



# Engaging Youth in IPV Prevention

## Lessons Learned from DELTA FOCUS



April 2019

**preventIPV**  
tools for social change



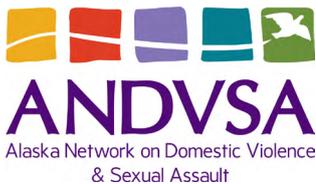
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## Contributing Organizations

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Alaska Network on  
Domestic Violence and  
Sexual Assault

[www.andvsa.org/  
prevention](http://www.andvsa.org/prevention)



Ohio Domestic  
Violence Network

[www.odvn.org](http://www.odvn.org)



California Partnership  
to End Domestic  
Violence

[www.cpedv.org/prevention](http://www.cpedv.org/prevention)



Rhode Island Coalition  
Against Domestic  
Violence

[www.ricadv.org/en/what-  
we-do/prevention](http://www.ricadv.org/en/what-we-do/prevention)

## Acknowledgements

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## Overview

In recent years, there has been a growing call<sup>1</sup> to identify programs that can prevent more people from ever experiencing violence. To date, this knowledge gap remains given only a limited number of intimate partner violence (IPV) prevention strategies have been rigorously evaluated for their impact in communities (e.g., neighborhoods, cities, and states) and community settings



Hugh B. Bain Middle School 2017 Youth Empowerment Zone Leadership Team

(e.g., hospitals, schools, businesses). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancement and Leadership Through Alliances, Focusing on Outcomes for Communities United with States (DELTA FOCUS) program<sup>2</sup> attempted to fill this knowledge gap by documenting the efforts of domestic violence coalitions to prevent IPV through influencing the environments and conditions in which people live, work, and play. These DELTA FOCUS lessons learned are intended to be shared with other domestic violence coalitions and those whose work intersects with preventing IPV.

The DELTA FOCUS program supported domestic violence coalitions to identify, implement, and evaluate programs that are theoretically or empirically linked to reducing IPV, or decreasing risk factors or increasing protective factors for IPV.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the coalitions learned important lessons along the way. Some lessons are specific to one type of approach while some are more broadly applicable for implementing and evaluating community-based approaches. The goal of sharing these stories is for others in the violence prevention field to benefit from this collective learning. This includes learning more about existing field-based programs and practices, discovering what worked or did not work in implementation, and considering how to approach evaluation or develop a more rigorous evaluation than was possible for the DELTA FOCUS domestic violence coalitions.

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Division of Violence Prevention Strategic Vision. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/overview/strategicvision.html>. Accessibility verified June 26, 2018.

2 CDC-RFA-CE13-1302. DELTA FOCUS (Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancement and Leadership Through Alliances, Focusing on Outcomes for Communities United with States). Department of Health and Human Services. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at: [www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppld=198393](http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppld=198393) Accessed October 5, 2017.

3 Armstead TL, Rambo K, Kearns M, Jones KM, Dills J, Brown P. CDC's DELTA FOCUS Program: identifying promising primary prevention strategies for intimate partner violence. *J Women Health (Larchmt)*. 2017;26(1):9-12.



Agency partner and program banners lining the wall at the first annual Warren County Youth Summit

## Introduction

This story features lessons from five community coalitions funded by four DELTA FOCUS domestic violence coalitions. One of the community coalitions is located in Sitka, Alaska; two in Ohio: Warren County and Knox County; and one each in Los Angeles, California and Cranston, Rhode Island (see Table 1).

Informed by health behavior<sup>4,5</sup> and social norms theories,<sup>6</sup> these stories suggest that prevailing attitudes, culture, and social expectations related to IPV can change through efforts to foster adult-youth mentoring opportunities, a focus on youth leadership development, and support for youth-led media and marketing campaigns. Their approaches focus on building youth's leadership skills, engaging them in shifting norms related to violence, and strengthening community-level protective factors for IPV.

4 Rogers, E. M. (1962). *Diffusion of innovations*. New York, NY: Free Press of Glencoe.

5 Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179-211.

6 Berkowitz, A. (2013). *A grassroots' guide to fostering healthy norms to reduce violence in our communities: Social norms toolkit*. Atlanta, GA: CDC. Retrieved from [socialnorms.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Social\\_Norms\\_Violence\\_Prevention\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://socialnorms.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Social_Norms_Violence_Prevention_Toolkit.pdf)

Table 1. DELTA FOCUS Engaging Youth Approaches

Coalition	Approach and Goal	Example Activities
<p><b>Alaska Network to End Domestic Violence’s Sitka Community Coalition<sup>7</sup></b></p>	<p><b>Sitka Youth Leadership Committee (SYLC):</b> In tandem with school-based programs, the committee works to change social norms in youth peer groups, connect youth to positive mentors, and build their leadership skills.</p>	<p>Youth representatives from three high schools plan retreats and implement activities, including conferences, marches, and youth-led workshops using a video toolkit developed to inspire conversation around respectful relationships and equity.</p>
<p><b>California Partnership to End Domestic Violence’s Los Angeles Community Coalition<sup>8</sup></b></p>	<p><b>Youth Over Violence:</b> Building on a five-week summer Youth Leadership Institute and the “In Touch with Teens” violence prevention curriculum, the goal is to educate youth on healthy relationships and teen dating violence and prepare them to engage in violence prevention activities through internships with community experts.</p>	<p>Youth-led activities are focused on disseminating positive messaging about healthy relationships and prevention, highlighting the innovative work being done in communities across the state, and promoting the important role of schools in prevention (including during Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month).</p>
<p><b>Ohio Network to End Domestic Violence’s Warren and Knox County Community Coalition<sup>9</sup></b></p>	<p><b>Teen Council:</b> The approach focuses on engaging youth in knowledge and leadership building activities so that they become prevention ambassadors within their social networks to shift social norms.</p>	<p>Councils in each community develop universal and targeted mass media and social media campaigns, organize youth summits, and present public service announcements at events. For example, “Color for a Cause 5k” was a Knox County event used to promote community awareness of teen dating violence and substance abuse.</p>

Table 1. Continues on page 4

<sup>7</sup> Pathways to a Safer Sitka

<sup>8</sup> Peace Over Violence

<sup>9</sup> The Abuse and Rape Crisis Shelter of Warren County and the New Directions Shelter of Knox County

Table 1. Continued: DELTA FOCUS Engaging Youth Approaches

Coalition	Approach and Goal	Example Activities
<b>Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence’s Cranston Community Coalition<sup>10</sup></b>	<b>Youth Social Cohesion Work:</b> This approach seeks to increase the social cohesion and collective efficacy among youth in Eastern Cranston, Rhode Island by expanding a preexisting, school-based Youth Empowerment Zone project to the neighborhood.	This multi-component approach involves convening youth leadership boards, supporting youth-directed programming and community-focused projects, training staff on positive youth development, and creating a network of supportive adults through family engagement plans.



Warren County Teen Alliance Council (TAC) Members at the annual all day summer retreat at Armco Park

## Key Lessons Learned

1. Cultivating youth leadership requires a balance of providing support and giving youth the opportunity to lead.
2. To build connectedness and a sense of belonging, youth should be authentically engaged through meaningful relationships.
3. Given the diversity of youth backgrounds and experiences with trauma, it is important to be attentive to their comfort level and sense of safety.

<sup>10</sup> The Elizabeth Buffum Chace Center

## Key Lesson # 1: Cultivating youth leadership requires a balance of providing support and giving youth the opportunity to lead.

Research demonstrates that collective efficacy among youth is a neighborhood-level protective factor linked to lower rates of dating violence perpetration<sup>11</sup>. Emphasizing skill development and adult-youth mentorship opportunities<sup>12,13</sup> creates an opening for young people to have positive peer interactions and provides an opportunity for them to plan and reflect on projects that contribute to positive community change. The Warren and Knox County Community Coalitions shared how they focused on skill-building with students by using what one staff member called “a consensus method.” Through discussions with youth, adult staff help them to hone in on the project areas they want to be involved in and split them into groups focused on these areas. The Coalitions described how their students liked to work on “big things.” Adult mentors encouraged these ideas but also assisted the students to break down the larger concepts into smaller, manageable steps and activities. This process helped the students to learn what they needed to know and do to achieve their goals.



Knox County TAC members hosting an open house to recruit new members for the next school year

The other community coalitions were also successful in developing youth skills and giving them space to lead. In Sitka for example, the Sitka Community Coalition members supported skill-building by encouraging youth to participate in conversations about their issues of concern, working with them on facilitating such conversations by role-playing with other students, and training them to train other youth. The coalition observed that Sitka Youth Leadership Committee (SYLC) participants were more prepared to undertake leadership activities than youth groups from other school districts.

Facilitating skill-building with youth involved continually assessing their readiness to perform skills on their own and to lead with adults in the background. The Cranston Community Coalition, for example, gave a great deal of consideration

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- 11 Rothman, E. F., Johnson, R. M., Young, R., Weinberg, J., Azrael, D., & Molnar, B. E. (2011). Neighborhood-level factors associated with physical dating violence perpetration: Results of a representative survey conducted in Boston, MA. *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 88(2), 201-213.
  - 12 Pittman, K. J., & Wright, M. (1991). Bridging the gap: A rationale for enhancing the role of community organizations in promoting youth development. Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, Commissioned Paper #1.
  - 13 WestEd. (2018). Resilience and youth development [webpage]. Retrieved from <http://chks.wested.org/using-results/resilience-youth-development/>

to students' developmental age because their approach spanned multiple grade levels. They would tailor tasks presented to youth based on age and how youth progressed. As one staff member described their process, they would, **“push them to always go a little further and do a little bit more than they think they're capable of,”** with adult support on-hand. The Warren and Knox County Community Coalitions closely observed how their Teen Council cohorts developed in terms of skills in leading meetings and talking to school administrators. This allowed them to gauge when and how much the adults should step back.

As demonstrated by the previous examples, developing youth leadership skills required a balance and varied across the approaches. The process required continually assessing the readiness of youth to be independent and their ability to lead. Therefore, coalitions found that they could not always be sure when youth were ready to move forward on their own. However, in all cases, the coalitions demonstrated their trust in the youth by making the space for them to lead and communicating their trust directly. For example, in Los Angeles, a staff member mentioned, **“trusting the youth”** was itself a key lesson learned for his team:

**“Allowing them to have the freedom to move forward with the project, with a workshop, or whatever, a brainstorming activity, or organizing activity and just having trust that they'll do it well. . .sometimes we feel like we have to be overseeing them or on top of them. Even though we do need to provide that guidance, at the same time just making sure that they know we trust them and what they're doing [is key to their success].”**

## Key Lesson # 2: To build connectedness and a sense of belonging, youth should be authentically engaged through meaningful relationships.

The coalitions were guided by models<sup>14</sup> that suggest authentically engaging youth requires empowering them through meaningful relationships that allow them to learn from the life experience and expertise of adults. The coalitions built structures that supported youth's productivity on their projects, as well as activities that encouraged meaningful bonding among youth participants and between youth and adults involved with the approaches. For example, the Sitka



Students at the 2nd Annual Warren County Youth Summit participating in Speed Prevention, a fast-paced activity that allows students to have a voice in local prevention efforts

14 Hart, R. A. (1997). Children's participation: The theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.



Warren County TAC students preparing posters for National Teen Dating Violence Awareness month in their school

Community Coalition determined that SYLC members<sup>15</sup> continued to participate in activities over time because a strong sense of community developed in these groups. The coalition staff made sure there were enough adults involved to provide support and built activities to help youth get to know one another, bond, and feel welcome. One staff member noted, **“more than anything the reason I have teens showing up on a week-to-week basis is because they feel like they belong there and I’ve heard them even say that this was different than other youth groups because there’s no competition... Everybody has a voice, everybody has a place here.”**

The Los Angeles Community Coalition, Peace Over Violence, emphasized that they took every opportunity to demonstrate their respect for the youth. This helped them build connections with youth they worked with. In the words of one staff member, they

worked to **“really show the young people that we’re putting our money where our mouth is that, yeah, we do want to lift up your voices.”** For example, they found that some structured team-building activities helped youth feel a connectedness among all the students and created a sense of community. In addition to fostering connections among youth participants, the Los Angeles Community Coalition also made sure that all adult staff from the prevention team were present during program orientations to introduce themselves and to underscore their availability. As a result, when surveyed, participating youth endorsed that, **“there is at least one adult team member they feel connected to.”**



TAC Meeting

15 SYLC was one of the comprehensive set of approaches implemented in the school districts of interest that collectively demonstrated documented changes in school climate. For more information on the other programs visit <https://www.safv.org/youth>.

Sitka staff noted that creating a sense of belonging within the three SYLC groups hinged on balancing structured activities that demonstrated respect for their time with having time for fun. One staff member noted:

“ With Girls On the Run and Boys Run [school-based programs implemented in tandem with SYLC] there’s a curriculum that guides each practice, each lesson. For SYLC we definitely have a strategic plan that guides our work. . .there’s a structure, there’s sense of purpose. . .it’s work but it’s also fun and it’s relaxed and it’s a place for them to be themselves and they’re productive. . .they want to know that they’re coming and that their time is being used well. There’s space to share and laugh and be silly and let your guard down and get to know each other. ”

**Key Lesson # 3: Given the diversity of youth backgrounds and experiences with trauma, it is important to be attentive to their comfort level and sense of safety.**

All coalitions discussed the importance of developing programs that were attentive to the comfort level and sense of safety for the involved youth. This was especially important for them because the youth populations they serve represent diverse backgrounds and some of the youth have a current or past experience with trauma. The coalitions focused on different aspects of safety and well-being, such as taking steps to create physically and emotionally comfortable spaces and experiences, steadfastly using positive framing in the language and messaging used within the programs, and creating opportunities for the communities to view youth more positively. For example, the Los Angeles Community Coalition described the ways that they intentionally created a comfortable space for youth. They addressed different levels of comfort ranging from basic (e.g., how the room is physically set up to facilitate activities) to complex, less tangible considerations of how youth were feeling during implementation (e.g., checking in each day on how youth were feeling using a “feeling thermometer”).



Participants in Peace Over Violence’s Summer Youth Leadership Institute gather after a full day of leadership development activities

The Sitka Community Coalition increasingly situated their work within trauma-informed perspectives and focused on promoting resiliency. As part of this

framing, they could have addressed a number of risk factors but instead chose to communicate with their youth and the wider community about protective factors and building connectedness. One Sitka staff member noted that doing so has a two-fold effect, as **“it just seems to generate more buy-in and people get more excited about that. It changes the way we think about building community and working in our community.”** In both Warren and Knox Counties’ Teen Councils, members gave their adult staff the feedback that they were more responsive to and connected to positive framing of violence prevention. One staff member, for example, shared that this also increases youth’s motivation to share messages because they felt safer doing so:

**“ [Students told us] quit telling us what not to do and start telling us what we should be doing or how best to do something. So, while we do both [risk factor and protective factor-focused] approaches. . .we have been very conscientious to really strive to increase the protective factors and to do more positive promotion of healthy relationships instead of just trying to prevent teen dating violence or substance abuse. . .[also,] positive messages are easier to share on social media. So, the [Teen Council] kids are not as anxious or willing to share the scary, negative things. . .they really want the positive stuff because that’s safer for them to share on their personal pages. ”**

With the knowledge that some participating youth are involved with the juvenile justice system or are otherwise viewed as sources of problems in their communities, the Los Angeles Community Coalition directly invited law enforcement to engage in dialogue with youth in order to change perceptions of youth and to reduce negative encounters with law enforcement.



TAC Healthy Relationships Break-out

They did this by highlighting the leadership work being done by their students and the issues they face in their communities. The Cranston Community Coalition also addressed the concerns expressed by the youth about being viewed negatively by their community. They attended to youth’s feelings of connection and comfort in the moment, but also brought outside attention to youth activities to change youth’s feelings about themselves. One staff member remarked that in response to youth feeling as if they are **“seen as troublemakers, hoodlums,”** their team regularly invites a local reporter to come and cover what their students are doing, **“so there’s always a news article. . .We try to really make [the students] the focus. . .They work together. They help their community. They get to feel like they make a difference.”**

## We Can Prevent IPV

IPV is a preventable public health problem, and we are continuing to learn more from practice and research about what works to prevent it. In 2017, CDC released *Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices* (see Footnote 3), which helps states and communities take advantage of the best available evidence on preventing IPV across the lifespan. Additionally, CDC's Division of Violence Prevention shared a strategic vision for preventing multiple forms of violence by addressing shared factors that put people at risk or protect them from violence (see Footnote 1). Establishing a sense of belonging and a connection for youth to caring adults and their community (community connectedness) are two factors that protect against multiple forms of violence including child maltreatment, dating violence, youth violence, and suicide.<sup>16</sup> This story offers lessons learned from a selection of community coalitions implementing approaches that engaged youth with caring adults and their communities. While it is too early to provide any recommendations or evidence of effectiveness from these specific approaches, the implementers are willing to share implementation and evaluation elements they found to be practical and useful. For more information, contact:



Pakrush Katragadda, Warren County TAC member, receiving his Congressional Gold Medal for service in his community and the Teen Alliance Council

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<sup>16</sup> Wilkins N, Tsao B, Hertz M, Davis R, Klevens J. Connecting the Dots: An Overview of the Links Among Multiple Forms of Violence. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2014.





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