

# The Knox County DELTA Project: Pioneers in Prevention

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## A new approach to an old problem

New Directions: Domestic Abuse Shelter has been helping survivors of domestic violence in Knox County since 1983. For several years, the shelter has also worked to prevent abuse, providing limited educational programs on a shoestring budget. But it was not until 2003 that New Directions was able to invest in prevention in a significant, comprehensive way. “After years of doing crisis intervention and education, the most exciting and hopeful initiative has been the DELTA Project which has allowed us to really focus on the primary prevention of intimate partner violence and sexual violence,” says New Directions Executive Director Mary Hendrickson.

The DELTA Project took root in Knox County in the fall of 2003. With a grant from the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) administered through the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN), the Knox County DELTA Project brought together a group of committed community members to plan and implement primary prevention activities aimed at eliminating intimate partner violence. “Primary prevention” means stopping the problem before it even starts, generally by promoting healthy attitudes and relationships among children and youth. “Intimate partner violence” refers to domestic violence and dating abuse. The Knox County DELTA Project also has a grant from the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) specifically for the primary prevention of sexual assault.

The Knox County DELTA Project is one of four pilot projects in Ohio. Thirteen other states also have DELTA Projects. As a pilot project, Knox County DELTA serves as a kind of laboratory for trying out new, community-based approaches to preventing violence. Recognizing intimate partner violence as a significant public health program and major cause of injuries, the CDC looks to local DELTA projects for new ideas and strategies. The CDC will then draw upon these local ideas to inform a broader, national strategy for preventing domestic violence. As Project Coordinator Amy Bush Stevens describes it, “We are really at the forefront of trying to figure out what works in preventing domestic violence in rural communities. Here in Knox County, we have the privilege of being the ‘guinea pigs’—trying out different things to raise awareness and change people’s attitudes. Some of the things we’ve tried have worked well, and others haven’t. Either way, we learn something about how to do this work that will hopefully make a difference here and across the country in the future.”

## Promoting the positive to prevent the negative

Made up of about 45 representatives from different sectors of the community (schools, social service agencies, law enforcement, clergy, parents, survivors, etc.), the Knox County DELTA committee developed its own mission, vision, and goals in 2003. The group emphasized that the mission of DELTA is to “intentionally create and support equality, compassion, and respect in relationships.” The focus is on “what *to do*,” not just “what *not to do*.” Much of DELTA’s activities therefore promote healthy relationships, including teaching communication skills and respect for women. This

work requires an ongoing commitment to social change—challenging and changing the social norms that say “it’s OK to treat women like objects” or that “it’s OK to resolve personal conflicts with violence.” This kind of social change is crucial, but difficult. As one DELTA member put it: “It’s a long, arduous process, but well worth the effort. It’s a lifetime effort. The impact of interpersonal relationships being equitable and kind is a really important mission. It’s well worth it.”

### **From learning to share to peaceful relationships: Second Step**

It’s never too early to start doing primary prevention. In fact, the Second Step program begins with 3-5 year olds. Using puppets, stories, role plays, and songs, Second Step teaches children impulse control, anger management, and empathy—skills they will need to form healthy relationships as they grow into adulthood. Second Step is a nationally-respected, evidence-based curriculum, and a local evaluation of the program found that teachers find it useful and effective. As one preschool teacher put it: “[Second Step] helped me as a teacher on how to approach the kids when there are conflicts... trying to help kids to see the whole picture and how their actions affect others. Definitely, it’s helped me as a tool to deal with that.”

DELTA supports Second Step in Knox County by purchasing curriculum kits for schools. The Mount Vernon YMCA preschool and Head Start having been implementing Second Step over the past few years, and several new preschools and child care centers are slated to begin the program in fall 2007 following a summer teacher training sponsored by DELTA.

### **Savvy consumers of pop culture: Media Literacy**

“I look at stuff now [advertisements] and think about it more,” said a 12<sup>th</sup> grade student from the Career Center after she participated in the Media Literacy program. This is precisely the goal of this program—teaching youth skills for thinking more critically about TV, movies, music, and other media. DELTA’s media literacy sessions focus on portrayals of gender and violence in popular culture in an effort to impact young peoples’ attitudes and values so that they will have healthy relationships and not become abusers. So far, this program has been presented to 90 middle and high school students.

### **Setting the stage for healthy relationships: Safe Dates and Choose Respect**

Dating abuse is pervasive among young people. According to recent research from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), one in eleven adolescents reports being a victim of physical dating violence and one in four reports experiencing some form of dating abuse. Even more startling, adolescents who report experiencing dating violence are also more likely to report binge drinking, suicide attempts, physical fighting, and current sexual activity.

Safe Dates is an evidence-based curriculum that teaches high school students about healthy relationships and signs of abuse. *Choose Respect* is a broader initiative to help adolescents form healthy relationships. It is designed to motivate adolescents to challenge harmful beliefs about dating abuse and to take steps to form respectful

relationships. The project reaches out to “tweens”—adolescents, ages eleven to fourteen—because they are still forming attitudes and beliefs that will affect how they are treated and how they treat others. Using CDC-produced Public Service Announcements, the DELTA Project is sponsoring Choose Respect cinema slides at the Mount Vernon movie theater, ads on MOTA busses, and posters in places frequented by teens.

### **Raising awareness, moving toward social change**

Part of DELTA’s mission is to raise awareness about intimate partner violence—making the community more aware of the prevalence of this problem and ways it can be prevented. To do this, DELTA sponsors annual public events such as the annual Take Back the Night march and vigil and Domestic Violence Awareness Month vigil. The annual Founding Fathers campaign honors men in our community who model healthy relationships.

DELTA members are also available to facilitate discussions at church groups, service clubs, or other organizations. Videos about healthy relationships, gender, abuse, and violence in society are available to educate the community and spark discussion about these topics.

### **Training leaders, building capacity**

From the beginning, DELTA has been working to educate its members and other community leaders about intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and the importance of prevention. DELTA provides workshops for providers, teachers, parents, and other adults.

### **You can help**

There are many ways you can help make social change and end violence in Knox County. One way is to join DELTA. As a DELTA member you will attend monthly meetings and help to plan and implement prevention programs and events. Another way to help is to invite a DELTA speaker to host a video/discussion session at your church, service club, or other group. Other ways you can contribute to the DELTA mission include: attending a community event, sponsoring advertising or prizes for a community event, volunteering as a media literacy teacher, donating money to buy prevention curricula for the schools, or volunteering to work with youth through the Choose Respect or MOST (Men of Strength) Clubs. Please contact Amy Bush Stevens at 397-4357 or [amystevens@columbus.rr.com](mailto:amystevens@columbus.rr.com), or go to [www.newdirectionsshelter.org](http://www.newdirectionsshelter.org), for more information.

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