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THE PURPLE RIBBON STUDY CIRCLES PILOT PROJECT EVALUATION

The Purple Ribbon Council to Cut Out Domestic Abuse (PRC)¹ is a volunteer-led organization formed in the Greater Phoenix area. In April 2008, more than 50 domestic violence issue stakeholders and community members gathered in Phoenix for the launch of the Purple Ribbon Brunch and the Purple Ribbon Study Circles Project. In May 2008, Eve's Place Safehouse became the PRC's national Launch Partner and 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor. The PRC is now working to take the program nationwide (and perhaps even internationally) by 2010.

The Purple Ribbon Study Circles Project is a grassroots dialogue-to-action program designed to inspire bottom-up collaboration on issues of domestic abuse and domestic homicide. The program model was developed by Everyday Democracy, a national organization that helps local communities find ways for people "to think, talk and work together to solve problems."² They have worked with more than 550 communities across the United States on many different social issues including racial equity, education, growth and sprawl, immigration, violence, youth issues, and community and police relations.

A study circle is a small, diverse group of people, led by an impartial facilitator trained to manage discussion. In four two-hour sessions, the study circle examines a chosen issue from diverse points of view, explores possible solutions, and develops ideas for action and change. The specific aim of the PRC program is to bring people together to talk about ways local communities can develop and implement action agendas to lessen domestic homicide and domestic abuse. The pilot program used the following basic structure:

- Session One:** Framing the issue, talking about how participants are connected to the issue, and beginning to look at domestic abuse and domestic homicide.
- Session Two:** Examining the nature of the problem and what domestic abuse and domestic homicide look like in the local community.
- Session Three:** Exploring why domestic abuse and domestic homicide are problems in the community and how local people can start to improve things.
- Session Four:** Moving from dialogue to action to change, looking at the community's assets, brainstorming action ideas; connecting action ideas with community assets; and setting priorities for action.

A pilot of the Study Circles Project ran in six cities in Greater Phoenix from September through December 2008 (Phoenix, Chandler, Peoria, Gilbert, Goodyear, and Tempe). This was the first known

¹ For more information see: www.girls-night-out.org/documents/ABOUT-the-Purple-Ribbon-Council-to-Cut-Out-Domestic-Abuse.pdf .

² For more information see: www.everyday-democracy.org/en/index.aspx .

Study Circles initiative in the U.S. specifically focused on domestic abuse. Study Circle participants and facilitators participated in a culminating “action forum” in November 2008 and three “action committees” were established: Mass awareness, education and outreach, and research and system change. The three committees are due to meet in January 2009 to continue their work.

Documenting the pilot program

Three reporting forms were created to document the program:

- Participant profiles forms
 - 38 forms were completed that provided background information on study circle members
- Participant feedback forms
 - 42 were completed at the beginning of the first session and 29 were completed at the end of the last session, designed to gauge attitudes to domestic abuse issues and pre- and post-participation changes of opinion
- Facilitator feedback forms
 - 15 completed, concerning the facilitators’ opinion on how well the sessions went).

Participants

Participants in the pilot program were not representative of Greater Phoenix community members as a whole. For example, females were over represented (83%), Hispanics were underrepresented (5%), and almost half (47%) had post-graduate degrees. In addition, and perhaps accounting for these differences, 78% reported they were professionally involved in domestic violence issues (as police officers, victim advocates, shelter workers, or social workers) and almost half (49%) had previous experience of similar “dialogue-to-action” programs.

It is clear that as the program goes forward greater efforts must be made to include more members of local communities *without* professional involvement in the issue. However, these participants were able to test the program materials and provide important feedback. For example, the following table shows levels of agreement with a series of statements asked pre- and post-participation.

Given that most participants were professionally involved in domestic violence, it is not surprising that only three of the 13 statements produced statistically significant differences pre- and post-program participation. It is also not surprising that the results showed that most participants expressed opinions in keeping with research findings on domestic violence.

When asked their reasons for becoming involved in the Study Circles program 12 mentioned that they worked directly with domestic violence victims and five mentioned having personal experience, while others gave of a variety of answers, including to help others, learn more, help their community, and so on.

The post-program evaluation instrument included several questions on participants’ general assessment. The results were:

- 100% said they would like to stay involved in the study circles action plan devised by their group.
- 92% said that participation in the study circle meetings made them more aware of things their community could do to combat domestic violence.
- 92% said they would recommend others to become involved in future study circles on domestic violence.
- 39% said that participation in the study circle meetings changed their views about domestic violence.

Statements ^a		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not sure
Domestic violence (DV) means inflicting or threatening a family member with physical harm.	Pre Post	57% 45%	17% 34%	10% 3%	10% 14%	7% 3%
The criminal justice system is unfair to victims of DV.	Pre Post	10% 28%	39% 48%	24% 21%	10% 3%	17% 3%
DV is best handled privately, rather than by the police.	Pre Post	2% 4%	2% 2%	24% 22%	69% 74%	2% 2%
Most DV victims could easily leave their relationships, but don't.	Pre Post	2% 3%	12% 3%	26% 28%	60% 69%	2% 2%
Most DV incidents occur because of offenders' anger-control problems.	Pre Post	17% 10%	26% 21%	31% 28%	24% 38%	2% 3%
Most DV calls are isolated events in otherwise good relationships.	Pre Post	2% 2%	5% 2%	48% 29%	45% 68%	2% 4%
Most DV incidents stem from abusers' need for power and control over victims	Pre Post	57% 76%	38% 24%	2% 2%	2% 2%	2% 2%
DV is just part of human nature, there's not much anyone can do to stop it.	Pre Post	2% 3%	3% 3%	12% 31%	83% 66%	2% 2%
Most victims are safer as soon as they leave an abusive relationship.	Pre Post	5% 7%	22% 28%	27% 62%	41% 3%	5% 7%
I have ideas about how to decrease domestic violence in my community.	Pre Post	14% 34%	67% 55%	7% 7%	3% 3%	12% 12%
Domestic violence is common because of how violence is shown in the media.	Pre Post	7% 7%	43% 52%	33% 38%	10% 10%	14% 3%
I, family members, or friends have been victims of domestic violence	Pre Post	40% 31%	29% 52%	14% 14%	12% 12%	5% 3%
Controlling somebody else's life may be a bad thing, but it isn't domestic violence.	Pre Post	5% 5%	31% 31%	64% 66%	3% 3%	3% 3%

a. Statements in bold showed statistically significant independent sample t-test differences at .05 level or less.

Facilitators

Program facilitators kept records on logistical issues and were asked to email them to the program organizers for immediate attention. They were also asked to provide weekly feedback on their assessment of participants' willingness to discuss the issue, listen to others, share their ideas and experiences, and follow the facilitators' guidance. Averaged across all week, all items received a maximum average score of 10 out of 10, suggesting that the facilitators felt that the participatory goals of the program were fully met.

Discussion

In terms of the issues examined by this modest evaluation, the program proved to be a success and several important lessons were learned to help full implementation:

- Include evaluation materials with training documents.
- Make it easier for facilitators to completed and return evaluation documents.
- Recruit a more representative group of participants, beyond those directly involved in the issue personally or professionally.



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