Before You Start a Community Action Team

To help you make an informed decision about whether you want to start a community action team (CAT), we recommend that you go through a careful assessment of yourself, your organization and your community.

Personal Readiness:

• Do you like working with groups?
• Do you like the challenge of being a leader who can encourage others to take on leadership as well?
• Are you able to guide groups towards compromise by identifying points of agreement?
• How open are you to ambiguity and learning as you go?
• Are you excited about starting something totally new?

Organizational Readiness:

• How open is your organization to letting volunteers set goals and direction for an aspect of programming?
• Is your organization willing to live with the tension that could possibly arise when the CAT begins to challenge social institutions (e.g., media, legal system, educational system)?
• Is your organization willing to shift resources towards community change work that may not directly and immediately benefit your direct services program?
• How big is your volunteer pool? Can your organization afford to let those who may be interested in activism move their energy to this new opportunity for involvement?
• Are there staff members interested in and capable of leading a CAT?
• Can you identify community members who care about the issue of domestic violence and would welcome an opportunity to champion the cause in their community?

It is important to involve all the people who are invested in the formation of a CAT in the assessment process. This may involve staff, board members and volunteers. It is a good idea to seek out their input as you begin to form the team. Also, you might want to gather ideas, suggestions and feedback on how the CAT impacts their work once you have begun your organizing work.

Adapted from the handbook, “How to Facilitate Community Action Teams.” © 2000, Transforming Communities: Technical Assistance and Training Project.