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SAY

INNOVATIVE CAMPAIGNS AND TECHNOLOGIES ARE INFUSING NEW URGENCY INTO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN THE PITTSBURGH REGION. AS PARTNER ABUSE CONTINUES TO BE A PROBLEM ACROSS THE COUNTRY, LOCAL PHILANTHROPIES ARE CALLING ON MORE COMMUNITY LEADERS — AND MORE MEN — TO PUSH FOR AN END TO THE BRUTALITY.
BY CHRISTINE H. O'TOOLE

NO

MORE

The 19-year-old East Hills mother knew her former boyfriend wanted her dead...

He was already awaiting trial for assaulting her last year...

She had sought and received a protection from abuse order...

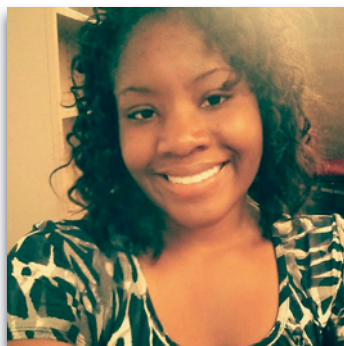
Her infant was safe in foster care...

But on May 7, he broke into the home where she was visiting her grandmother...

He fatally stabbed Tionna...

Then he beat her 72-year-old grandmother to death.

**TIONNA BANKS DID
THE RIGHT THINGS
TO PROTECT HER LIFE.
BUT THEY JUST
WEREN'T ENOUGH.**



Tionna Banks in 2013

Perhaps the saddest aspect of this family tragedy is how commonplace it is. Every day across the country, three or more women are killed by their partner. More than one in three have experienced rape, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner. Last year, 47,000 individuals in Allegheny County alone were victimized by their partners.

Now, southwestern Pennsylvania is saying no more.

The past year has marked an inflection point for domestic violence prevention efforts in the Pittsburgh region. Local foundations—including The Heinz Endowments, which has a long history of supporting such programs—have stepped up funding for promising initiatives and urgently needed facilities. New mobile technologies are helping individuals evaluate their personal safety and connect to emergency help. And awareness campaigns are targeting and enlisting men to point out their responsibility to get involved.

“For years we have been asking people to think about how the stigma has been attached to the victim,” said Shirl Regan, president and CEO of the Women’s Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh. “The question needs to be, ‘Why do we allow him to get away with it?’”

Including men in the conversation is a tactical shift in the battle. Last year, the FISA Foundation and the Endowments joined 20 service agencies to create Southwestern Pennsylvania Says No More. Endowments

President Grant Oliphant has been a vocal leader of the campaign, which created a Father’s Day pledge initiative that urged men to end gender violence. In an op-ed published last year on the day celebrating fathers, Mr. Oliphant explained his commitment to the cause.

“Men’s behavior toward women is not a women’s issue, it’s a men’s issue,” he wrote in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. “Who teaches (or fails to teach) young men what it means to be a man? As fathers, most of us would do anything to protect our families. It is time that we stood together as allies to protect not only our daughters but all women against gender violence.”

“Since our founding in 1996, we’ve always had a focus on domestic abuse. What’s new is the shift to prevention,” said Kristy Trautmann, executive director of the FISA Foundation. “We decided our focus would be to use men as allies, talking more to boys about prevention, and [promoting] offender accountability.”

The Pittsburgh-based philanthropy supports local causes for women, girls and individuals with disabilities. As government funding for violence prevention efforts dwindled over the past decade, FISA increased its investment. Since 2012, it has committed \$1.3 million and technical assistance to the cause, bolstering three decades of support from the Endowments and other local philanthropies.

Among the other violence prevention initiatives in which the Endowments has invested is Standing Firm, a corporate effort that focuses on the impact of domestic abuse in the workplace. The program addresses partner violence on multiple fronts, including employee education and appropriate workplace policies and training. Nearly 300 local firms, from the Pittsburgh Pirates to FedEx Ground, are member employers, accessing resources for both victims and abusers.



Pittsburgh's Women's Center & Shelter cannot substitute for a real home, but it's the small touches that help clients to feel more comfortable as well as secure. Children's art projects, like the paper cutouts above, help to decorate sparse bedrooms, below right. Toys, such as a tricycle, below left, and outdoor play space also are available.

“The Endowments’ commitment to preventing domestic abuse really began with Vira Heinz,” explained Marge Petruska, senior program director of the foundation’s Children, Youth & Families Program. “Among the interests expressed in her will were that her endowment should fund ‘research into the causes of ignorance, poverty, crime and violence, the prevention of these evils, and the amelioration of conditions resulting therefrom.’”

Ms. Petruska added that the Endowments’ most recent grant of \$1 million to the Women’s Center & Shelter honors that legacy.

Founded in 1974 as one of the country’s first refuges for battered women, the center’s current facility is overextended, exceeding its 32-bed capacity each day. The Endowments grant will support an expansion to 47 beds, more communal space, indoor and outdoor play areas for children in the shelter, and a therapeutic garden. Even a refuge for beloved pets is part of the renovation. So are increased security measures because the center is unable to maintain its confidential location now that anyone with Internet access can pinpoint where it is in seconds.

The Women’s Center also has received ongoing Endowments support for prevention efforts that target abusers as well as victims.

“We can never have enough shelters or programs. The need is too great,” said Carmen Anderson, the Endowments’ senior program officer for Children, Youth & Families. “We can’t place all responsibility on women for their own safety—they’re not hurting themselves. So, we must change focus, take advantage of this window of opportunity and engage the broader community.”

This has meant creating programs that reach beyond adults to teenagers.

COACHING ABUSE PREVENTION

The idea of involving sports coaches in abuse prevention seems obvious. Teaching respect and self-control, they can powerfully influence young lives. They also might prevent abuse among teens. In a national 2014 survey by the University of Chicago, more than 60 percent of teen respondents said they had experienced physical, sexual or psychological abuse in their dating relationships.

Elizabeth Miller helped create a program for youth coaches to discuss respect for women with their players. Now chief of the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine at Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC and professor of pediatrics at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, she received funding from the Centers for Disease Control and tracked the resulting changes in behaviors and attitudes among 2,000 male athletes at 16 California high schools.

“One year later, we found both a reduction in perpetration of abusive acts and in negative bystander behavior,” said Dr. Miller, adding that the most striking result was a significant increase in positive bystander behavior as boys intervened to correct their peers’ behavior or talk. “Among the boys in comparison schools who didn’t get the program, abuse increased. That indicates that the program is doing primary prevention. Even with a really light touch, we are making a difference.”

When the FISA Foundation’s Trautmann heard Dr. Miller present her findings at a 2012 conference, she recognized a strategy with real promise for southwestern Pennsylvania’s sports-loving culture.

“It was stunning to hear that something worked in this field. Now we are supporting implementation in this region,” Ms. Trautmann said. Eighteen regional high schools now participate in the program, and the Pirates recently invited dozens of youth coaches to learn about the program at a luncheon at PNC Park. Fifty registered to pursue the training. Middle schools, colleges and YMCAs across the region are joining the effort.

“Men are eager to do something,” Ms. Trautmann added. “They helped us start to think differently about strategies. And then Ray Rice happened.”

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Carmen Anderson

Children, Youth & Families senior program officer, The Heinz Endowments

VOICES:

"IT'S EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY. I DON'T THINK WE SHOULD POINT FINGERS. THE MESSAGE OF AWARENESS SHOULD BE OUT THERE, AND THE REACTION SHOULD BE CONCERN AND CARE... WE OUGHT TO BE UNITED AS A COMMUNITY, AS A WHOLE."

Amber
domestic abuse survivor



"MEN ARE EAGER TO DO SOMETHING. THEY HELPED US START TO THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT STRATEGIES. AND THEN RAY RICE HAPPENED."

Kristy Trautmann
executive director, FISA Foundation



Annie O'Neill



"FOR YEARS WE HAVE BEEN ASKING PEOPLE TO THINK ABOUT HOW THE STIGMA HAS BEEN ATTACHED TO THE VICTIM. THE QUESTION NEEDS TO BE, 'WHY DO WE ALLOW HIM TO GET AWAY WITH IT?'"

Shirl Regan
president and CEO, Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh

An elevator security camera captured footage of Mr. Rice, a Baltimore Ravens running back, as he assaulted his then-fiancée and dragged her unconscious body into a parking garage. When the video went viral in the spring of 2014, it ignited a firestorm of outrage.

“It was stunning how many men joined women in condemning [Rice’s actions],” Ms. Trautmann said. “It felt like a huge opportunity for us to capitalize on the fact that so many more people are talking about this.”

WHEN MAKING THE RIGHT MOVES WORKS

One former victim welcomes the public conversation.

Amber was a young mother of three when her abusive husband, then a Pittsburgh police officer, held a gun to her head as she cradled her infant son. “He was very mean,” she said simply. She fled with her children to the Women’s Center & Shelter, living there and enrolling in programs that helped her recover her safety and sense of self-worth.

“It helped me tremendously,” she recalled. “I thought abuse was normal. In various communities, it’s the norm. People don’t think anything is wrong. They grew up with it. They think, ‘This is what I have to go through to be loved.’”

Through the center’s programs, she learned about the warning signs of abuse. Legal advocates accompanied her to numerous court appearances. Eventually, she completed her education, earning undergraduate and master’s degrees.

“I feel safe now,” Amber said. “It’s been some years and it’s been quiet. He’s moved on, I’ve moved on.” She also has created public service announcements about abuse, and volunteers with the Women’s Center on its awareness efforts.

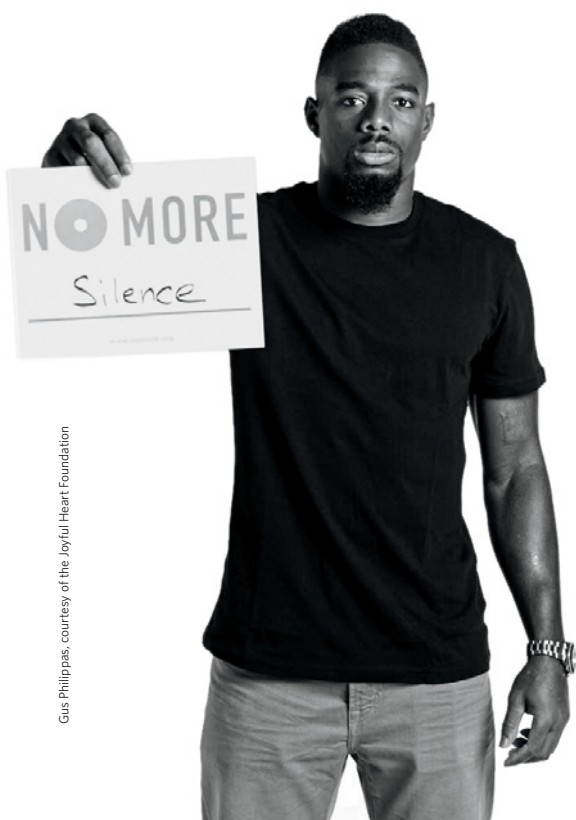
“It’s everyone’s responsibility,” she insisted. “I don’t think we should point fingers. The message of awareness should be out there, and the reaction should be concern and care. That reaction is not out there—we haven’t gotten there yet. We ought to be united as a community, as a whole.”

She added that same-sex relationships can encounter the same power struggles. “The least dominant person gives the most, and will tolerate more abuse.”

And Amber still believes that people can change. She said she is proof.

“I’m living, loving and enjoying life. I’m okay. My tears are not tears of sadness. They’re tears of joy. I survived. My children survived. So many people who are abused do not.” **h**

MOBILE WARNINGS



Gus Philippas, courtesy of the Joyful Heart Foundation

Pittsburgh Steeler William Gay lost his mother to domestic violence when he was seven years old. Since 2009, he has been a spokesman and advocate for the work of the Women’s Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, including one of its newest endeavors: a mobile app that allows those in danger of abuse to determine their level of danger and immediately call the local domestic violence hotline.

Newton Consulting, a Pittsburgh technology firm, developed the free app based on research done at Johns Hopkins University. The app compiles resources from across the country, and since its debut last December, it has demonstrated its potential to save lives.

Answers to 10 yes/no questions, beginning with “Has your partner physically abused you and has the violence increased in severity in the past year?” allow the app to determine the user’s level of danger. The app also can call 911 directly. As of early September, the app had been downloaded to 1,100 devices nationwide. In two cases, it has been used to call 911, and it has connected 54 users to local women’s shelters.

Another mobile tool, RUSafe, extends the center’s work with a lethality assessment program designed to help Pittsburgh police when answering domestic abuse calls. Also delivered on mobile devices, its algorithm allows officers to determine whether victims are in immediate danger, and allows a victim to use the officer’s phone to call a local hotline.

Both the police force and the Women’s Center log information on incidents into databases. The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence has commended the program.

William Gay, a cornerback with the Pittsburgh Steelers who lost his mother to partner violence, is active in anti-domestic violence initiatives such as the Joyful Heart Foundation’s “No More” campaign and various programs of the Women’s Center & Shelter.