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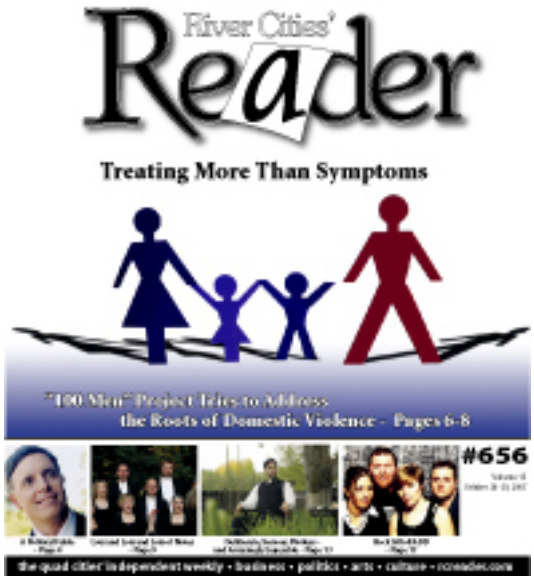

October is domestic-violence awareness month, but the Minneapolis-based organization 100 Men Take a Stand for Domestic Peace takes a larger view.

Domestic violence, its leaders say, is part of a larger problem.

"We view it as being a cold," said Warren Edwards, a group facilitator and activist. "With a cold, a lot of times there are a lot of symptoms. Violence is a symptom of that cold." The question is "how to deal with the cold in its entirety rather than just the things that come with the cold?"

As a culture, said 100 Men organizer James Martin, "our focus is so much on the person who raises their hand, and not focused on what leads to him raising his hand."

And domestic violence leads to violence in the community, Edwards stressed. "We have a firm belief that if you stop the violence in the home, that the violence in the street will stop," Edwards said. "Knowing that violence is a learned behavior, if there's no reinforcement of violence in the home, it's our hope that we can turn this around, mainly by modeling different behaviors, actually walking the walk."

"The violence in the streets began with violence in the home," Martin echoed.

Leaders of 100 Men will be in the Quad Cities this weekend for a series of domestic-violence-related events presented by the local Healing Waters Empowerment Project. A five-hour training geared to professionals in the domestic-violence field and the public is scheduled for Friday, October 26, and a two-hour training for the general public is slated for Saturday, October 27. The Healing Waters Empowerment Project will also present a theatrical performance of *"I Will Carry My Sister's Pain"* on Saturday. All events will be held at the Second Baptist Church in Rock Island.

The premise of these events is that domestic violence has a ripple effect. In the home, domestic violence affects "not just the victim, not just the perpetrator," Martin said. "There are witnesses. ... It affects the entire family."

And its impact extends beyond the immediate family. Edwards also compared violence to weeds. "What affects you affects me," he said. "That's something we want people to think about. ... What grows in my yard, like weeds, can eventually grow in your yard, too."

"**It's Our Problem"**

One element of 100 Men is its focus on the African-American community. "We're African Americans," Martin said. He added that his group believes in "cleaning up your own backyard before you look in somebody else's. ... It's our problem, it's our issue. As black men, we want to and will focus on getting after those root causes toward a solution.

"Family violence has no [racial or economic] boundaries," he conceded. "It's across the board. ... [But] if we don't take care of *our* business, who would we expect to take care of it?"

Shellie Moore Guy, the director of Healing Waters, said she hopes the events serve as an organizing tool to keep the topic in the public consciousness in the Quad Cities. "There was a trend [in recent years] that the black community around the country was really addressing the problem as we were starting to," she said. "It should no longer be a women's issue, and a women's movement."

And the reality is that domestic violence is a more pervasive problem in the African-American community than in other cultures.

According to a 2000 U.S. Department of Justice study (http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/ascii/ipv.txt), "Overall, blacks were victimized by intimate partners at significantly higher rates than persons of any other race between 1993 and 1998. Black females experienced intimate partner violence at a rate 35 percent higher than that of white females, and about 22 times the rate of women of other races. Black males experienced intimate-partner violence at a rate about 62 percent higher than that of white males and about 22 times the rate of men of other races."

Furthermore, according to the University of Minnesota's Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community (http://www.dvinstitute.org), "African Americans account for one-third of the intimate-partner homicides in this country and have an intimate-partner homicide rate four times that of whites."

The American Medical Association defines intimate-partner abuse as "the physical, sexual, and/or psychological abuse to an individual perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner." The broader term "domestic violence" encompasses a wider range of familial relationships, and sometimes includes financial abuse. A common thread in definitions of domestic violence is coercion and control. Domestic violence and child abuse are typically considered separate but related, and both are obviously types of family violence.

According to the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community, a significant portion of the racial disparity in domestic violence can be explained by economic and neighborhood factors. "When income and neighborhood characteristics are controlled for, racial differences in intimate-partner violence are greatly reduced," it noted.

A 2002 study by the institute included interviews with members of the African-American community in the Oakland and San Francisco area. Like 100 Men, the study saw a clear relationship between domestic and community violence: "Domestic violence was part of a continuum of violence that links the community to the family. Domestic violence in the home did not occur in isolation, and its prevalence almost mirrored the various forms of community violence. To participants, this parallel evidenced the coexistence of violence inside and outside the home, highlighted linkages between stressors inside and outside the home, and connected violence witnessed to violence committed."

The study also said: "Many participants noted that the prevalence of domestic violence in the African-American community flowed directly from the deficit of leadership, in general, and positive models for nonviolence, specifically, in the African-American community."

That report's recommendations suggest approaches similar to 100 Men Take a Stand for Domestic Peace: "Community leaders should move toward developing or supporting an existing African-American-led coalition against domestic violence. The primary mission of the coalition should be to educate African Americans about the individual, familial, intergenerational, and community impacts of violence in the home; mobilize the community towards prevention and intervention; and help develop and shape community norms."

The 100 Men project got its start in 2001, Martin said. The group's founder, who has since died, "identified that most people seemed to think that that [domestic and community violence] was the norm."

In addition to training events such as those in Rock Island, 100 Men Take a Stand for Domestic Peace holds pledge ceremonies at which men promise to work to end domestic violence, Martin said. Those men are sent monthly postcards to remind them of their pledge and to offer advice on, for example, dealing with anger. "Take a time out," says one postcard from earlier this year. "Walk. Talk to a mentor. Play sports."

More than 700 people have taken the pledge so far, Martin said. The program is funded by a state grant and from private contributions, he said. Its budget is less than$100,000 a year.

When asked about whether the 100 Men program is having an impact, Martin admitted that measuring progress is "always a perplexing and difficult problem." The program's leaders said, though, that the program has grown, and pointed to that as a sign of its effectiveness.

The program is certainly aimed at people who do not commit domestic violence, with the idea that they can be models of nonviolence to their communities.

But some of the people who have pledged *have* committed violence in the past, Edwards said. "I'm employed at the African-American Men Project, so I connect with a lot of men who are reentering the community from prison," he said. "I also counsel a lot of those men."

A Different Approach

A major challenge in dealing with domestic violence is that its causes are complex. The Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community cited poverty as one key element, and Martin traced domestic-violence problems in the African-American community to slavery.

But that doesn't really pinpoint *why* abusers do what they do. In a 2003 article in *Psychology Today* , author Hara Estroff Marano noted that low self-esteem often leads to domestic violence: "Aggression eliminates self-doubt, and batterers tend to resort to it whenever their sense of self feels threatened - unless someone teaches them a better way, like compassion."

In the same article, psychologist Steven Stosny said domestic violence is a vicious circle: "You can't hurt someone you love and feel good about yourself," he said. "Abuse of loved ones is about the most self-destructive thing a person can do."

One way to change those behaviors is to give batterers alternatives to violence.

"The question always is: How do you deal with men who are violent?" said Samuel Simmons Jr., a behavior consultant and chemical-dependence counselor involved in 100 Men. "Well, first of all, just because we think they're violent, they don't think they are. They think they're just doing what's natural to survive. And so if you come with ... your view of violence and you try to put that upon these men, they ain't listening."

In some households, he added, abuse "was considered discipline, not violence."

Violence is typically also not a problem in a vacuum. "Alcohol problems (drinking, binge drinking, dependency) are more frequently related to intimate-partner violence for African Americans than for whites or Hispanics," according to the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community.

Simmons also noted that violence is a tool for people who want attention, and who want "to be validated. Unfortunately, violence ends up getting you a lot of attention."

Those factors combine to make it difficult to connect with people who commit domestic violence.

Simmons said that a punishment model for African-American men typically doesn't work, because they're inured to it. Furthermore, it devalues their sense of worth, and doesn't address causes. "You were sent here to be punished, and I don't have time for punishment," he said of his approach. "African-American men who've been raised in the inner city, they know how to be punished. The system has taught them how to be punished. ... But they've never been taught how to live, how to manage their stress. ... They have no clue. ... If I only know one way to deal with things that make me uncomfortable, then I will act out violently."

Alcohol and drugs, Simmons said, are often a stress-management tool for African-American men.

"How do you heal?" he asked. "A bruised person has a tendency to be violent in many different ways."

Fundamentally, Edwards said, these people need "help them to heal themselves."

"*Dialogue of Peace: Men Taking a Stand" will be held from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Friday, October 26. The cost is $20.*

"*Men's Anti-Violence Training" will be held from 3 to 5 p.m. on Saturday, October, 27. Admission is free.*

The Healing Waters performance "I Will Carry My Sister's Pain" *will take place at 6 p.m. on Saturday, October 27. The cost is $10.*

All events will be held at Second Baptist Church, 919 Sixth Avenue in Rock Island. For more information, contact Shellie Moore Guy at (309) 786-2407.