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"The Voice of Our Community Speaking for Itself"

Domestic Violence Boot Camp Can Save Lives

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"I want batterers to understand what it feels like to leave home in the middle of night and not know where you're going," said Ken Hicks founder of Domestic Violence Counselors and Consultants. "I want them to know what feeling unsafe and sleeping with a group of strangers is like..." Hicks, a parole agent, licensed social worker and author of *Eleven Building Blocks of Domestic Violence Prevention* is reaching out to volunteers for his pilot project, a boot camp for batterers.

"I call it rehabilitation through the realization of the victim's devastation," explained Hicks. "The idea is to have these guys go to some remote location, somewhere they don't know. They would have to stay there all week long, sleep in the same clothes, clean up after themselves and be there with others who are going through the same thing (other batterers with emotional problems)."

Hicks first noticed the need for his program in his capacity as parole agent for the State of California Department of Corrections in the early '90s. A lot of the parolees men and women, he said, had been in for domestic violence. As a social worker involved in family therapy, he knew a lot of the factors that when into creating the problem.

Some include misunderstanding about what defines domestic violence, stigma associated with it, fear and desire to preserve the family.

"I sent a proposal to Sacramento, [for me] to have a specialized caseload of all batterers and do groups with them to keep them from battering. Sacramento gave me the opportunity to do that. I was probably the only parole agent in the country who had a specialized caseload..."

"I had some real violent batterers in my group and I came up with the building blocks based on our sessions," said Hicks.

According to experts, abuse usually occurs in a cycle, what they call "the cycle of violence." It starts with the build up of tension where the victim may experience verbal or emotional abuse including name-calling,



KEN HICKS

threats or other means for the abuser to assert control. Battering begins, they say, when tension reaches an unbearable level.

The abuser is often set off, not by the victim, but rather outside stressors like problems at work or with finances. The cycle is completed with apologies, excuses and amends, which facilitate repeat incidents. Statistics say over half of U.S. marriages experience at least one violent incident, and one out of every two women in this country will be in a violent relationship in their lifetime.

Through Hicks' program batterers for one week would have a rigid schedule starting at 6:00 am, which would include anger management, drug and alcohol and other group sessions. The sessions are very intensive, said Hicks and serve as a foundation for court mandated workshops once they're done.

Hicks is also beginning a program with the teen sector in the wake of a rising incidence of dating violence among students.

"Just from doing research in the

last few months I found that teen dating violence is very high," Hicks continued.

"Teens (especially females) are being hit, hurt in other ways and sexually and emotionally abused. A lot of times young girls really don't know because a lot of times they grow up in families where this is going on, that its against the law. They have nobody to tell them that."

For students Hicks has written a contract, which is legally binding if signed. It basically says that either party can exit the relationship at any time without fear of retaliation. Signature spaces include dating parties and both sets of parents.

"The contract is new. It's a step-stone really, to get parents and kids talking," Hicks continued. "It them get into a discussion concerning what's acceptable dating behavior. I think sometimes teens (more so females) are kind of embarrassed to talk to their parents about certain things. They kind of have fantasies about what love is..."

"The contract explains what physical abuse is, what sexual abuse is, what verbal abuse is and what emotional abuse is. They understand that this behavior is unacceptable. They can say, 'If this happens to my daughter, if you abuse her in any way you're going to jail...'"

Hicks plans to go to schools around Los Angeles County to give talks on dating violence that will include every aspect of the problem from the cycle of abuse and a plan of escape for victims. For more information about the program and how to help call (661) 267-7110. To purchase copies of "Eleven Building Blocks of Domestic Violence Prevention" visit www.dvprevention.com.