

July Newsletter

Connections - BLM and Prevention of IPV

Special Dates

- **July 7 - 3:30pm**
- Zoom Volunteer mtg.
- **July - Osborne**
"Cards for a Cause" fundraiser. (FB event)

Current Needs

- **Disinfectant wipes**
- **Swiffer Wet Jet pads and liquid**
- **Laundry detergent**
- **New pillows and protectors**
- **Clorox bleach**
- **All purpose liquid cleaner**

It certainly seems that we are on the verge of a new awakening to the travesty of oppression and racism in the US. Now, more than ever before, as the Black Lives Matter movement gains momentum, members of the black community are beginning to be heard by governmental leaders in our communities. White folks are learning about oppression and speaking up on behalf of people of color. There is a movement to examine the deep-seated systemic racism present in our society.



Addressing the root causes of racism is vitally important when trying to eliminate the inequity of health outcomes, educational opportunities, income disparities, incarceration rates, and so many more measures of well-being. But an often-overlooked connection is the one between racism and intimate partner violence; anti-racism work is crucial to uprooting the systems of oppression that allow violence to occur.

There are several ways to look at IPV prevention, but the one that has the greatest impact and should become our ultimate goal is primary prevention. Primary prevention is defined as preventing violence before it occurs. This work can take place on several different levels: individual, relationship, community, and societal. If we think of primary prevention as changing the social norms that allow and condone violence, then these efforts should target attitudes, beliefs, practices and policies that contribute to violence. This includes all areas of oppression that show up as discrimination against class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and disabilities, as well as race.

We know that systemic racism has a huge impact on our black community in terms of health, poverty, safe housing, mental health, etc., and the intergenerational trauma experienced by African Americans in our country only compounds the effects of present day racism. When people absorb the level of aggression and violence that is often directed at blacks, it is likely to come back into their homes and communities in the form of domestic violence. As a result of pervasive repression, folks often take that frustration out by exerting power and control over their family members.

We also know that there are protective factors that are associated with lower rates of IPV: Stable housing, positive school environment, household financial security, connected community environment, and local agency resources and services are a few examples. Many of these protective factors are not present in black communities, often as a result of systemic racism.

As we put together all of this information, it becomes clear that working to eliminate racism should be a priority for all who wish to prevent intimate partner violence. Let's use our advocacy to promote equity and further the cause for healthier communities for all.

Survivor Story

Marissa Alexander



As with many survivors of domestic violence, Marissa Alexander is not just a survivor; she wears many hats, but her role as a survivor defendant is what has given her the opportunity to bring attention to the criminalization of survivors.

Alexander's story began in her mid-twenties when she met a very charismatic, charming man, Rico Gray, who she eventually fell in love with. Gray was very attentive and caring, and the two seemed to have a lot in common.

Unfortunately, that attention soon turned into jealousy, which caused Alexander to feel on guard all the time. Alexander didn't have the language to define what she was experiencing as abuse; she didn't think his actions were *that* bad, and didn't want to become *that* woman, so she remained in denial. But eventually Gray's jealousy escalated into verbal and physical violence. One evening during an incident the police were called, and Gray was arrested. This arrest resulted in a permanent no contact order being filed; Alexander did not want to press criminal charges for fear of his losing custody of his two children.

Alexander still had feelings for Gray, and truly wanted to make the relationship work, as is true for many survivors. They began to work toward reconciliation, and Alexander began to hope that the relationship could grow, and return to the way it was in the beginning. She became pregnant and modified the no contact order to just include violent actions; she believed that this would protect her in the event that he became abusive again.

In 2010, Alexander gave birth to a premature daughter who had to remain in the hospital for an extended time; she had taken pictures of the baby to show Gray, but he began looking at texts from her ex-husband instead. Alexander had previously been married, had a set of twins, and then divorced, but still maintained a friendly relationship with the father of her children. He had sent her pictures of their twins' birthday party which is what Gray was looking at. He became enraged, began to verbally and physically assault her, and threatened to take her life. She got her registered gun and fired what she describes as a warning shot into the wall.

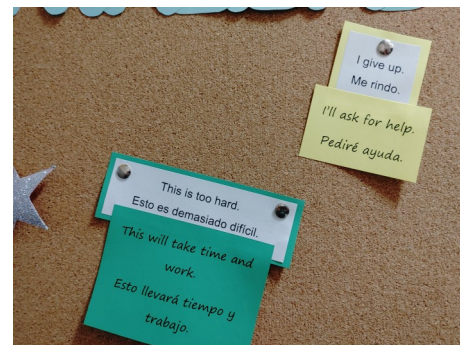
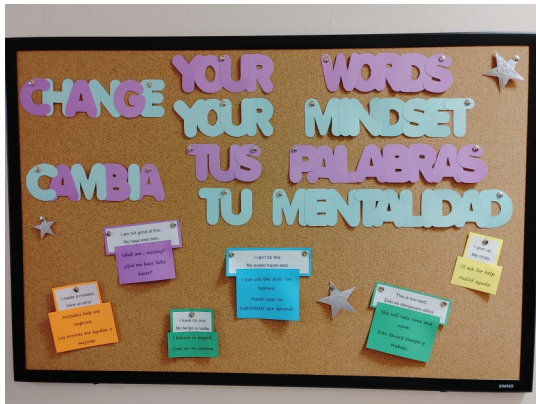
Alexander was arrested for aggravated assault with no intent to harm; in May of 2012 she was sentenced to 20 years in prison. The harshness of her sentence sparked a national outcry about the unfair treatment of domestic violence survivors, and the uneven application of Florida's "Stand Your Ground" law. Following George Zimmerman's acquittal after killing Trayvon Martin, many people began to organize and demand Alexander's freedom. They publicized the case, held protests, and raised funds for her legal defense, and eventually the case was overturned. Upon the threat of a new trial, a plea agreement was reached which resulted in a total of 3 years in prison and 2 years in house detention. In January of 2017, Alexander finally became free.

Upon her release, Alexander established a nonprofit organization, "The Marissa Alexander Justice Project" to end domestic violence and injustice in the criminal system. She is determined to take her ordeal and turn it into an effort to improve outcomes for all survivors.

Around the Shelter

Our bulletin board

Check out this great bulletin board created by Sally, one of our shelter supervisors, to help our clients cultivate a growth mindset! Simply put, a growth mindset sees challenge and failure as a springboard for growth. So next time you find yourself saying, “I just can’t do this!”, add the word “yet” and feel the difference!



Staff changes



Goodbyes are never easy and lately we’ve had to say goodbye to two of our staff members. As May came to a close we said farewell to our Domestic Services Coordinator, **Stephanie Heishman-Litten**. Stephanie has left her staff position at Response to continue to broaden her church ministry as she is currently serving as a Pastor for two churches. We will miss having her here on a daily basis, but she will continue to serve Response in a new volunteer capacity as her schedule allows. Stephanie has worked for Response for eight years so this is a big adjustment for all of us, but we are proud of the work she does in her ministry and wish her continued happiness in that field.

The second staff change will also have a huge impact on our agency, as **Jennifer Morrison** left her position as Executive Director at the end of June. It’s never easy to lose a leader, and especially one as dynamic as Jennifer! There have been many changes and lots of growth in her 12+ years here at Response; during that time we have added a Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator, increased our court advocate position to full-time and added attorney services, expanded our in-school prevention programs, and began sending our bi-annual newsletter to all households in Shenandoah County. Our building is in better shape than ever, as we have secured maintenance services for our building, performed major upgrades to our building’s HVAC system, and made numerous other cosmetic and structural improvements. Jennifer led Response as we increased awareness of intimate partner violence and normalized the conversation about the need for our services in our community.

We know that we will miss Jennifer’s leadership, but wish her all the best in her next endeavor!