovative programs from 24 communities that are making substantive change in protecting victims, holding perpetrators accountable, and teaching children about healthy relationships. The sheer breadth of these programs is fascinating. Most do not come from traditional domestic violence agencies. They were created because their community or organization saw a need and decided to find a way to fill it – much the same way as Louisville/Jefferson County created VINE.

The presenters will showcase programs that address victims safety, offender accountability, prevention of dating violence, outreach into underserved areas, like the elderly or the faith community, and many more. The settings for these programs range from hospitals to universities, from businesses to mental health organizations, and almost everywhere in between. They come from small towns and from large cities. They were started by organizations who identified this crime in their service population and decided to take steps to eradicate it.

The presenters were all winners of our Celebrating Solutions awards, chosen in an arduous process involving national reviewers. They are not just “best practices,” they are innovative and they can and must be imitated. We need to end the epidemic crime of domestic violence (DV) because we all pay its price. The cost in human life is inestimable, but others have quantified the cost to businesses, medical care, rising insurance costs and lost educational opportunities for children who are truant in a vain attempt to protect their mothers at home. It is in the billions of dollars.

The Mary Byron Project challenges you to attend this Summit. We challenge you to not only applaud these programs but to commit to replicating them in your community. We need everyone to become involved, even if you have never attended a domestic violence meeting. This conversation involves all of us, not just victims' advocates, or prosecutors, or police, or judges.

DV affects every single one of us, and if we are to truly have a new conversation about it, you need to be involved right here, right now.

Our Web site with registration information may be found at www.marybyronproject.org. Join us. Survivors, victims, and children need your commitment NOW.

MARCIA L. ROTH

Executive Director, Mary Byron Project, Inc.

Louisville 40223
