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Press Release

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**National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Strategies for Prevention**

By Lia Holbrook

Ukiah, CA –

Since 1981, October has been commemorated as National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The observance serves to educate communities, individuals, couples and families about the services that can help prevent, raise awareness of community responsibility and provide resources for addressing domestic abuse. Throughout October, communities across the country will mourn for those whose lives were taken by domestic violence, celebrate the tremendous progress victim advocates have made over the years, and connect with one another with a true sense of unity to end domestic violence.

Domestic violence is an alarming and pervasive problem in our country.NISVS data reports that on average, 24 people per minute are victims of rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner in the US. Over the course of a year, that equals more than 12 million women and men.1 In just one day, across the US and its territories, NNEDV (National Network to End Domestic Violence) Census Counts 2011 report more than 67,000 victims of domestic violence sought services from domestic violence programs and shelters.2 Though domestic violence is often still viewed as a “private matter”, it has devastating ripple effects across our society. Domestic violence costs our nation billions of dollars annually, including costs for medical and mental health care, and lost productivity.Nationally, estimates of the medical cost burden of intimate partner violence against women age 18 and older, within the first 12 months after victimization, range from $2.3 billion to $7.0 billion dollars, depending on the research method used.3 Not only are the costs of domestic violence experienced personally by victims and their communities, but society as a whole bears the cost as well.

One of the silent victims of domestic violence are children. Children may experience multiple types

of exposure to domestic violence, with nearly all exposed children being direct eyewitnesses to at least some violence in the home.4 Children react to exposure to domestic violence in different ways, and many children show remarkable resilience. However, children exposed are often physically, mentally, and emotionally impacted.

As recognition of the impact of domestic violence on children increases, it becomes more important for domestic violence advocates and other practitioners to create interventions that decrease or prevent the harms associated with exposure to violence. Prevention efforts should start early by promoting healthy, respectful relationships in families by fostering healthy parent-child relationships and developing positive family dynamics and emotionally supportive environments.5

Strategies to prevent intimate partner violence can effectively strengthen the health of our communities, saving both lives and dollars.An investment to stop intimate partner and sexual violence before they occur will protect and promote the wellbeing and development of individuals, families, and societies.6 Research findings from California suggest that just a 5% reduction in rates of intimate partner violence would account for an $8.6 million dollar economic savings.7 Preventing violence means changing our society and its institutions—eliminating those attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, environments and policies that contribute to violence and promoting those that stop the violence.8 Primary prevention efforts impact several modifiable factors associated with intimate partner violence such as reducing acceptance of violence, challenging social norms, practices, and policies that place girls and women at increased risk, and confronting gender and racial injustice.9

Prevention work can begin at the individual level. Starting is simple. If you are concerned about the effects of violence in your community, begin the conversation with those in your life.

Here are a few tips on informed conversations:

1. Challenge widely-held perceptions about domestic violence. Unfortunately, misconceptions about domestic violence persist – such as the notions that survivors can “just leave;” that heterosexual, cisgender women are the only victims; that domestic violence only includes physical violence; or that domestic violence is a “private, family matter.” Each one of these myths persists, despite our work to challenge these perceptions. Survivors must think about their own physical safety, financial security, the safety and welfare of their children and pets, potential housing and where they can “just leave” to, among myriad other issues. Domestic violence can include physical, financial, emotional, psychological, or sexual abuse (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2016).

2. Believe, support, and trust survivors. Instead of second-guessing their experiences, let’s rightfully place the responsibility on abusers and perpetrators to end the abuse. Domestic violence is rooted

in power and control. As a society, we continue to place blame on victims by asking, “What did she/he do to deserve that?” or “What was she wearing?” or “Why don’t they just leave?” Yet we do not ask these questions to victims of other crimes. We must stop asking these questions of domestic violence and sexual assault survivors (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2016).

3. Survivors know their experience and story better than anyone. Taking a survivor-centered approach empowers survivors by prioritizing their needs and wants. Often, abusers deny their partners’ self-determination; empowering survivors returns their control and enables them to make their own decisions. Listen! Ask survivors what they need to individually be safe – there is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing domestic violence (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2016).

1. If you’re having a conversation about domestic violence and someone discloses that they are a victim or survivor of domestic violence, you can:

Listen, and communicate that the abuse they’re experiencing is not their fault. Let them know that they deserve safety and respect.

Refer them to resources: If they are in immediate danger, please call 911, our local hotline at: Inland, 463-HELP/4357, Coast, 964-HELP/4357 or the U.S. National Domestic Violence Hotline at (800)799-7233 and TTY (800) 787-3224. Or refer them to one of our office locations: Project Sanctuary: Inland 462-9196, North Coast 961-1507, South Coast 882-3457, North Inland 472-7190.

There are many ways to become an ambassador in your community and help prevent violence before it starts. Here are a few ideas from Futures Without Violence (https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/6-ways-you-can-help-prevent-domestic-violence/):

* ***Teens:*** [Become a *That’s Not Cool Ambassador*](http://www.thatsnotcool.com/ambassadors.aspx), and help educate your peers about digital dating abuse.
* ***Coaches:***[Become part of the *Coaching Boys into Men*](http://www.coachescorner.org/) program and teach your high school-aged athletes about the importance of respect and non-violence.
* ***Parents:*** Ensure that the university your child is attending (or could be attending in the future) is doing enough to prevent sexual assault on campus. [Send an email to the college president now and take action](http://otherfreshman15.org/).
* ***Health care professionals:***Whether you’re a nurse, a doctor, a social worker, or advocate, we have a variety of [resources to educate the community about the health impacts of domestic violence](http://www.healthcaresaboutipv.org/).
* ***College students:*** Educate yourself about the prevalence of [sexual assault on your campus](http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/colleges-universities/). Know your rights, and explore clubs and advocacy groups on campus to educate other students about the issue. [Email your college president](http://otherfreshman15.org/) to ensue they’re doing enough to protect your safety.
* ***Educators:*** Visit our [Start Strong toolkit](http://startstrong.futureswithoutviolence.org/)to implement a school-based program that promotes healthy relationships for middle schoolers.

**(1)** Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J., & Stevens, M.R. (2011). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report.* Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS\_Report2010-a.pdf.

**(2)** National Network to End Domestic Violence. (2012). *Domestic Violence Counts 2011. A 24-hour census of domestic violence shelters and services.* Washington, DC. Available at <http://nnedv.org/docs/Census/DVCounts2011/DVCounts11_NatlReport_BW.pdf>.

**(3)** Brown, D. S., Finkelstein, E. A., & Mercy, J. A. (2008). Methods for estimating medical expenditures attributable to intimate partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 23(12), 1747-1766.

**(4)** Hamby, S., Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., & Ormrod, R. (2011, October). *Children’s Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence and Other Family Violence.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/232272.pdf.

**(5)** Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J., & Stevens, M.R. (2011). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report.* Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Available at http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS\_Report2010-a.pdf.

**(6)** World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. (2010). *Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: taking action and generating evidence*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

**(7)** Prevention Institute and The California Endowment with The Urban Institute. (August 2007). *Reducing health care costs through prevention*. Oakland, CA.

**(8)** The Missouri Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence. (March 2012). *Embracing prevention as social change: How to build organizational capacity for prevention*. Jefferson City, MO.

**(9)** World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. (2010). *Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: taking action and generating evidence*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

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Lia Holbrook is the Coast Services Director at Project Sanctuary in Fort Bragg. Project Sanctuary, Inc. is a private, not-for-profit organization with the mission to prevent domestic violence and sexual assault in Mendocino County through advocacy, crisis response, community collaboration, education, and shelter.

For information on Healthy Mendocino or to schedule a presentation, please contact Patrice Mascolo, Healthy Mendocino Coordinator, at 707-467-3228 or healthymendocino@ncoinc.org.