

# Three Success Stories

## Story 1: **Organizacion en California de Lideres Campesinas, Inc.** (Farmworker Women’s Leadership Network)

Since 1992, Lideres Campesinas has worked to develop the capacity of and provide a unified voice for farmworker women in California. This statewide network of women activists focuses on social and health issues of farmworkers such as economic development, pesticide poisoning, HIV education, nutrition and domestic violence.

Lideres Campesinas began working in the domestic violence prevention arena after needs assessments in 1988 and 1993 indicated that intimate violence is one of the top five concerns among farmworker women. This is not to say that domestic violence is more of a problem in farmworker communities. Rather, factors such as isolation, language barriers, fears of deportation, and limited bilingual and bicultural services make it difficult for farmworker women to leave abusive situations.

The work of Lideres Campesinas is based on a peer education model. They train women organizers in the causes of domestic violence, its symptoms and available resources. The domestic violence training program addresses how cultural and poverty issues affect the way that farmworker women deal with the violence in their lives. Organizers who go through the training return to their communities and share the information they have learned with other farmworkers.

*“Initial contacts are made through this peer-to-peer education model. It is the basis for our success in accessing women who are isolated due to linguistic and cultural barriers. We take a long time to train our community leaders on domestic violence issues. And when they go into the community, they often make their contacts in the unlikeliest of places—like the beauty shop. They go where the women are, they connect with them and establish trust.”*

—Elia Gallardo

*“Until I talked to the other women, I didn’t understand about domestic abuse. I didn’t know there was such a thing. Growing up in Mexico, I learned that the man is the boss. If you don’t do what he wants, then you must pay the price. But it was getting worse and worse for me at home. Even my children, who are almost grown now, were disrespectful of me. So, finally, after all these years, I said, ‘Enough!’”*

—Paula, 58-year-old mother

*“Farm worker women have domestic violence problems and there is no support in their areas. We want to bring in services to their communities and train them so they can empower themselves and other women. The message that we are trying to spread among the thousands of women who need to hear it is: “It is up to us to take control of our lives.”*

—Mily Trevino-Sauceda, Founder and Director of Lideres Campesinas

Lideres Campesinas uses a variety of strategies to break the linguistic barriers and cultural reluctance that impede Hispanic farmworker women from being vocal about their abuse. One successful strategy has been to perform skits at forums and other community education activities. The skits are performed

in Spanish and recreate scenarios of domestic abuse. Women in the audience often recognize the pattern of behavior in their own lives and identify with the performers. The skits are often followed by presentations on the cycle of domestic violence and information about community resources. Lideres Campesinas often partners with social service organizations, law enforcement, and others in the community in their efforts to prevent violence among farmworker women.

Lideres Campesinas also provides legal assistance to battered, undocumented farmworker women who are married to legal citizens or permanent residents. These services were developed in recognition of the fact that batterers use their wives' undocumented status as a way of maintaining control in the relationship.

*“One study of undocumented immigrants found that for 64% of Latinas and 57% of Philipinas, the primary barrier to seeking help from social service agencies is the fear of deportation.”*

—C. Hogeland and K. Rosen, *Dreams Lost, Dreams Found: Undocumented Women in the Land of Opportunity*

In observation of Domestic Violence Awareness month, Lideres Campesinas organized the first large awareness events in farmworker communities. Through processions and vigils, women remember those who died by the hand of their intimate, share stories, and convey to victims that they are not alone—there is support in the close-knit farmworker community. These domestic violence awareness events now take place yearly in five farmworker communities.

The Lideres Campesinas domestic violence project initially was the only program in the country that specifically focused on Spanish-speaking farmworker women. Recognizing the invaluable work of the Lideres Campesinas, the Family Violence Prevention Fund awarded the organization its prestigious 1995 Marshalls Domestic Peace Prize.

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## **Story 2: Purple Berets . . . Women Defending Women**

The Purple Berets, a grassroots women's organization formed in 1991, has been a visible force in protecting the rights of women in Sonoma county. The underlying philosophy of the Purple Berets is the belief that women standing together in collective resistance can effect positive change in our communities. The activists encourage and support women to confront their rapists, batterers, the court system, law enforcement, school administrations, and employers.

Using a variety of strategies, especially direct action, the Purple Berets have created a public demand for change in how crimes of violence against women are handled. They focus their efforts on holding the criminal justice system, elected officials and others in positions of power accountable for their response to and treatment of victims of sexual violence.

When Sonoma State University attempted to suppress six women students' reports of sexual assault, Sonoma County Women Against Rape (SCWAR) helped the women file a federal civil rights complaint. When the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) investigation blasted the university for its handling of sexual harassment/sex discrimination complaints, the university responded by suppressing the report. The Purple Berets blew the lid off the secret by blanketing the campus with a leaflet headlined "Name That Professor." The leaflet cited the OCR finding that a professor who had eight complaints filed against him for sexual harassment, including rape, was not disciplined by the university, and invited students to name the professor and the offending behavior. The effect was to break the silence surrounding teacher-student sexual harassment and to demonstrate strategies women students could use to hold the university accountable.

After three years of advocating for individual victims in cases of sexual assault and domestic violence, the Purple Berets looked to a different strategy for more systemic change. Joining with other local women's groups, Purple Berets and SCWAR circulated the Equal Justice for Women & Children petition calling on elected officials to mandate prioritizing of violent crimes against women. Armed with statistics like, "1,998 domestic violence calls to police resulted in only seven felony convictions," the petition successfully built a public consensus for change. "Although all of our demands were called radical at the time, within two years virtually all had been met," states one Purple Berets activist. As a result of the activists, domestic violence prosecutors in Sonoma County have nearly doubled arrests for domestic violence, arrests for restraining order violations are mandated, and there is increased training and supervision for law enforcement.

On April 15, 1996, a Sonoma County woman, Maria Teresa Macias was murdered by her estranged husband. Four days later, headlines in the local newspaper read, "Cops Wrap Up Investigation." Knowing there was much more to the story, the Purple Berets, working with Women Against Rape, uncovered and exposed the real story behind Teresa's death. What they unearthed was clear evidence of how law enforcement's failure to treat domestic violence as a crime literally kills women.

In addition to prior reports of physical and sexual abuse of the children, Teresa or witnesses had called or visited the sheriff's department 22 times just in the last three months of her life to report her husband's stalking, violation of restraining orders, and other acts of harassment. The sheriff's department did nothing, despite the county's mandatory arrest policy for restraining order violations. The women activists exposed the history of Teresa's contacts with law enforcement and, in spite of official efforts to suppress the story, got the truth into the local media.

The work of the Purple Berets and SCWAR resulted in investigations by the state attorney general's office and a local committee that drafted recommendations to improve the criminal justice system's handling of domestic violence. The Macias case also fueled a landmark \$15 million Equal Protection lawsuit against the county. By educating and mobilizing the public, using the courts and the media, and partnering with local organizations, the Purple Berets translated the tragedy of Teresa's death into advocacy for reform. As Tanya Brannan of the Purple Berets noted, "Teresa Macias has become the symbol for all that must change if women everywhere are to be safe from domestic violence."

*"If I die, I don't want other women to suffer as I have suffered. I want them to be listened to."*  
—Maria Teresa Macias

For information, contact: Purple Berets, P.O. Box 3064, Santa Rosa CA 95402  
Tuesdays: (707) 887-0262 Fridays: (707) 887-0865

## Story 3: The Teen CAT

The Teen CAT consists of a group of ninth graders at a local Marin County, California high school. Teen CAT members attended trainings about domestic violence and gender socialization, discussed racism and sexism, and participated in group exercises that examined the role of the media in perpetuating negative stereotypes of women and girls. Following their training, the teens were ready to develop action plans for reaching out to other youth.

Over the past few years, Teen CAT members have:

- ◆ Joined with the Young Feminist Network to host an open forum on the issues that young women face.
- ◆ Conducted presentations to over 1,000 peers at neighboring schools. Presentations included skits and role plays which challenged young people to examine gender roles and to work to prevent teen dating violence.
- ◆ Written a script on teen dating violence, recruited a volunteer film director to make it into a video, secured funding for the project, and acted in the production, which was released on videotape in 1998 as “abuse--NO WAY!”
- ◆ Hosted a monthly movie night which features films chosen by Teen CAT members that depict women and girls in positive roles.
- ◆ Hosted a weekly chat room session on an internet website for teens called “The INSITE.” Teen CAT Members provided support, advice, information, and encouragement to teens around the country and globally regarding teen dating, violence, and abuse.
- ◆ Recruited other teens to join the CAT and get involved.

For information, contact: Marin Abused Women’s Services, 1717 Fifth Avenue, San Rafael, CA 94901. Phone: (415) 457-2464 [www.transformcommunities.org](http://www.transformcommunities.org).

