



A Community-Mobilization Approach to Preventing Domestic Violence

Close to Home provides technical assistance and other resources to mobilize Waltham, Mass.

SUMMARY

In 2002, residents of Dorchester, Mass., founded [Close to Home](#) to promote a community-mobilization approach to the prevention of domestic violence. In 2008, the organization launched an effort to replicate its program in three Massachusetts communities: Waltham, Brocton, and Martha's Vineyard. Partner agencies in the latter two communities were unable to continue in the program for financial and organizational reasons after one year, but Close to Home continued to provide support and technical assistance to REACH Beyond Domestic Violence, in Waltham.

Key Results

- Waltham's REACH Beyond Domestic Violence implemented the early stages of a community-mobilization effort, engaging some 300 people in community assessment and follow-up activities.
- Close to Home's training consultant and the project team created a training curriculum with technical assistance tools and materials. These were subsequently incorporated into a resource guide for implementing a community-mobilization initiative.

Funding

From October 2008 through February 2011, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) funded this project with a \$369,182 grant.

CONTEXT

According to the [2000 National Violence Against Women Survey](#), almost 25 percent of women and 7.6 percent of men reported having been assaulted by an intimate partner at some time in their life. A 2003 [report](#) by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control estimated that medical and mental health care services for victims of such violence cost the nation \$4.1 billion annually.

A Community Prevention Approach

In 2002, residents of Dorchester, Mass., founded [Close to Home](#) to promote a community-mobilization approach to the prevention of domestic violence. By 2008, the organization had established a network of 65 volunteers and 75 businesses and local organizations, and was engaging some 400 people a month in prevention activities.

Close to Home engages youth, adult residents, and civic and business leaders in a multistage process, beginning with community assessment. Activities such as mapping, surveys and one-on-one meetings provide a better understanding of the local environment, including the prevalence of, and attitudes towards, domestic violence. Following this assessment, community members:

- Start conversations about domestic and sexual violence in their community
- Build skills in violence prevention
- Initiate domestic and sexual violence prevention projects in the neighborhood

RWJF's Interest in This Area

RWJF's \$4.5 million program, *Strengthening What Works: Preventing Partner Violence in Immigrant Communities* seeks to enhance the evaluation capacity of community-based organizations using innovative and promising approaches to prevent intimate partner violence in immigrant and refugee communities in the United States. It runs through February 2013.

Another program, *Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships*, is developing and implementing effective strategies to prevent relationship violence among youth. This \$17.1 million effort runs until mid-May 2013.

And RWJF has funded a [variety of studies and demonstration projects](#), all within two other programs: *New Jersey Health Initiatives*¹ and *RWJF Local Funding Partnerships*,² as well as through ad hoc grants.

THE PROJECT

In 2008, Close to Home launched an effort to replicate its community-mobilization approach to domestic violence prevention at three agencies in Massachusetts:

- REACH Beyond Domestic Violence, in Waltham (suburban)

¹ See [Program Results Report](#) on one project.

² For projects in the area of violence preventions see the Local Funding Partnerships [website](#). Click the Project Focus tab and select Violence Prevention & Treatment.

- Health Imperatives, in Brockton (urban)
- Martha’s Vineyard Community Services in Martha’s Vineyard (rural)

Each agency hired a community organizer to carry out most of the work of implementing the Close to Home program in their communities. Close to Home hired a training consultant, P. Catlin Fullwood, to train community organizers and their supervisors, and to assist in the development of a curriculum on the community-mobilization approach.

After the first year of the project, Close to Home terminated its contract with the Martha’s Vineyard and Brockton agencies. The economic downturn put pressure on both Close to Home and the two agencies. Close to Home continued to provide technical assistance to REACH in Waltham.

During the project, Close to Home staff participated in the Governor’s Council to Address Domestic and Sexual Violence. The Council’s Promising Practices Working Group, co-chaired by Close to Home, produced a report titled *Community Mobilization, High Risk Assessment Teams, and Coordinated Community Response*, which included recommendations to spread the community-mobilization approach throughout the state.

Evaluation

Close to Home originally planned to conduct an impact evaluation of the project. Both the timeframe of the project and the challenges of administering such an evaluation in the context of a community organizing effort made that unrealistic, according to Project Director Aimee M. Thompson Arevalo. Instead, it focused the evaluation on the implementation process. Mariana Garrettson, MPH, of the University of North Carolina’s Injury Prevention Research Center, conducted the evaluation.

Garrettson produced an evaluation report, *Close to Home Implementation Study Final Report*. See [Bibliography](#) for details and [Lessons Learned](#) for conclusions.

Other Funding

Jane’s Trust with a grant of \$200,000, and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, with two grants totaling \$350,000, also supported the project.

Results

The project director reported the following results to RWJF:

- **Waltham’s REACH Beyond Domestic Violence implemented the early stages of a community-mobilization effort, engaging some 300 people in community assessment and follow-up activities.** The community organizer in Waltham worked with a core group of community leaders to design and implement community building and domestic violence prevention projects. These included:

- A community assessment through neighborhood mapping, gathering information on residents’ activities, and conducting a survey on perceptions of domestic violence
- A two-part meeting called REACHing the Community to share the survey results with the residents
- A Fall Festival in 2010, a day of music and food with “know your neighbor” games and domestic violence awareness-raising activities
- Training and education for the public, including training for staff at a hair salon and “What To Do, What To Say” training for family, friends, and neighbors of those affected by violence
- A “Latinas Know Your Rights” training project
- **Close to Home’s training consultant and the project team created a training curriculum with technical assistance tools and materials.** These were subsequently incorporated into a resource guide for implementing a community-mobilization initiative. See [Bibliography](#) for details. Close to Home shared the guide with two California agencies, which were in the process of implementing the program. See [Afterward](#) for more details.

LESSONS LEARNED

The evaluator offered the following lessons in her report:

1. **The Close to Home model can be adopted by a domestic violence services agency, but if the amount of support given to Waltham is necessary for success, it is probably not scalable.**
2. **Choose replications sites based on agency capacity—including organizational history, orientation toward organizing and prevention, leadership support for the program, willingness to learn, and financial and organizational stability.**
3. **Agencies with substantial experience in prevention and community engagement are most likely to achieve success with the Close to Home model.**
4. **There is a tension between confidentiality and community engagement.** Domestic violence agencies face an imperative to protect the confidentiality and safety of clients. But community organizing requires engagement and publicity. Agencies must learn to manage this tension when they implement community-mobilization efforts around domestic violence.

AFTERWARD

Close to Home continues to provide technical assistance to REACH Beyond Domestic Violence in Waltham as well as the two agencies adopting the approach in California.

In addition, Close to Home is using the experience gained through the project to expand a community organizing partnership with a Greater Boston organization The Network/La Red, a domestic violence support group that provides services to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. Both organizations will be working with Jane Doe, Inc., the state coalition against domestic violence, providing training for their direct service organization members.

Close to Home will create a dissemination strategy for the tools developed during the project and is also planning a small impact study examining its original community in Dorchester and the two communities in California.

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