

## STEPS on the Road . . .

The Teen Accountability Program (TAP) was selected to participate on a panel presentation this summer in Washington D.C. at the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence's 13th National Conference on Domestic Violence and 30th anniversary celebration. The workshop, "Youthful Offender Domestic Violence Courts: Can A Court Help Break the Cycle?" developed by the Center for Court Innovation and STEPS to End Family Violence, was selected from nearly 250 proposals nationwide and presented a model for how communities can come together to create change within the criminal justice system.

The panel presenting the workshop consisted of Carol Grannum, one of our TAP facilitators; the Honorable Miriam Cyrulnik, presiding judge of the Brooklyn Youthful Offender Domestic Violence Court; Rebecca Thomforde Hauser of the Center for Court Innovation (CCI); and Sarah Vehlings, from the Teen Dating Violence Program at the Kings County District Attorney's Office. The panelists discussed key issues of teen dating violence, the court system's response to teen safety, and offender accountability.

The Brooklyn Youthful Offender Dating Violence Court (YODVC) was created through the collaboration of victim advocates, prosecutors, members of the defense bar, and youth advocates who envisioned a more effective response to teen dating violence. Since the inception of the YODVC, STEPS has worked in concert with the court system, mandating sources and CCI to monitor youthful offenders and to create an environment of accountability while strategizing



ways in which our New York communities can implement change to decrease teen violence. During this past year, TAP representatives have joined CCI members at conferences

and various community forums to present our TAP model as a collaborative effort which educates male teens to identify abusive behavior and holds them accountable by reporting their behavior to the courts.

The Teen Accountability Program continues to educate teen men to examine ways in which abusive and controlling behaviors damage others and themselves and to take responsibility for the decisions that have brought them to abuse. The Teen Accountability Program, which accepts referrals from the court and mandating sources in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn, remains the only program in New York City to operate a teen accountability program for young men.

Lucia Riviuccio and Connie Marquez attended the three-day conference and spent an afternoon meeting with Senator Clinton's staff to discuss the work of STEPS To End Family Violence and the impact of the federal Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) on the provision of services to survivors of family violence and the prevention of future violence. STEPS spoke of the importance of reauthorizing and fully funding FVPSA and provided examples of the specific programs which FVPSA helps support in East Harlem as well as the many programs STEPS continues to provide to women, children, and teens. ❖

Above: Judge Miriam Cyrulnik

Left: Carol Grannum, Sarah Vehlings, Judge Cyrulnik, and Rebecca Thomforde Hauser.



## From the Director's Desk



When I'm asked how things are going at STEPS, my answer comes with a tinge of irony. I can state with confidence that our programs are going strong, our staff is solid (and phenomenal, I might add), and that we continue to develop innovative and effective programming. Of course the subtext to this is that domestic violence is, sadly, alive and well in our society. One need only read the news for just the past couple of months alone to see evidence of the tremendous need for domestic violence services.

Recent tragedies in New York City and Clifton, New Jersey provide testament to the pervasiveness of domestic violence in every strata of our society. On a personal level, I have been saddened to overhear educated, respected acquaintances of either gender joking cavalierly about "slapping" or otherwise physically injuring a partner in response to some minor frustration or in some ill-placed assertion of power. I have even been disheartened by hearing young boys talk of it not being ok to hit girls—does that mean it's ok to hit other boys?

Perhaps I am reading too much into the vernacular. Yet, with our Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) program having no problem meeting our yearly intake goal of 50 women with felony charges related to their experience of domestic violence; our non-residential legal and counseling staff far exceeding performance goals in providing counseling, advocacy, and legal services to survivors; and a Teen Accountability Program for young men dealing with their first DV charge having no shortage of participants—I can safely say that domestic violence does indeed persist in our culture. While I know STEPS and programs all over the country are reaching in to transform belief systems about gender roles, power, and the use of violence as early as childhood, our influence is neither extensive nor effective enough.

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*One of our ATI clients saw all of the charges against her dismissed and was reunited with her two children early this summer—she is now actively seeking work and enjoying safety and security for the first time in many years.*

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According to the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence, 2007 saw the NYC domestic violence hotline answer 123,409 calls while in the same period police responded to 229,354 domestic violence incidents<sup>1</sup>. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute of Justice report that close to 25% of American women report being raped or physically assaulted by an intimate or dating partner at

some point in their lives<sup>2</sup>. With stories in the press nearly every day highlighting domestic violence at every level of our society, one would be tempted to think that not much has changed.

Here at STEPS, however, we have seen change we can take heart in: children in our Children's Therapy Program report an increase in positive peer and family relationships; women completing counseling report lives of independence, free from abuse; one of our ATI clients saw all of the charges against her dismissed and was reunited with her two children in their very own apartment early this summer—she is now actively seeking work and enjoying safety and security for the first time in many years; and, perhaps most inspiring, from one of our group participants, "I have discovered who I am and what I'm worth to myself and the world. I honestly think I would have been going down the path to self-destruction as I was . . . when I first came here. Now I'm living my life and loving it. I have never been happier." ❖

—Lucia Riviuccio, LCSW, Director

<sup>1</sup> Mayor's Office DV Fact Sheet Calendar Year 2007, available at [http://www.nyc.gov/html/ocdv/html/statistics\\_resources/fact\\_sheet.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/ocdv/html/statistics_resources/fact_sheet.shtml)

<sup>2</sup> *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Violence*, July 2000.



RAPP Peer Leaders Ashley Grullon and Adam Delgado Mitchell

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ The Relationship Abuse Prevention Program (RAPP) is very proud of the many RAPP participants who have gone on to utilize their leadership and communication skills in college. Many former participants have expressed an interest in beginning an alumni group to share their new experiences and learnings within their new communities and with current RAPP students. As one of our peer leaders stated this summer, "If only you could speak to the whole world . . . that is why RAPP has us. To inform other people through us."
- ❖ One of our former RAPP peer leaders is leading teen workshops with the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence.
- ❖ Two peer leaders from IS 52, Ashley Grullon, 13, and Adam Delgado Mitchell, 14, wrote an article on the recent NYC Department of Education Anti-Bullying initiative, which was introduced in the public school system this September. The article is being considered for publication in *El Diario*. Both students were recently honored by Edwin Gould Services for Children and Families for their contributions as RAPP peer leaders.

## STEPS Toward Change: Policy in Action



Sr. Mary continues her work with STEPS largely through advocacy to affect public policy on the city and state level. STEPS has long been in partnership with community coalitions and work groups on policy change regarding criminal justice issues, particularly as they affect survivors of domestic violence.

Currently, Sr. Mary is working with two

M.S.W. policy interns from the Columbia University School of Social Work, Alyson Davis and Rachel Green, to build on previous years' work on housing for the formerly incarcerated, the *Drop the Rock* campaign, and the Merit Time bill.

### Merit Time Bill

STEPS is an active member of the Correctional Association's Coalition for Women Prisoners (CWP) and its Violence Against Women (VAW) Committee. The CWP continues its third year of advocacy on the Merit Time Bill, which would amend New York State law and allow the Department of Correctional Services to grant merit time eligibility and increased merit time allowances to inmates who have defended themselves against their abusers, or who have committed crimes as a result of abuse they have suffered. The bill has been introduced before and passed the House but was not put on the floor for a vote by the Senate. This year we are re-introducing the bill and hopeful that it will be passed.

If you would like to learn more, please contact Rachel Green at [RLGreen1@gmail.com](mailto:RLGreen1@gmail.com).

### Strength of a Woman

New this year, the CWP and the VAW Committee have joined with independent filmmaker Allison Caviness to create a video entitled, *Strength of a Woman*. This video explores the issues facing domestic violence survivors in the criminal justice system. STEPS provided information on battered women defendants and feedback during the editing process. Our staff was present at the filming to provide support to the participants and was interviewed for the film.

For more information on this project, please contact Jesenia Santana at [jsantana@egscf.org](mailto:jsantana@egscf.org).

### Harlem Community and Academic Partnership

The policy work group of the Harlem Community and Academic Partnership (HCAP) continues to explore the barriers to housing for individuals returning home from jail and prison. STEPS to End Family Violence has been a member of HCAP since 1999, and previously helped to research and produce the report, "Housing and Reintegration in East and Central Harlem: Coming Home and No Place to Live." Building on this research, HCAP is now running focus groups to develop a new report on housing from the perspective of community residents. The report was presented to the office of Manhattan District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau earlier this year.

If you would like a copy of the report, or to learn more about the policy work group or the Harlem Community and Academic Partnership, please contact Alyson Davis at [AlysonDavis17@gmail.com](mailto:AlysonDavis17@gmail.com). ❖

## STEPS Interns

STEPS continues its long tradition of educating future social workers, lawyers, and psychologists this year with a record 16 masters- and J.D.-level interns hailing from five area schools.

Denise Baker, *NYU School of Social Work, Clinical Practice*; Lashonde Beasley, *Columbia University School of Social Work (CUSSW), Social Administration*; Kathryn Chiu, *Fordham University School of Law*; Alyson Davis, *CUSSW, Policy*; Yolanda Galindo, *CUSSW, AGPP*; Sujata Ghosh, *CUSSW, Social Administration*; Rachel Lea Green, *CUSSW, Policy*; Anna Harris, *Rutgers University School of Law*; Laura Jacobs, *Hunter College School of Social Work (Hunter), Clinical*

*Practice*; Mariah Kornbluh; Sophia Patino, *CUSSW, AGPP*; Jessica Radbord, *Columbia University School of Law*; Bethany Rich, *Hunter, Clinical Practice*; Meredith Shriver, *John Jay College, Forensic Psychology*; Angad Singh, *American University Washington College of Law*; and Naomi Tsukamoto, *John Jay College, Forensic Psychology*.

STEPS would like to thank Professor Holly Maguigan and her students at the **Comparative Criminal Justice Clinic: Focus On Domestic Violence** of NYU Law School for their longstanding contributions to the ATI program.

We are also thrilled to announce a new relationship with Columbia Law School's Domestic Violence Project, coordinated by law student Zoe Pershing-Foley. ❖

## WE ARE NOW ON FACEBOOK!

Show your support by joining our Facebook cause—we now have over 360 members and are growing every day. We will be posting program successes and updates periodically and are able to accept donations via this page.



Sr. Mary Nerney

## FOUNDER'S MESSAGE

It hardly seems possible that it was 23 years ago when a seed germinated to become STEPS to End Family Violence. This small, innovative program to advocate and assist battered women defendants was rooted in the hearing at Bedford Hills Prison held in September 1985. This seed grew in 1992 when STEPS became an official Alternative To Incarceration (ATI) program. In the 1990s we saw and addressed the problem that children and teens face when they are home with domestic abuse. Our Children's Therapy Program as well as our teen programs are still among the very few programs in the city to provide such services. It is wonderful for me to reflect back on these many years and see how STEPS has grown and developed into a comprehensive and holistic program of services for families facing domestic abuse. Now, I continue this process and I am working on policy and legislative issues as they affect our clients within the criminal justice system. In this regard, there is much education needed as well as advocacy. I am glad to be able to continue on this road and grow other flowers that are needed. ❖

## Farah's Story

The following essay was written by a participant from one of our recent New Beginnings groups.

**O**K. So I have been in this domestic violence group for 12 weeks now. There are so many things I have learned. Not only have I learned from this class but I have also developed a sense of self worth and in some ways it has helped me become a better person both in society and in my personal life.

First I was able to identify why I stayed. Here are three main reasons. I felt it was in my son's best interest. He didn't abuse my son and I felt at the time that it was better for me to stay and put up with it so he wouldn't leave and my son could have both parents at home. Now I know different. Children who witness domestic violence, whether they have been abused or not, still suffer. If I had known this before, I would have left my abuser the first time he hit me when I was pregnant with our son. The second reason I stayed was because of hope. I so desperately wanted to believe that he would see the wrong he was doing and I thought he would change. I convinced myself in my mind

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*I so desperately wanted to believe that he would see the wrong he was doing and I thought he would change.*

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that he would. I just didn't realize that without serious interventions, the likelihood that he would change were slim to none. The third reason I stayed was because of shame and embarrassment. This prevented me from telling anyone and caused me to deny any problem even existed when friends and family ques-

tioned me. I know now that they were the ones who truly loved me and were only looking out for my best interests. When my friends and family now tell me to be cautious in dangerous situations, I listen.

I also learned the effects of family violence on children. [It could affect] not only my son's well being, but his development all together. My child could have had trust issues, poor health, low self esteem, depression, poor school adjustment and imitating the abuse, just to name a few. It's just not worth it. My son comes before all.

Most importantly I learned what signs to look for in an abusive personality—jealousy, controlling behavior, quick involvement, unrealistic expectations, isolation, blame, hypersensitivity or rigid gender roles. These are not all the signs but [ones] I feel are the most likely. These signs are what I saw in my most recent boyfriend and sure enough, he become physically abusive. If I hadn't taken this class I would have still been with him. In conclusion I have discovered who I am and what I'm worth to the world and myself. I honestly think I would have been going down the path to self-destruction as I was already in when I first came here. Now I'm living my life and loving it. I have never been happier. ❖

## ADVISORY COUNCIL NOW IN FORMATION

Are you interested in becoming more involved with STEPS? We are looking for a select group of creative, energetic, and dedicated individuals committed to the mission of STEPS to End Family Violence to join our advisory council. The commitment will involve four to six meetings per year with a focus on fundraising, strategy, volunteer development, and communications. An introductory event is planned for early February.

For more information, or for an invitation to the event, please contact Lucia Rivieccio at [lrivieccio@egscf.org](mailto:lrivieccio@egscf.org) or 646-315-7633.

## Tiana's Story

*In existence since 1993, the Children's Therapy Program offers individual and group therapy for children affected by domestic violence or parental separation through foster care or incarceration.*

Tiana is a 12-year-old girl with a bright smile and a caring heart. Tiana's father passed away in 2003 due to an illness and she and her two younger siblings remained with their mother. In 2006 the children were all removed due to their mother's struggle with substance abuse, and placed in foster care with Edwin Gould Services for Children and Families. Tiana and her siblings have been in two foster homes since their removal and are currently placed with their father's family.

Tiana's case worker referred her to a children's group facilitated by the Children's Therapy Program of STEPS. This is an eight-week support group for children who have experienced family violence or family separation. It offers a safe and supportive environment for children to begin to heal from the effects of trauma with other children who have similar experiences. Tiana quickly became a natural leader in the group. She talked openly about what she had gone through: from her father's death, to the separation and removal from her mother, to issues related to being in foster care. At the group's completion, Tiana began individual therapy with STEPS to continue the healing process. Tiana initially presented with depressive symptoms and expressed feelings of hopelessness. Her school grades were below average and she reported low self esteem and difficulties relating to her peers.

The therapeutic environment has allowed Tiana the space to talk about her experiences and her feelings. The therapist has provided interventions that assist Tiana in identifying and expressing her feelings in an appropriate way, as well as interventions that build her self esteem and coping skills. Exploring the issues of foster care, her relationship with her biological mother and foster parent, and her future were central to the work. A creative child, Tiana has blossomed through the use of art therapy, creating a life book, and even going on walks with her therapist to destress and talk about her feelings.

Since beginning therapy Tiana has shown great improvements: her depressive symptoms have decreased, her grades have improved, and her overall attitude about herself and her life has changed so much that you can see it in her face and how she presents herself.

Recently, Tiana's mother's parental rights were terminated. Tiana and her siblings remain in a loving home and there are plans for adoption in the near future. With support from her caseworker, her therapist, and her family, Tiana is able to talk about what this change will mean to her and her future, and express her fears and wishes in therapy. More than ever Tiana is focused on having a positive future and dreams of going to college and becoming a lawyer for children some day. ❖

## MOTHER'S DAY AT ROSIE

The STEPS Alternative to Incarceration (ATI) team hosted its first annual Mother's Day event at the Rikers Island women's jail (the Rose M. Singer Center, "Rosie") on May 19. The event was created to give incarcerated survivors of domestic violence an opportunity to make a unique exploration of motherhood through song, poetry, art, and dance. The theme was of special significance to these women who are separated from their mothers and children through incarceration. Members from groups at Rikers prepared original poems, collages, art, spoken-word pieces, and songs that they presented along with karaoke and a capella performances of familiar R&B and hip-hop songs and hymns. One housing unit even composed and performed its own anthem! By turns hilarious, heart-breaking, and inspiring, the event was co-hosted by our Rikers Services Coordinator Josie White and a senior member of the Rikers domestic violence and trauma group. Some of the artwork was sewn together by ATI staff into a beautiful "paper quilt" (pictured below) and presented to the warden at the event. Brother Jimmy's Barbeque (Third Avenue and 92nd Street in Manhattan) generously donated delicious soul food for the event, while Pathmark kindly donated party supplies and beverages. Counselor Hana Ahary baked 48 delicious red velvet cupcakes—the women at Rikers are still requesting seconds! ❖



### STEPS To End Family Violence Winter 2008 Newsletter

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*Client names throughout this newsletter have been changed to protect identities.*

## *Thank you to our 2008–2009 Funders*

We cannot thank enough the many generous individuals and organizations who have contributed financially or with donations of their time, expertise, or needed items. Your belief in our work is invaluable and helps us meet the many needs of our clients and their children.

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*STEPS would like to thank all of its funders and individual donors who have supported us either financially or in kind. We apologize for any inadvertent omissions. List in formation as of December 10, 2008.*

*Please contact Lucia Riveccio at [lriveccio@egscf.org](mailto:lriveccio@egscf.org) or 646-315-7633 if you are interested in contributing to our work.*

*“Now, armed with knowledge on the different types of abuse, and the help of STEPS, I feel strong enough to make financial decisions all by myself. If I want to say no, I can, and I feel more independent.” —Jenny, age 23*

## **STEPS TO END FAMILY VIOLENCE**

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*STEPS To End Family Violence is dedicated to empowering families and communities through innovative strength based programs that promote healing and social change. We are a progressive community organization that values justice and diversity.*