



**TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES**  
Creating Safety, Justice & Equality

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, TRAINING & RESOURCE CENTER

# CATALYST CONNECTIONS

*A resource for transforming communities to  
prevent violence against women*

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*TC-TAT extends appreciation  
to the funder of this project:*



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## Reframing Evaluation as a Tool for Social Justice & Community Empowerment

*Transforming Communities: Technical Assistance, Training and Resource Center (TC-TAT) hosted a peer learning discussion on December 5, 2012 with advocates who have engaged in challenging traditional evaluation practices in their violence against women prevention work.*

*The goals were to explore:*

- *What it does it means to reframe evaluation by democratizing research and meaningful community engagement?*
- *What are the challenges as we strive to transform traditional evaluation practices into a tool that supports our social justice mission? How can participatory action research advance this mission?*
- *How can we re-align our resources and build a movement to support this paradigm shift?*

*This conversation was a space to share ideas, challenges, and build community while imparting insights with the broader prevention movement. We would like to thank the following for sharing their wis-*

*dom: Alisa Del Tufo, Threshold Collaborative; Miho Kim, DataCenter; Mimi Kim, Creative Interventions; Aimee Thompson-Aravelo, Close to Home; and Maria Elena Torre, The Public Science Project.*

***What does democratizing research mean to you? How are you challenging the traditional evaluation model in your prevention work?***

**Alisa:** Threshold Collaborative is a capacity/knowledge building organization with projects and partnerships in communities around the United States. Our vision is to build and support the creation of more caring, just and healthy communities. Threshold distinguishes itself through a focus on deep human connections developed through narrative/oral history and participant driven strategic action that leads to citizen engagement and com-



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## Participatory Action Research: What does it really mean?

Participatory Action Research or “PAR” is a way of collecting information for organizing that honors, centers, and reflects the experiences of people most directly affected by issues in our communities. PAR is not so much a set of procedures to follow or to gather information as it is a philosophy and approach to gathering and using information. It is also a way to build and strengthen communities and our understandings of ourselves, each other, and our relationships. It can be a powerful outreach, base building and organizing tool to help bring people together to build movements for change. - *Incite-National.org*

Download “What is Participatory Action Research”, visit [http://www.incite-national.org/media/docs/5614\\_toolkitrev-par.pdf](http://www.incite-national.org/media/docs/5614_toolkitrev-par.pdf)

## Comparing Values:

### *Traditional vs. Participatory Action Research (PAR) Evaluation*

Our work to end violence requires a deeper understanding of the steps needed to build effective strategies for change. There are multiple evaluation methods - randomized control trials (RCT), experimental models, quantitative, qualitative and PAR— each with strengths related to a specific context and learning need. Over time, traditional scientific methods have gained such popularity that they have dislocated the significance of other methods. We can see this in pressures from funders for “replicability” and in the Center for Disease Control’s recent report “Understanding Evidence Part 1: Best Available Research Evidence” which stresses the importance of a “rigorous research design” for determining violence prevention program effectiveness. ([http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/Understanding\\_Evidence-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/Understanding_Evidence-a.pdf))

Different evaluation methods are suited to differing situations and goals. RCT’s were created for and best suited for drug and other scientific experiments. However, when it comes to addressing human behavior, interaction and real life situations that have a complex array of forces at play, scientific evaluation methods are not (as) appropriate.

Social scientists, social justice organizers, activists and agents of change have developed an array of strategies that better describe and understand situations that deal with human behavior, feelings, interactions and social change, known as participatory action research (PAR). As the term suggests, these methods involve a more fluid, contextual and person-centered set of strategies. It honors and re-focuses on the experience and expertise of the participant/member/consumer/client. PAR privileges the voice and insight of participants in their ability to assess process, impact and set goals. The values underlying PAR evaluation are more closely aligned with our social justice mission and support true movement building.

*“PAR is about constructing knowledge from our lives, for our lives. And knowledge is power. PAR gives us an opportunity to pause and inquire. Participatory approaches to research and evaluation support and strengthen the intentionality of our work and are valuable tools for social change.”*

- Lisa Fujie Parks, California Partnership to End Domestic Violence

Traditional, Scientific Evaluation Values	Participatory Action Research Values
Objectivity	Collaboration and cooperation
Replicable results	Effective practice is a key goal
Professional expertise	Participants are the experts: their wisdom and involvement is key
Identifies “best practice”	Assessment deepens Impact that informs action for change
Specific methods result in specific outcome	Democratization of knowledge
Single desired effect	Feasibility, acceptability and utility are core values
Attribution usually to the professional evaluator	Findings emerge rather than proving a hypothesis
Specific, controllable outcome is chosen to assess	The gap between knowledge and action is reduced

## Activity 1: Five Questions in Five Minutes!

This exercise is a first level, whole community engagement strategy to use in situations where you are “taking the temperature” on a topic from a broad spectrum of individuals from your community. It is a useful for gathering community voices and perspectives and can be easily used in towns, street fairs, parking lots, health fairs, big city street corners, college campuses, etc. *This activity was developed by Threshold Collaborative, [www.thresholdcollaborative.org](http://www.thresholdcollaborative.org).*

### Five Simple Questions:

1. Information on the person: first name, where they live, what they do.
2. What is the best thing about this community?
3. What is this community’s biggest challenge?
4. If you could have one specific change made in this community, what would it be?
5. Would you like to be part of a longer conversation about improving your community?



## Activity 2: Values Leading to Positive Change

Most of us are capable of having violent attitudes and behaviors. Creative Interventions believes that constructing values that can lead to deep and lasting change requires us to take into account both our strongest capacities towards positive change as well as our resistance. These questions are adapted from Section 3 of *Creative Interventions Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence* available at [www.creative-interventions.org](http://www.creative-interventions.org).

### These are five questions to help you identify your individual or group values:

1. What is important to you?
2. At times that you have tried to change your own behavior, what has been helpful? What has made it hard?
3. What are some guiding principles that have helped you in your own life?
4. What are some values that you would like to hold even if they have been difficult or challenging to keep up?
5. What values do you think will lead to lasting positive change?



### Examples of PAR Methods & Strategies:

Oral history and narrative, digital storytelling, photo/audio stories

- ◆ [www.storycenter.org](http://www.storycenter.org), [www.photovoice.org](http://www.photovoice.org)

Community-led mapping, survey development, polling/analysis

- ◆ [www.c2home.org](http://www.c2home.org), [www.opportunityagenda.org](http://www.opportunityagenda.org)

Focus group discussions and interviews

- ◆ [www.datacenter.org](http://www.datacenter.org), [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org)

Theater/performance-based and community arts-related activities

- ◆ [www.youthspeaks.org](http://www.youthspeaks.org), [www.youthradio.org](http://www.youthradio.org)

Other innovative strategies that capture authentic, community voices (e.g. youth)

- ◆ [www.freechild.org](http://www.freechild.org), [www.incommunityresearch.org](http://www.incommunityresearch.org)

# Community Profile: Khmer Girls in Action



Communities have a right to know and a right to be heard. End of story. No. We take that back. This is where the story begins.

You've seen research and statistics before. Pew Research Center, Stanford, National Institute of Health. "Reputable facts" — one kind of reputable. But, DataCenter has worked with and trained important, powerful, yet often unnoticed, other reputable sources of knowledge. Sources like Indigenous Hawaiians, Immigrant Women, Low-Wage Workers and Survivors of Domestic Violence.

For the past two years, DataCenter has provided training support and capacity building to Khmer Girls in Action (KGA), in Long Beach, California that trains young South-east Asian women to be "relevant social justice organizers who can respond to the immediate needs of the community." It is organizations like KGA who empower

immigrants and second generation immigrant youth to voice their concerns and be justice leaders in their communities.

The 500 surveys of Khmer Youth covered three topics: Reproductive Justice, Immigrant & Refugee Rights and Health & Safety. After releasing the preliminary report, KGA recently completed a Listening Campaign that will help the Khmer youth, now experts in their community, determine what social and political action they want to take as a result of the information they gathered. During this campaign, over 50 youth and community members discussed the data that has been collected. KGA youth and staff will be presenting the survey and listening campaign results at a number of statewide and national events. - **DataCenter**

To download the Full Report, please visit: [http://kqalb.org/images/misc/PAR%20Survey.Report/KGA\\_Full%20Report.pdf](http://kqalb.org/images/misc/PAR%20Survey.Report/KGA_Full%20Report.pdf)

## RELATED RESOURCES...

**Close to Home** fosters community-wide responsibility to prevent and reduce the impact of domestic violence. We believe that domestic violence is a critical community issue and that all community members - youth, residents, families, friends, neighbors, civic leaders, and organizational Partners - are essential to designing and implementing the solutions to the problem. [www.c2home.org](http://www.c2home.org)

**Creative Interventions** is a resource center committed to the creation and promotion of community-based interventions to interpersonal violence: domestic or intimate partner, sexual, and family violence. The lessons from the Community Based Interventions Project, a pilot project to create and promote new alternative community-based models and education tools, are available in a Toolkit downloadable at [www.creative-interventions.org](http://www.creative-interventions.org)

**Data Center** unlocks the power of knowledge for social change. We support grassroots organizing for justice and sustainability through strategic research, training and collaborations. We use search to help move the knowledge and solutions of communities of color and the poor from the margins to the center of decision-making. To download tools, visit [www.datacenter.org](http://www.datacenter.org)

- "Documenting Our Lives: A Guide To Designing Your Research Project"
- "Power to the People: Creating Surveys"

**The Public Science Project** supports participatory action research with a commitment to the significant knowledge people hold about their lives and experiences. We collaborate with community organizations, schools, prisons, and public institutions to design research and practice aimed at interrupting justice. [www.publicscienceproject.org](http://www.publicscienceproject.org)

**Threshold Collaborative** is a catalyst for community-based change. Trauma, family and community violence, poverty, substance abuse, mental illness, school failure, teen pregnancy - Threshold implements solutions to these seemingly intractable social challenges and has pioneered the use of narrative and engagement strategies to help communities find sustainable solutions to their needs. [www.thresholdcollaborative.org](http://www.thresholdcollaborative.org)

**StoryTelling & Organizing Project (STOP)** is a community project collecting and sharing stories of everyday people ending violence through collective, community-based alternatives. Audio stories and transcripts available at [www.stopviolenceeveryday.org](http://www.stopviolenceeveryday.org)



Continuation of peer dialogue from page 1...

munity impact. These asset-based strategies bring about sustainable, community owned solutions to the challenges our communities face.

**Mimi:** I have generally been fascinated by this question of evaluation and the kind of social change work we are trying to do. I began to explore these questions when I first started Creative Interventions. As we well know, stating that "participation" is important is not enough. We can easily fall into many traps by saying that we are asking for participation while making participation tokenized, burdensome to the participants or otherwise unproductive or exploitative. I do believe that **participation is important, but I think we need much more thinking about what makes this work meaningful, how and by whom.**



**Maria:** At the Public Science Project, we work to democratize the production of knowledge, supporting and conducting participatory action research with communities in schools, prisons and neighborhoods struggling against structural disinvestment. We partner with youth and adults in these communities to produce meaningful research for use in their fight for justice.

**Miho:** Our mission is to unlock power of knowledge for community change. We utilize a research justice framework to understand how the democratizing of research can strengthen grassroots organizing. Historically evaluation has not supported social justice frameworks so we need to re-define past models into one that becomes useful, powerful and liberating for communities.

**Aimee:** At Close to Home, we utilize a community organizing process that includes many evaluation components - survey, interviews, relational meetings, community mappings and engaging community members in defining research questions. Yet, evaluation has been an ongoing journey that we wrestle with, especially pressure for the need for evidence, replication, and fidelity.

### **Shifting the Traditional Evaluation Paradigm: Opportunities and Constraints**

**Alisa:** Evaluation never felt like something I owned but it felt imposed and was more about reporting numbers to funders. I started to think about what it would take to re-align our efforts and re-define impact giving voice to the issues that really mattered and bringing knowledge and power to communities? How do we collaborate with funders to shift expectations and resources? How do we take this conversation to the next level, in particular, getting community organizations to see evaluation as a tool for social justice and for funders to encourage and support that work?

**Mimi:** With our StoryTelling & Organizing Project, one important question we have asked everyone is what they think is successful when it comes to a community-based intervention to violence. People don't just talk about the common indicators of violence. They talk about bringing people together; coming up with different options and strategies; and having people listen. **These expansive notions of success shift us from the simple notion of intervention and ending violence to the value of community building and organizing - something that remains an unfortunate gap in much of our current anti-violence work.**

**Maria:** Alison Bernstein, a former Vice-President at the Ford Foundation, wrote a recent article in *Thought & Action* called "Metrics Mania: The Growing Corporatization of U.S. Philanthropy" that is very useful to this conversation. She describes how foundations are ever more focused on their own branding and on managing the efforts they are funding rather than trusting the insights and expertise on the ground. It's paramount that we recognize the broad reach of this shift to hyper-accountability and "evidence-based" practice – a new paradigm fueled by what Bernstein calls the "obsessive measurement disorder" rampant in the foundation world. **How can we support community-based organizations to leverage the power they have to reframe the metrics being imposed on them,** particularly when the measures being encouraged come from "the top" down, and/or reproduce "service" oriented understandings of the work rather than justice frameworks?



**Miho:** It would be helpful to explain to funders the specific ways that current evaluation paradigms do not serve our mission and our social justice principles. My sense is that there are funders and program officers who are beginning to recognize that imposed metrics may have not yielded productive results or been a good use of time. **More people are feeling that the process is extremely important along with the power of communities to name that "these are the metrics that work for us."** We need the courage to counter present our own self-defined metrics as part of our conversations with funders.

*Continuation of peer dialogue from page 5...*

**Aimee:** Another layer is how “evidence-based” evaluation requirements constrain local work, innovation, and adaptation. The “standard” of evidence based, e.g. randomized control trials (RCTs) and quasi-experimental design, is in direct conflict with community driven approaches. Since this standard of evidence is being upheld by the Centers for Disease Control and other government funders, most foundations are not investing in community change metrics, except for a few. Even some national foundations require using “evidence-based” curricula for local projects. These projects end up lacking the leadership development, base building, and power building components needed for community change work.



**Maria:** Yes, and it’s a methodological mismatch! Experimental methods and RCTs are important and appropriate in many areas, but they are not so well suited for what Miho beautifully calls “justice research.” Can you imagine randomly assigning a “control group” to police harassment or poverty? Or what happens to the cherished validity of “standardizing” methods like random digit-dialing when the population you want to survey, say working class youth, relies on prepaid cell phones with drops in service and changing numbers? Neuropsychologists tell us those steeped in a context are better at observing and narrating the conditions of that context than third parties. Yet it is the outside observer who is deemed the expert! ***We must embrace a blending of traditional and creative methods in our work or we risk losing sight of the purpose, never mind the validity of our “evidence.”***

**Alisa:** It is clear that there is frustration about how we can strengthen community change efforts with what currently passes for knowledge/impact/evidence. The challenges of replication and fidelity plague us all as funding becomes more business and corporate driven. The organizations that are getting funded are the ones that can meet the threshold of evidence rather than demonstrating true quality of life changes in participants and the community. What I find eternally challenging is how it always comes back to the financial resources. ***There are opportunities, people, organizations and communities that would be open to creating a more impact focused way of looking at our work.*** Who are the funder allies that are interested in experimenting with these strategies? The public health arena seems to be our closest ally in this work. Perhaps we should be looking there?

**Miho:** I also agree with Alisa that the public health sector is fertile ground for conversations about paradigm shifts. For example, there are four states where the Caucasian population has become the minority. In order for these public institutions to effectively serve its mission while responding to changing demographics, it is critical to find ways to meaningfully gain direct input from communities that are increasingly diverse. Developing curricula about PAR can be challenging and difficult to standardize. PAR is more than a technical process, it requires specific skill sets to manage complex group dynamics and the specific context setting you are working in. If we could somehow document this, we could offer a counter-argument that PAR does produce genuine information that is surfaced from the ground level. There is always a bias that community people cannot be experts because they don’t know how to do systematic inquiry. It’s important to name this bias as we strive to shift the paradigm.

### ***Where Do We Go From Here?***

**Aimee:** This conversation has traveled across multiple levels of systems and spheres. It would be helpful to develop to a framework to identify the areas we want delve deeper into, including dissecting the challenges and strategy. We need to understand our landscape and establishing a common vision for mobilizing our field, our allies, our collaborators, and partners on the ground.

- ◆ Locally: We can’t wait for funding to do everything. How do we stay true to our values of radical social change work? What does it mean for local organizations? What are the resources/partnerships we need?
- ◆ Relationships between local organizations and their communities & funding partners: How do we negotiate those relationships? How do we gain momentum and influence?
- Systemic: How do we address the structural entities/frameworks that prevent us from moving in certain ways?



I think the process of identifying and mapping our strategic allies and where strategic conversations are happening within all of these layers would be extremely helpful for shifting the evaluation paradigm to one that advances our community change work.



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## UPCOMING EVENTS:

### **Domestic Violence Prevention through Media Advocacy - WEBINAR**

*Wednesday, May 30th, 11 am - 12:30pm (PST)*

TC-TAT and co-presenter Berkeley Media Studies Group will discuss how to use media advocacy strategically to advance primary prevention of domestic violence (DV) among adults and young adults. Participants will learn about the challenges in current news coverage of violence, how to identify opportunities to create news around primary prevention of DV, and how to frame DV to emphasize prevention and promote policy solutions. This webinar is a project of the California Department of Public Health, Violence Prevention Unit, Domestic Violence Training and Education Program.

### **Movement Building: Exploring the Concept of Beloved Community - WEBINAR**

*\*DATE TO BE CONFIRMED*

What do social activists like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Grace Lee Boggs mean when they speak about 'beloved community'? How can the beloved community concept strengthen our prevention work? Join TC-TAT, with guest presenters Aimee Aravelo - Thompson, Close to Home, and Cristy Chung, Prevention Consultant, for a panel discussion of this concept and what it looks like when we apply it to our domestic and sexual violence prevention efforts.

**TO REGISTER & FOR DETAILS:** Visit [www.transformcommunities.org](http://www.transformcommunities.org) or email [info@transformcommunities.org](mailto:info@transformcommunities.org).

## ABOUT TC-TAT:

TC-TAT is a national technical assistance, training, and resource center that advances new practices, skills, movement building, and policies to prevent violence against women and related forms of abuse, including domestic violence, sexual assault, teen dating violence and gender-based bullying. TC-TAT is available to work with your organization and team members to help advance your prevention activities and agenda. Services include:

- ◆ Individual consultations via email and teleconferences
- ◆ Specialized training and workshop sessions through webinars and listservs
- ◆ On-site assistance may be available on request

To download the previous issue of [\*Catalyst Connections: Building our Intersectional Gender Analysis\*](#).

*For information, visit [www.transformcommunities.org](http://www.transformcommunities.org) or email [info@transformcommunities.org](mailto:info@transformcommunities.org).*

## **THANK YOU.**

TC-TAT extends its gratitude to all of the people who have contributed to this issue: Alisa Del Tufo, Threshold Collaborative; Lisa Fujie Parks, The California Partnership to End Domestic Violence; Miho Kim, DataCenter; Mimi Kim, Creative Interventions; Aimee Thompson-Aravelo, Close to Home; and Maria Elena Torre, The Public Science Project.