



communities leading change

An overview of Close to Home's philosophy and practice for domestic and sexual violence prevention

By Aimee M. Thompson

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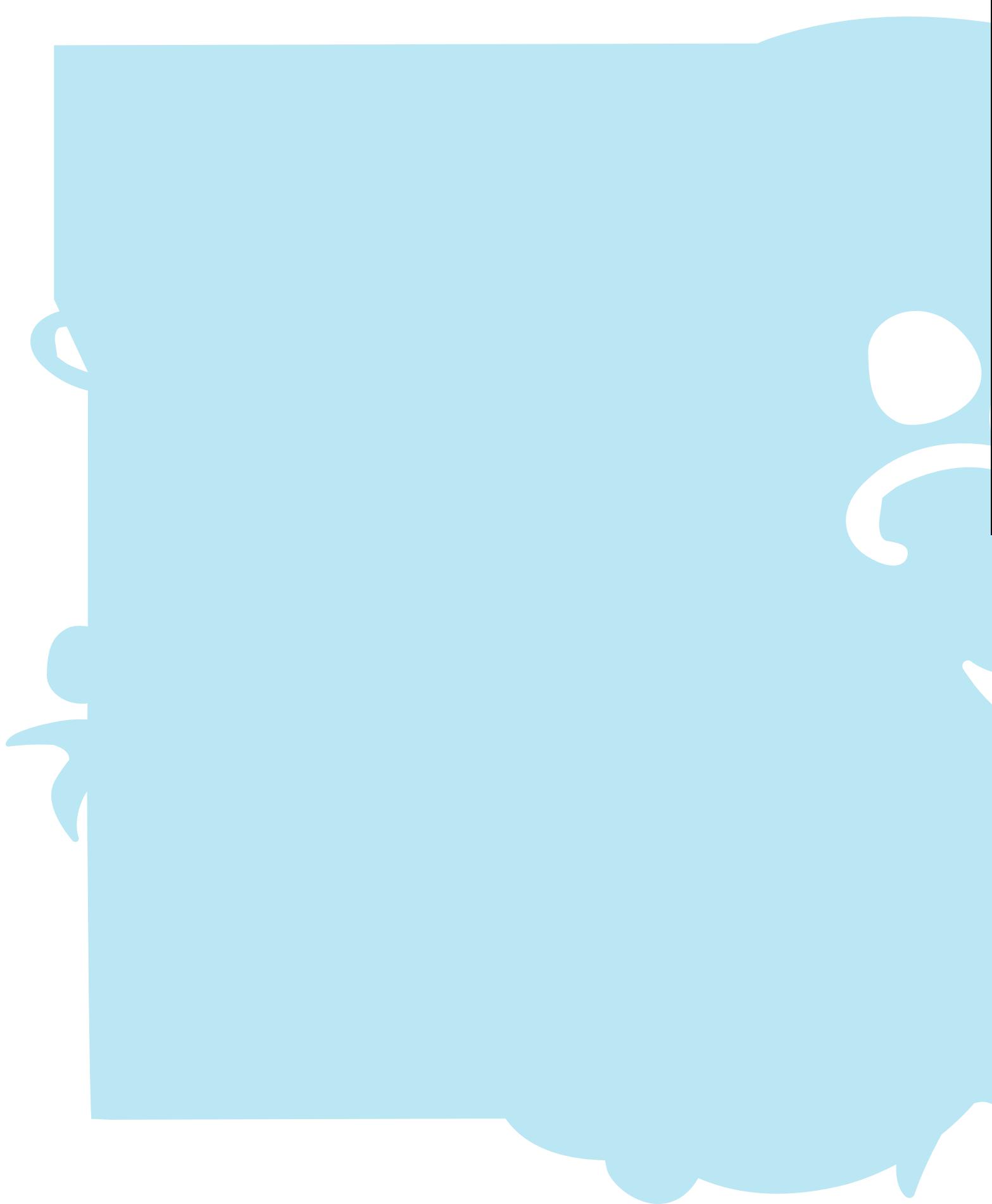
Communities Leading Change

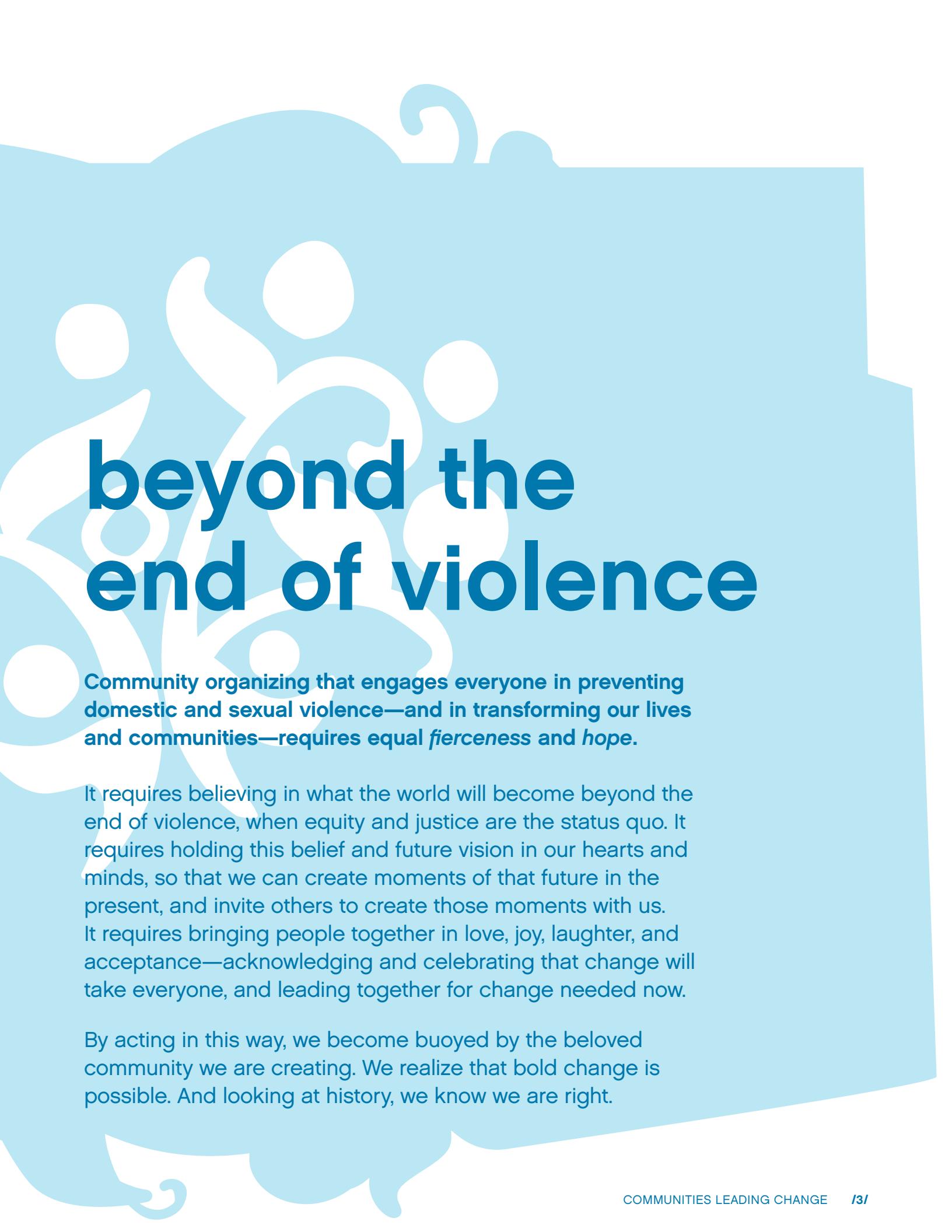
An overview of Close to Home's philosophy and practice for domestic and sexual violence prevention

By Aimee M. Thompson

The Close to Home approach began in Dorchester, Massachusetts, United States, through the ideas, actions, and leadership of community members working in affiliation with the organization Close to Home. It continues to evolve through the leadership and experimentation of communities throughout the United States and beyond.

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beyond the end of violence

Community organizing that engages everyone in preventing domestic and sexual violence—and in transforming our lives and communities—requires equal *fierceness* and *hope*.

It requires believing in what the world will become beyond the end of violence, when equity and justice are the status quo. It requires holding this belief and future vision in our hearts and minds, so that we can create moments of that future in the present, and invite others to create those moments with us. It requires bringing people together in love, joy, laughter, and acceptance—acknowledging and celebrating that change will take everyone, and leading together for change needed now.

By acting in this way, we become buoyed by the beloved community we are creating. We realize that bold change is possible. And looking at history, we know we are right.

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introduction



A New Way of Being

The future of domestic and sexual violence prevention—and ultimately ending violence—requires paradigms and processes that engage everyone in creating change. We need everyone playing a role and taking responsibility for ending violence in our communities and in the broader society.

The way forward brings us into a new way of being—building relationships, discovering a shared vision, and collectively living that vision today. Doing so effectively reaches deep into our humanity and the social norms that cause violence, which makes the work both challenging and remarkable. It requires great effort and commitment, and accordingly holds the potential to change communities for generations.

In this spirit, this document sets out to convey the following:

1. A **rationale** for calling on whole communities to lead domestic and sexual violence prevention
2. A set of **principles** that guide community-wide efforts toward creating lasting social change
3. An **approach** for moving as a community through understanding, conversation, skill building, and action
4. The **possibilities** when we do so, immediately and into the future

Big Visions and Messy Truths

The idea of whole communities leading change may sound idealistic. However, this work—while rooted in bold visions—is messy, thorny, and both uncomfortably and refreshingly real. This document describes the framework within which such an experience unfolds. It is an overview of how to create the conditions for change. For more detail about how to navigate the challenges and realities of implementation, we invite you to read the companion document, *Tips for Practitioners: Lessons learned from using the Close to Home approach*. Then, to implement the first phase, we recommend following *The Assess Guide: How to use action research in Close to Home's community organizing approach*. You can visit www.c2home.org for PDF downloads of each, as well as for other resources.

Elevating the Conversation

The ideas in this document are both new and old. For generations, communities of people have come together to call for justice and change. Our history tells the stories of how they succeeded—redefining our communities, our schools, our economies, our politics.

In the movement to end domestic and sexual violence, countless communities have successfully organized and continue to organize for social change. However, these efforts still fall outside “mainstream” solutions—which are focused on crisis and criminal justice interventions—and often do not receive the support needed to expand their power and reach. This document seeks to elevate the conversation about community organizing to address domestic and sexual violence—bringing it into a more central space where critical momentum can be gained. Greater than any one idea suggested herein, this document as a whole represents the following beliefs:

1. **Change is more powerful and lasting when everyone is involved.**
Since domestic and sexual violence affect all of us in some way, we all have a role in creating change.
2. **While this is provocative and challenging work, it is also meaningful and fun.**
It is about living a vision of community beyond the end of violence starting now, through the sharing of food, compassion, conviction, and opportunities for action—enabling both personal transformation as well as social and political change.
3. **We can define processes for community organizing while still letting it be emergent.** Structuring and systemizing the work does not need to make it forced or imposed. Creating these types of frameworks will only strengthen our efforts, enabling us to better compare, evaluate, and evolve practice.

Origins and International Dialogue

This document was born from our work as a US-based nonprofit organization called Close to Home (page 37)—and all the relationships, learning, stories, and partnerships that helped shape our practices and ideas. Since the approach outlined in this document has been primarily implemented and evolved within North America, the document will speak from and to that perspective.

However, the work of Close to Home is also part of an international movement advocating for whole communities to lead domestic and sexual violence prevention, primarily through changing social norms^{1,2}. The international emergence of methodologies and research demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach are critical to moving our collective efforts forward³⁻⁵. This document is designed to contribute to this international momentum—to the culture of peer learning that will grow this practice. We all have much to learn as we engage in community mobilization and organizing and much to share in our discoveries of what is hard and beautiful in this work.



what is community organizing?



Bringing Us to Now

In the late 1960s—in multiple countries including the US—the women’s movement made visible the experiences of women living with violence and mobilized a grassroots response.

Over the subsequent four decades, the efforts of the women’s movement gained government support and funding, and expanded to include formal services such as shelters, rape crisis centers, crisis hotlines, and advocacy organizations.

These services saved lives and laid the foundation for change.

However, today, the need for these crisis services often far outstrips available resources, and fewer people believe that more of the same is the answer. Simply put, the best efforts to help have failed to stop the problem. Among advocates, activists, policymakers, and community leaders, there is a push to move beyond our reactive stance to a focus on root causes and social norm change—a growing interest in new solutions that leverage community assets with a focus on violence prevention.

Over the past 40 years, preventative, community-led initiatives have been evolving. Community members have been coming together to challenge the social norms that tolerate violence—by resisting injustice, supporting each other, building power together, healing and re-envisioning, and practicing new ways of being in relationship, family, and community.

Some of this has been happening within organizational and programmatic settings, some within informal settings and people’s social networks. Much of this work has emerged from communities of color, immigrant communities, and LGBTQ communities—communities in which “mainstream” formal services and response strategies are often undesirable, inaccessible, and/or culturally irrelevant. Still, most of these organizing efforts⁶—including some of the most innovative—are not visible to the broader movement, have been bypassed for funding, and remain isolated even from each other. Yet, with courage, creativity, and commitment, the community members leading these efforts persist.

Now, at last, global perspectives are shifting. Prevention methodologies from the US and abroad with roots in activism and mobilizing communities are proving their effectiveness—peaking the curiosity of practitioners, community members, funders, and government entities.⁷

Community Organizing for Domestic and Sexual Violence Prevention

There are many perspectives about how to practice community organizing to address domestic and sexual violence. In this document, we are defining community organizing as a process of engaging whole communities—youth and adults; people of all genders; family, friends, and neighbors; professionals and politicians—in collectively articulating the problem, developing an expansive vision, building collective power and capacity, and creating both personal and social change. This type of community organizing enables the foundational work of violence prevention: engaging everyone in developing the beliefs, skills, actions, and behaviors that can shift social norms and eliminate the root causes of violence. Social norm change for violence prevention requires engagement from across a community. The inherent qualities of community organizing make this possible.

Language and Context

“Organizing” vs “Mobilizing”

While this document refers primarily to community “organizing,” it is important to note that the terms “mobilizing communities” and “community mobilization” are central to international conversations advancing these and similar ideas. While some people feel that “organizing” and “mobilizing” are two ends of a spectrum,⁶ with “organizing” being the more political of the two, this document will treat the words synonymously. That said, it will mostly use the term “community organizing” because of its connotations of activism for North American readers. It is critical that we make the distinction between “awareness” (as in receiving) and “action” (as in doing). This document speaks to community organizing as work that explicitly engages community members in individual and collective action.

“Network” and “Network Members”

This document draws from the growing literature on “network theory” and “network leadership”⁸ in relation to how community members are engaged as actors in social change. Here the term “network” is not describing an umbrella organization, nor a national association or electronic social networking platform. Rather a network, in this case, is a flexible community organizing entity. Community members can choose to participate in varying roles, small or large, to advance social change efforts, and in doing so become a “network member.”

Being a “member,” above all, provides a sense of purpose and belonging rather than a set of fixed obligations, and is an experience that can be self-defined and changed over time. Most significantly, a network is driven by strong relationships and shared leadership, with everyone bringing ideas and skills to carry the work forward. The initiating organizers/organization support and facilitate the process, as network members discover the strengths of their community and co-create the social change campaigns they feel will be most effective.



rationale



A rationale for calling *on* whole communities

Family, friends, and neighbors are closest to the issue and can play a powerful role.

Often people who experience violence will share this experience with family, friends, or neighbors rather than with a service provider.⁹ In turn, those family, friends, and neighbors can provide people who experience violence with all kinds of direct support—by bearing witness, by holding those using violence accountable, by providing concrete support such as a place to stay, and more. Over the long-term, children’s resilience in the face of violence is increased by the presence of supportive adults in their social and kinship networks. Also, those using violence are often more responsive to social sanctions from family and peers than to legal sanctions. In addition to family, friends, and neighbors being powerful responders when violence happens, it is in these community networks that the social norms, power dynamics, and biases that perpetuate violence often exist. Equally, it is here that they can be transformed—making community networks all the more critical to prevention and social change strategies.

The current response does not have the capacity to meet the need.

In the US, the majority of funding related to domestic and sexual violence goes to crisis-intervention and service-oriented responses. For example, shelters provide a safe haven for those in immediate danger. Community-based services, such as rape crisis and health care centers, provide individualized clinical and legal advocacy as well as support groups. Specialized intervention programs engage those using violence in gaining insight into their own actions and learning alternatives. All of these services have provided invaluable support to those experiencing and using violence. However, in urban centers this prevailing response is stretched thin by ever-increasing rates of reported violence, as waiting lists abound for shelter beds, children’s support groups, and intervention programs. More broadly, staff are challenged by the complexity of the needs—feeling ill-equipped to provide effective assistance to people who experience not only violence but also profound and chronic poverty, intergenerational trauma, chemical dependency, and mental illness. Given the size of the problem, it is unlikely that the current service delivery model will ever have the resources to meet the need or create the change people are seeking.

Many people experience further injustice from the current response.

We know that many people do not seek help from formal service providers or people in positions of power due to fear, mistrust, or inaccessibility. Of those who do engage a formal agency, it is typically not a first choice, but a last resort. With few exceptions, the social service and criminal justice responses to domestic and sexual violence have failed to build inclusive community support and accountability. For example, current responses to violence are often not culturally appropriate or language accessible; do not respond to the leadership, strengths, or needs of communities; and often require those affected by violence to leave their communities, jobs, and schools. As a direct result, communities have been fractured by the institutional responses. These inadequacies are further exacerbated by the reality of racism in all systems, including the criminal justice and child protection systems. This racism results in over-incarceration and disproportionate removal of children from immigrant communities and communities of color, and creates yet another barrier for building community and engaging with existing services.

The current response distances community members from their capacity to lead change.

By relegating power and responsibility to professionals reacting to violence after it happens, the system often leaves community members without the resources and tools for preventing violence before it starts. Since the current response emphasizes calling experts for help and seeking safety away from community, few people experience their own agency in change and few people experience community as a resource for change. Even the majority of prevention strategies in the US—often curriculum or awareness based—do not engage community members in shaping solutions, playing a leadership role, or integrating the prevention of domestic and sexual violence into community life and decision-making processes. This means people with passion for and connection to the issues are rarely called upon to lead.

Domestic and sexual violence are issues that affect everyone.

Domestic and sexual violence have profound physical and emotional consequences for those who experience or witness violence, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder. There are also consequences that reach far beyond. For example, domestic and sexual violence significantly impact a community's economic and social vitality, due to the costs of health care and crisis response systems, as well as the barriers and safety issues that can prevent those experiencing violence from attending work and participating in civic life.^{10,7} There is also an impact on youth development, as children who live with domestic and sexual violence may have greater challenges in school as well as difficulty forming healthy relationships with peers, teachers, and other potentially supportive adults in the community.

Among these consequences and others, one of the most profound and far-reaching is how the silence that surrounds domestic and sexual violence limits community members' ability to connect honestly and fully with each other. A community cannot truly thrive if its members live in fear of the violence occurring in their homes, in their relationships, and in their neighborhoods. When community members are isolated by shame, fear, and the impact of trauma, people's opportunities for friendships and other community connections are limited. Young people's social development is hampered, because it is not safe to participate in school activities, at community centers, or to invite friends to their own homes. All of this affects the social cohesion of a community and can stymie organizing and community building efforts.

Lasting change relies on all aspects of community life.

In many areas, there are community-building initiatives that focus on the public and civic life of a community, such as revitalizing economic health, youth development, voter registration, and green space. Domestic and sexual violence prevention is often left out of these community-wide efforts due to it being cast as a private and individual concern. However, the root causes of domestic and sexual violence are embedded in social norms, which live in all aspects of a community.

Widespread change of social norms requires engagement of individuals, family, friends, and neighbors as well as engagement of civic life and social services. When this is happening, new conversations and behaviors take place on neighborhood front steps, at the doctor's office, at school, on the soccer field, on the radio, in political offices, and more. This kind of community engagement is different from people being passive recipients of awareness raising. Here, everyone is creating new strategies and messages and putting them into action.

People want to engage differently but remain disconnected from each other.

Community members are asking what they can do about violence. They want to know how they can prevent domestic and sexual violence from occurring. They want to know what to say and do if someone close to them is directly affected. In many ways, the community is our largest and most untapped resource. At the same time, service providers are feeling the constraints of limited resources and recognizing the need for proactive solutions. More and more of them are seeking tools for engaging with community members to co-create the way forward. It is time to bridge the divisions and power dynamics that diminish community engagement efforts. With equal respect for everyone's wisdom and everyone's capacity to shape and lead change, we must all proceed with the understanding that a truly collaborative effort, with a bold vision anchored in social change and community leadership, is a critical part of the way forward.

principles



A set of principles *that* guide community-wide efforts

Community organizing to prevent domestic and sexual violence is attracting lively, global dialogue about the qualities of promising practice—discussions that Close to Home has both participated in and facilitated. The central belief in these discussions is that transformative community organizing is values-driven and that distinct qualities set it apart from other forms of community engagement and action. At Close to Home, we have dedicated ourselves to the qualities captured in the following principles, which in our experience lead to profound social change.

A Fierce Commitment to Community

We believe that community organizing is most effective when led by community members who live, work, and play in that neighborhood, town, or cultural/identity community. Others involved in the work—including the initiating organizers/organization—participate in the process first and foremost with humility, a spirit of learning, and a commitment to that community. Together, everyone sees the community as greater than the sum of its parts and shares the following qualities of heart and mind:

- Reverence, love, and esteem for the community
- Profound respect for the knowledge and wisdom that exists there
- Belief in the community's ability to be the author of its own transformation

For All Social Change

We believe in community organizing that practices a rigorous intersectional analysis. The causes of violence are rooted in the intersections of multiple forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and adultism. This critical understanding guides us in taking thoughtful and effective action; in connecting gender justice with racial equity; in developing a shared analysis of the root causes of domestic and sexual violence; and in advancing the transformation of the social, economic, and political systems fueling injustice—all while cultivating the compassion and action we envision.

Creative Action

We believe that it is the propositional nature of creativity—the making something, rather than only breaking something down—that defines the true spirit of this work. When community organizing is truly “creative,” community members come together to envision an alternative, an image of how things might be. Everyone not only speaks out on what must change but also creates and seizes opportunities for stepping into a new way of being. With this approach, community organizing becomes an inspired form of activism, reminding everyone that each moment is an opportunity to ACT—for people’s rights and for the community imagined.

Whole Community Engagement

We believe that the most powerful community organizing engages a cross-section of the community—youth and adults, people of all genders and races—and touches all levels of the Ecological Model:¹¹

- Individuals and their internal transformation
- Social networks and the power of family/friends/neighbors
- Local organizations and the public life of neighborhoods
- Societal and governing institutions

With this broad, multi-dimensional involvement, we discover our connections to the problem and identify our roles in creating and implementing solutions.

Powerful Relationships

We believe in community organizing that enables people to develop deep and supportive relationships in which they engage their strongest motivations for social change. Relationships are the glue of this work, connecting people to build power for acting individually and collectively, creating space for telling the truth about our experiences and for compassionately holding each other accountable. When this happens, authentic connection and personal transformation become the engines of social change. We begin to form meaningful relationships that extend across social barriers and even ideological differences, as we rally around a collective vision acting as our full selves.

Beloved Community

We believe in community organizing that fosters a spirit of laughter, play, joy, and love. Such a spirit begins and grows quite simply, and profoundly, through the sharing of food, art, stories, and ideas. Upon this foundation, we can live our way into creating a beloved community—honoring each other, offering a sense of belonging, taking risks and being creative, and trying new things. As we practice this new way of being together, we experience change in small moments on an intimate scale that in time extends through our social networks, neighborhood, and community. This sense of community gives us the strength for moving through the struggles, discomfort, and resistance that also live in this work. It makes room for exposing fear, shame, sadness, and conflict without judgment. A beloved community is not always uplifting and easy, but it is real and transformative.

Community Assets and Strengths

We believe in community organizing grounded in community assets and strengths. Engaging from a strengths-based perspective creates opportunities to build on powerful qualities or untapped opportunities within a community—such as cultural norms, public spaces, informal leadership, and community celebrations. Seeking out community assets can also reveal what is not always visible—networks of informal relationships, communication patterns, and the talents and skills community members can bring to the social change process. When community organizing processes work intentionally to identify and utilize strengths, they have greater cultural and social relevance and lead to lasting solutions.

Network Leadership

We believe in community organizing based on a spirit of peerness—a recognition that we are all in this together. In a network leadership model there is not a leader and follower *per se*. The magic is what happens in that relational space—with leadership, creativity, and action emerging from our relationships with each other. In this context, we work together to create opportunities based on what is exciting, energizing, and relevant to our lives and analysis. The options for taking action become vast, with an entire network of expertise to draw from. We roll up our sleeves and create together, engaging intuitively and experimentally as both leaders and learners. What we discover, create, and achieve is shared widely and broadly. Working in this way changes our perspectives and opens our eyes to the opportunities and relationships that immediately surround us and to what can come from joining our power and sharing our strengths.

Patience and Persistence

We believe in community organizing that supports sustained efforts over time, while honoring how emotionally challenging and risky this work can be. Shifting commonly held attitudes and behaviors is a gradual process of change rather than a one-time event—and not just a change we must seek in others but one that we must look for in ourselves. It requires redefining how we use our power, resisting dominant culture habits, and creating time and space for the emotional work that arises when we have the courage to do so. A multi-year investment allows for a phased approach that remains attentive and responsive to emerging needs in the community. It ensures time for everyone to support each other as we move through experiences of learning, building skills, and implementing solutions. Above all, a phased process keeps power in everyone's hands, as we work together to realize bold transformations for an end to violence.



approach



An approach for engaging as a community

The following pages provide a summary of how the Close to Home approach unfolds. For more detail about how to navigate the challenges and realities of implementation, we invite you to read the companion document, *Tips for Practitioners: Lessons learned from using the Close to Home approach*. Then, to implement the first phase, we recommend following *The Assess Guide: How to use action research in Close to Home's community organizing approach*. You can visit www.c2home.org for PDF downloads of each, as well as for other resources.

Growing a Network

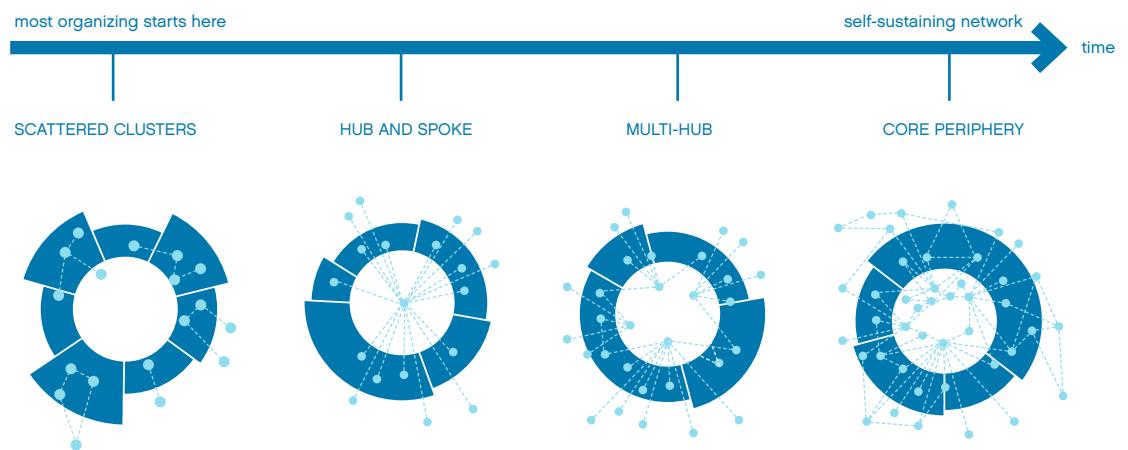
Community organizing has the power to inspire community members to become activists in their everyday lives—positively and creatively taking action for social change. Network theory and practice explore how, within these and similar contexts, we can do away with traditional delineations of leaders and followers, and create ways for an expansively growing group of people to work together, nimbly and effectively.

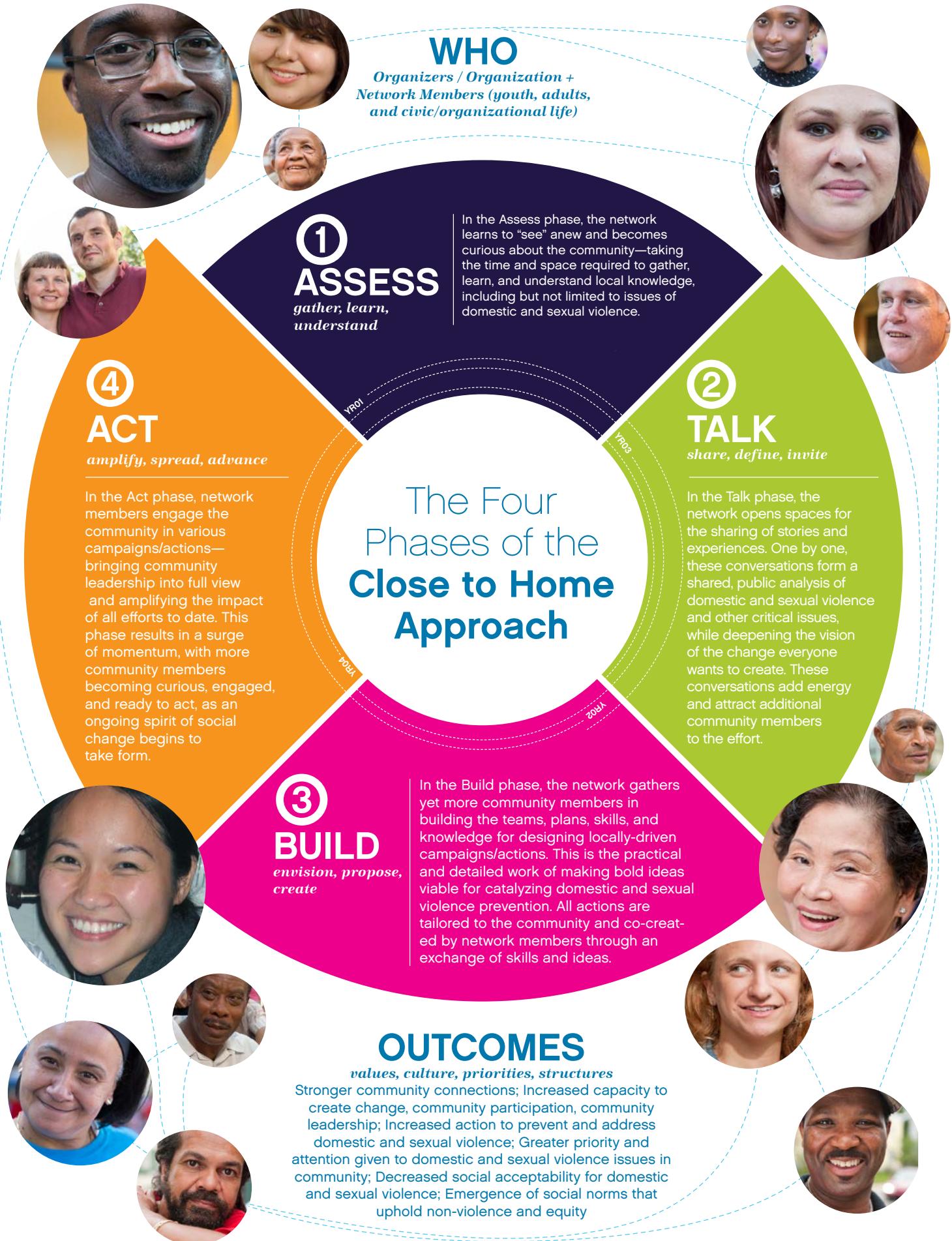
The core purpose of Close to Home's community organizing approach is to set in motion the growth of a community network that can co-create actions for domestic and sexual violence prevention. Through such a network, people join their power and increase community leadership in social change.

A network, by design, is open and flexible. It is transparent, mutual, playful, and relational. In a network, people can immerse themselves and step back, iteratively and effortlessly based on their interests and availability—always with a sense of belonging, always feeling part of the whole. No matter people's level of involvement, they become inspired by being part of something bigger—part of a group that is working to create change in their community—in which all roles are important and valued. That sense of belonging and value, along with their new skills and knowledge for community organizing, inspires people to take action for domestic and sexual violence prevention within their personal lives as well, thus extending the reach of the network's impact.

The community organizing process described on the following pages was especially designed to grow such a network.

Community Organizing and Network Growth¹²





Roles within Network Leadership and Growth

In network leadership, everyone moves in and out of different leadership roles, bringing their unique wisdom and talents to bear on the community organizing process. However, an underlying structure of roles and responsibilities still underpins the network development. Here are the roles inherent in this approach and how they come together to grow the network:

Organizers/Organization

A group of community members, organizers, or a local organization initiates and facilitates the pacing of the approach. They also manage the funding, evaluation, and reporting, and build collective responsibility for the integrity of the work. Above all, they foster the creation of dynamic, safe, open, and fun spaces that invite the engagement and leadership of others.

Network Members

The organizers/organization recruit other community members who are passionate about the issues and interested in creating change. Whether the grandmother on the corner who knows everyone on her street, the youth with great influence in his peer network, or a local restaurant owner, these community members bring an essential and equal voice to the process and become known as “network members.” To engage the cross-section of people required for social norm change, the organizers/organization actively mobilize the participation of community members from three core groups (either simultaneously or over time):

- adults
- youth
- organizational/civic life

The Network

The “network” becomes a combination of the initiating organizers/organization and the ever-growing group of network members. The network then engages other community members, using the processes and activities described on the following pages. Over time, through the organizing process, more and more of the community members reached join the network themselves—causing the network to grow into a dynamic presence in the community. All along, the organizers/organization support the network’s core, with varying network members joining them in more substantial leadership roles.

A key to creating such a network is establishing many ways for community members to enter the work and a range of options for participation. For example, higher touch or more intensive involvement might include weekly or daily meetings and playing leadership roles in teams or on specific projects. Lower touch involvement might be attending events, receiving a newsletter, etc. Above all, being a “member” should provide a sense of purpose and belonging rather than a set of fixed obligations, and should be an experience that can be self-defined and changed over time.

Anchoring a Flexible Process

In community organizing, any approach or method must be held lightly—balanced with learnings that emerge from the community itself. If we follow the principles discussed earlier, community engagement takes on a life of its own and stays both flexible and strategic enough to yield opportunities to facilitate social change.

That said, there are rhythms to this work—components that improve its effectiveness, reach, and pace; tools and techniques that require study and practice; strategies for putting the principles into practice. The more we all document what we have learned—providing frameworks for community-led processes—the more we can share our lessons with each other, improve our work to increase our impact, and make community organizing more accessible to others.

The approach described here is not meant to be a rigid set of steps but rather to anchor the process just enough to provide directionality and focus for creative action. While each of the four phases has its own area of emphasis, all elements are at play from beginning to end. The process is flexible, yet the structure is developmental—meaning one phase builds on the one before.

Pacing and Timing

The right timeframe for each phase depends on the natural seasons and cycles of the community and what opportunities and needs are discovered throughout the process. However, as a guideline, it generally takes three to four years to sufficiently implement the approach herein, in a manner that has lasting impact. Within that timeframe, you cycle through the phases several times, while experiencing the following exceptions to a typical sequential approach:

1. You will **cycle back** to some phases if needed, such as returning to the Assess phase to collect more information or returning to the Build phase to self-organize around specific projects.
2. You may choose to **continue** some phases while already embarking on the next, such as continuing activities of the Talk phase to gather more momentum in the community.
3. You may have different groups working through **different phases simultaneously**.
4. You will **cycle around** to start the phases anew to deepen and broaden the process.

Core Skills and Knowledge

This approach requires those actively involved in the network to have core skills and knowledge related to domestic and sexual violence prevention. These include establishing a shared analysis of the root causes of violence, healthy relationship skills, proactive bystander skills, leadership skills, and community organizing skills (e.g., public speaking, event planning, group facilitation, etc.). Ideally these are introduced and reviewed throughout the approach, in an informal and iterative way. If this is not possible, then more formal workshops can be conducted with key network members at the outset, and then annually or semiannually. Whatever format you choose for building core skills and knowledge, what is most important is that it is done to maintain the integrity of the work and in a style that engages the knowledge everyone brings into the room.

Documentation and Evaluation

Throughout all phases, it is imperative to create and implement systems for documentation and evaluation. Tools and processes should be designed for tracking how the network is evolving, how the community has been engaged, the lessons learned, and the nature and scope of the impact. Having an accurate and easily accessible set of data allows you to assess your activities, share data with stakeholders and funders, and use learnings to continuously improve your social change efforts. The documentation and evaluation needs for this work are robust and a key aspect of advancing community organizing practice. It can be helpful to connect with others using similar approaches to share tools, templates, and lessons learned.

Relationship Building

Every aspect of this community organizing approach is meant to be embarked upon with a focus on relationship building. Every meeting and planning session, community gathering and consultation should provide a feeling of nurturing, togetherness, and abundance. Ideally, the program budget allocates generous funds for food, since the change and human connection that propels this work grows most often through the sharing of food and stories.

Phase 1:

Assess

What It Is

Drawing from the principles of action research and popular education, the Assess phase is when the network embarks on a deliberate and structured journey of “seeing” the community anew. The initiating organizers/organization and network members articulate what the network needs to learn, collect data through a variety of assessment methods, creatively analyze all that is discovered, and ultimately organize the outcomes to define a path for social change.

Unlike most assessments—conducted as a precursor to the process itself—here the Assess phase happens as a community and plays a central role in relationship and knowledge building. Through this process, the network gains new language, skills, insights, and values for strengthening the design and implementation of solutions.

The Assess phase also includes foundational steps that the initiating organizers/organization must take for setting up the overall approach, such as budgeting, creating documentation and evaluation systems, and making preliminary decisions about geographical boundaries.

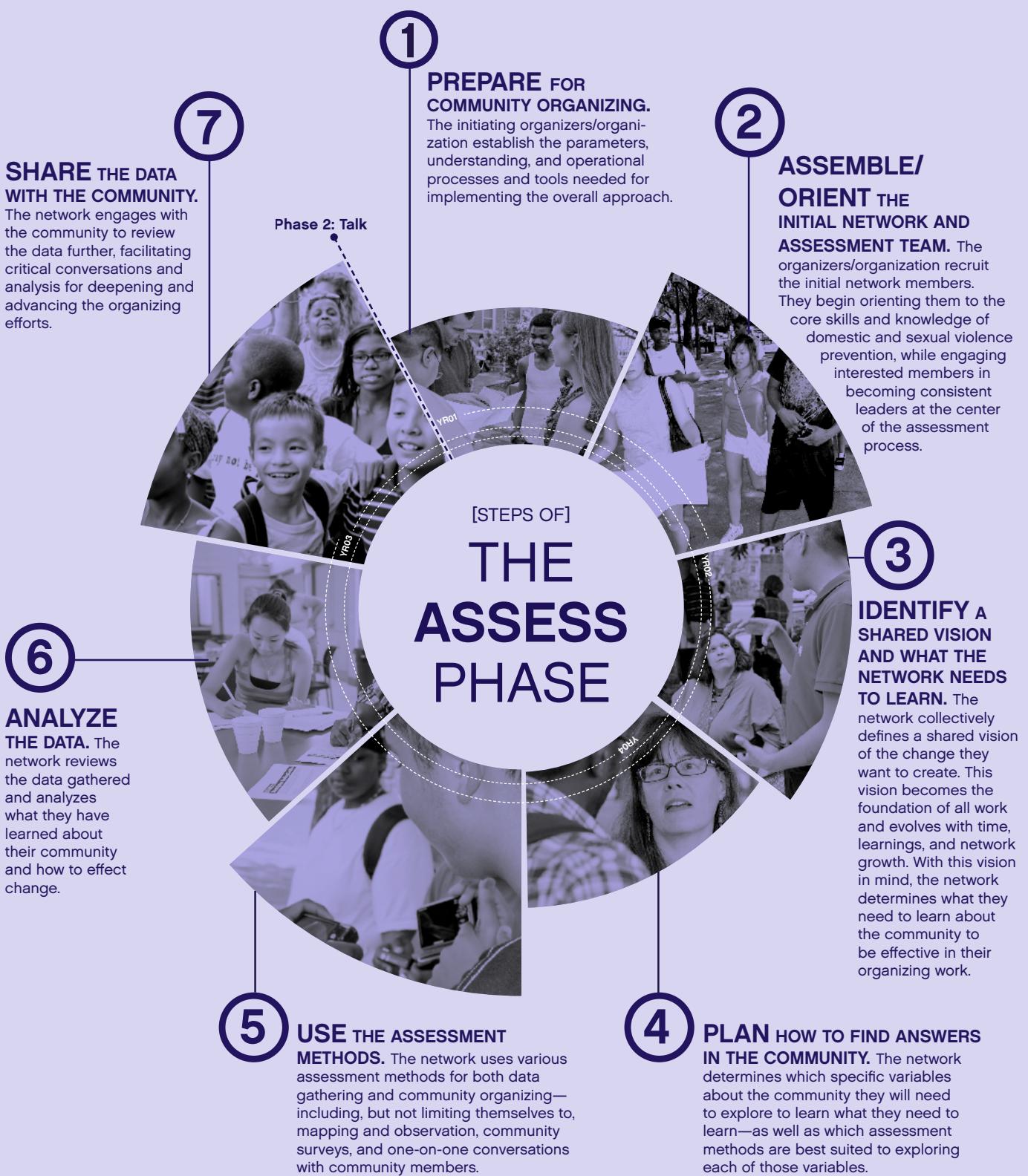
Why It's Important

In this phase, network members engage in honoring, exploring, and documenting local knowledge—amplifying voices marginalized by services and systems being cast as the primary holders of knowledge and expertise. In the end, this phase creates the opportunity for the following:

- Thinking critically and creatively about why things are as they are and the possibilities for how things could be different
- Identifying what is powerful and effective about the community and what untapped opportunities can be built upon
- Identifying community members who can speak to the way things are, have influence, and engage others
- Deepening relationships and people's commitment to a social change process
- Gaining a nuanced understanding of the community for designing solutions that address domestic and sexual violence

What's Happening to the Network

In the initial Assess phase, the network is young and small, with primary and foundational relationships being forged. In this and future cycles of the Assess phase, the action research methodologies become powerful community organizing tools, with many of the community members who are engaged by the research (youth, adults, and/or organizational leaders) often becoming network members themselves.



A GROWING NETWORK



Phase 2:

Talk

What It Is

The Talk phase is when the network calls on more community members to expand and deepen the conversations of the Assess phase. Everyone engages in critical and creative thinking related to domestic and sexual violence and other community issues, in time identifying priorities and shaping solutions. Every dialogue honors and meets community members wherever they are on their own path to prevention and leadership—welcoming, with openness, all backgrounds and ideas, while also focusing the discussion on issues of domestic and sexual violence. By engaging community members as experts in their experiences and communities, and by moving through potentially challenging conversations with determination, grace, and skill, the network reinforces its fierce commitment to the community's collective power and capacity to lead change.

Why It's Important

Through the Talk phase, the network lays the foundation for the process to be truly community generated and led, gathering the critical mass of support needed for social change. In the end, this phase creates the opportunities for the following:

- Recruiting more people and organizations into the organizing process
- Making more “public” the narrative about prevention and community change
- Nurturing more dialogue and relationship building between community members
- Gathering further insight into where people are on key issues
- Expanding the scope and depth of critical and creative thinking

Note: The “Talk” phase is not training, public awareness, or a series of presentations. Rather, it is a time to be together as community members—to tell stories, listen, learn, and inquire. This phase is a distinct example of taking an “organizing” stance rather than a “training” or “awareness-raising” stance.

What's Happening to the Network

The Talk phase is when the network expands and deepens its membership—drawing in multiple perspectives to increase the opportunities for innovation. Through social gatherings, dialogues, and collective analysis, community leadership becomes more visible. As energy and voices build, the network hones which issues and solutions to self-organize around in the Build and Act phases.



A GROWING NETWORK



Phase 3:

Build

What It Is

The Build phase is the time to prepare for action. In this phase, the network—now larger and growing—develops interconnected strategies and initiatives for catalyzing social norm change. Relationships deepen and energy builds, as the network self-organizes into project teams—harnessing the learning, conversations, and momentum from the first two phases to inspire creativity and inform decision making. Each team designs campaigns/actions—both peer-driven and intergenerational—based on where they feel they can have the most influence. They then go on to build the plans, skills, and knowledge for bringing those ideas to fruition.

Why It's Important

As teams create and experiment together to design their campaigns/actions, the network begins to innovate and feel the synergistic strength of the whole. Network members of all backgrounds contribute their talents to the effort—either through providing training or, more often, through supporting others in learning by doing. Everyone has the opportunity to become a learner again to acquire the knowledge and skills for implementing their ideas. Through it all, people are collaborating and sharing leadership, all to advance a vision they now hold deeply.

What's Happening to the Network

In the Build phase, the opportunities for participation in the network become more extensive and personalized, as network members engage in project teams that align with their interests and skills. People's strengths and talents are called upon more and more often. The cross-pollination of expertise expands as other community members are drawn in to provide needed knowledge and skills, often becoming network members themselves.



A GROWING NETWORK



Phase 4: Act

What It Is

The Act phase is when the network engages the community in various campaigns/actions. These community organizing activities make the issues of domestic and sexual violence more public, catalyze deeper conversations, and begin to generate a shift in social norms. Each campaign/action engages different aspects of the community, creating opportunities for more people to explore stepping into new ways of being—new perspectives on their own life, new attitudes and behaviors, new confidence in what they can do to effect change. Altogether, a surge of activity takes the community deeper into creating a lasting culture of violence prevention.

Why It's Important

It is through these campaigns/actions that the network shares its spirit of openness, intention, conversation, playfulness, and hope—a spirit needed for moving through the struggles of violence prevention and for grappling with resistance to change. After months of living the principles of this work and living their vision, the network shares not only their campaigns/actions with the public but also the sense of community that is possible. The way in which network members work together demonstrates how change begins in the present—and invites everyone to join that change.

What's Happening to the Network

In the Act phase, the network continues to grow organically—with more connections and stronger relationships—as the various campaigns/actions engage greater participation from the broader community. Rather than this phase becoming a culmination or end point, it becomes a time of expansion—spreading the spirit of the work, growing network membership, and creating a new foundation for cycling through the phases again.



[STEPS OF] THE ACT PHASE

IDENTIFY NEW OPPORTUNITIES.

OPPORTUNITIES. Through the learnings and insights gathered from community organizing, and as the network looks toward another cycle of the process, opportunities for further action are identified. Over time, it is important to assess where the community is at in its level of comfort, engagement, and ownership of the issues of domestic and sexual violence, so that the network can design the next approach to the cycle based on what will carry the community deeper into its participation in social change.

4

Re-Assess

1

TAKE ACTION. At last, network teams implement their projects. Depending on the project, this process could be a single event that supports ongoing community building and/or the launch of a specific campaign that lasts for several months. Ideally, at this time, a variety of campaigns/actions are unfolding across the community, engaging different aspects of the community simultaneously.

3

CELEBRATE THE NETWORK AND ITS

ACHIEVEMENTS. The network takes time to celebrate their accomplishments and to feel connected to the greater vision. Because social change is a long process, it is critical to celebrate small successes along the way, through food, connection, and recognition of network members' contributions.

2

DEBRIEF WHAT WAS DISCOVERED AND LEARNED.

Network teams debrief what worked and what could be improved about specific actions. Lessons learned are documented and shared across the network to increase innovation and learning, cross-pollinate ideas, and inspire one another as the network cycles through and deepens work in each phase.

A GROWING NETWORK



Lasting Social Change

Community organizing is inherently political work. It is not a utopian experience; it is challenging, relentless, and tiring. Yet amid this crazy journey are beautiful surprises that in time reveal themselves as reliable results of the process. For it is the process that creates the change and builds our individual and collective power.

At an individual level, the process leads to changes in fundamental **values** and how these values guide how we choose to be in the world. Individuals start to intervene when they see violence and bias happening. They examine their own relationships—family, intimate, friendship, and beyond—to see how power is used. To create change, they use their power to start with themselves.

Among social networks, the process inspires family, friends, and neighbors to transform their own **cultures**. Whether a group of teens or a group of neighborhood mothers, friends start having more conversations about violence, about authentic connection, being one's true self, and living outside the boundaries of our limiting social constructs. Propelled by the power of the collective, changes emerge within each social network as to what is expected and accepted and how to support one another.

At the community level, the process fosters conversations that lead to new **priorities**. In public forums, media, and boardrooms, silence is broken around issues of violence and justice. A growing number of public voices shifts attention to the role civic entities can play in change. The resulting new policies and procedures give everyone the power to take responsibility for ending violence.

When combined, these changes in values, cultures, and priorities have the potential to lead to **structural changes**—shifting patterns of domination and exploitation, and in turn, redistributing and holding power and love together.

For organizations that take on this work, the experience often involves a paradigm shift that can be both disorienting and energizing. As organizations share power and build connections in new ways, they can begin to feel part of a broader community and movement and to (re)discover their role in social change.

To support these outcomes going forward, we need to expand our ability to tell the story of this work—through traditional evaluation methods and through sharing peer-to-peer, community-to-community. We must document what we know works anecdotally and what is also emerging through science.^{2, 13, 14} The advancement of this work will require those of us engaged in its practice to be in community with each other and to share lessons learned about what is core to practice: the technical elements that allow us to go to great places, as well as the hard, thorny, annoying, joyful, and surprising aspects that bring us deeper into our own humanity, as we move toward our vision and toward equity.



the story of close to home



How it Began

It all started in 2000, in Dorchester, Massachusetts. We were a small group of locals—residents, advocates, and police officers—coming from different experiences yet rallied around a shared vision: to confront the complex issue of domestic and sexual violence where it happens, in our neighborhoods.

We started knocking on doors and speaking at meetings across Dorchester, walking over and through invisible barriers within our community, breaking long-held silences about the violence that existed. Our message was simple, but our request was challenging: work with us to change the social norms in our community that allow domestic and sexual violence to continue.

The community response was overwhelming—with more and more residents offering to volunteer and support the effort. In time, the response needed a home, a place to land, a dedicated effort to nurture its growth. Inspired by community voices, we decided to create Close to Home, incorporating it as a nonprofit in February 2002.

Communities Come to Life

Within four years, Close to Home was engaging youth, adult community residents, merchants, and civic and organizational life in the neighborhood, touching the lives of 14,000 community members annually. We were recognized as a leader in innovation by local and international social entrepreneurship competitions. We were invited to sit on the state-level policy advisory boards and to help integrate community organizing strategies into long-term, state-wide prevention plans. We were also invited to speak throughout the US and abroad about our approach, as interest in community-led change processes started to grow.

By 2008, we sought and received substantial public and private funding to develop a proactive five-year growth plan, which included implementing our full community organizing approach in three Massachusetts communities in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Shortly after, we were chosen by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) to be one of three promising practices tested in two communities each. Based on assessments of our work over four years, the CDPH chose Close to Home's approach of the three for broader implementation. We felt truly energized by the momentum and traction our work was gaining locally and in the broader field.

Giving Everything to a Vision

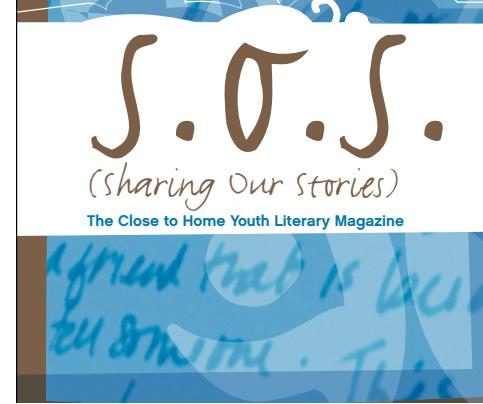
However, our story did not evolve as we expected, or planned. As hoped, interest in Massachusetts and California continued to grow, and there was increasing appetite in the US and beyond for learning and training in community organizing. However, at the same time, we began to question whether the organizational vehicle called Close to Home remained the most effective approach for our social change strategies, including supporting local efforts, training other communities, and playing a thought-leadership role. The existing infrastructure at Close to Home was simply not enough to meet the need and interest. And so, we faced difficult choices and heartbreakingly struggled as we decided how to truly honor our mission and vision of engaging whole communities in ending domestic and sexual violence. In the end, we made a very strategic and intentional decision to let go of this organization as a central entity, a locus of change. Instead, we chose to distribute our programs and knowledge among partner organizations and networks, believing that at this evolutionary phase of our growth we would have more impact by investing these resources in the broader movement ecosystem.

By July 2014, Close to Home's local and Massachusetts programs—along with the seeds and spirit of our mission—were transplanted into new organizational homes, while we turned our focus to documenting the approach, training new California communities, and engaging in national movement building with Move to End Violence Movement Makers. Similarly, during the writing of this resource, we are exploring with the CDPH the opportunities for shared leadership and peer learning networks in the future expansion of the approach in California, while preparing to dissolve the legal entity of Close to Home by summer 2015. This document is part of Close to Home's legacy—capturing our thinking on and approach to community organizing for domestic and sexual violence prevention.

What we have learned above all through Close to Home is that the work of organizing communities to end violence is bigger (and deeper) than all of us and certainly bigger than any one organization. By virtue of its underlying values, it calls into question the boxes and structures we are so accustomed to working within. It reminds us that the most we can do is imagine, try, learn, share, and engage with our fullest, most authentic selves. From this, our movement can grow.



This can be **your** best tool to prevent
domestic violence



Written by the C2H Youth Team
Edited by Priscilla Rorie
Fall 2008



Share a cup of coffee.
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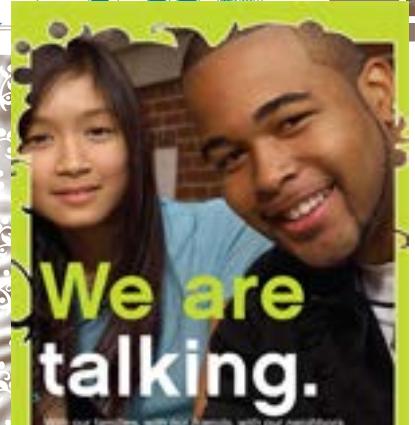


What I See

6 // Sharing Stories // The Close to Home Youth Literary Magazine



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Acknowledgements

So many people have contributed to the development and evolution of Close to Home and its practice. From among them, I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude and appreciation for the community members, partner organizations, staff, and board members who for years joined together to create change in Dorchester. This includes members of the King St. Group, the late Paul Johnston and the Boston Police Department Area C-11, youth team members, and Heather Dabreu and other community members who continue organizing in Fields Corner. You took the spirit and the challenges of this work deeper into the community and into your own lives.

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The Close to Home approach engages whole communities in designing solutions and leading social change for domestic and sexual violence prevention. Go to www.c2home.org to learn more and to download these essential documents:

COMMUNITIES LEADING CHANGE:

An overview of Close to Home's philosophy and practice for domestic and sexual violence prevention

The starting point for practitioners, funders, or municipalities interested in learning more about the Close to Home approach.

THE ASSESS GUIDE:

How to use action research in Close to Home's community organizing approach

A detailed implementation guide for the first phase of the Close to Home approach, essential to ensuring the experience becomes community driven and led.

TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS:

Lessons learned from using the Close to Home approach

Insights and learnings for all four phases of the Close to Home approach, providing practitioners with guideposts within a flexible journey of change.