



**community
bridges** Empowering Girls,
Building Leaders for the Community



Spring



Step Up & Stand Your Ground!

~ Ana Lopez, Executive Director

“SHOUT!” That was the collective response of community leaders, policy makers and school officials when we brought them together to discuss the sexual harassment experienced by girls in our community.

Like us, our colleagues were alarmed by the results of our survey of 150 girls who participate in our programs. Here are some of the disturbing facts the survey revealed:

Several of the experts who joined us deal with teen dating violence, domestic violence, and bullying. They pointed out that sexual harassment is part of a continuum of violence often not given the importance it deserves in order to protect women and girls in our community. It affects their ability to seek the support they need to learn, grow, and achieve at the same rate as their peers.

(story continued on page 2)

- 57% of the girls had been targets of sexual comments
- 44% had been touched, grabbed, pinched in a sexual way
- 36% had been physically intimidated by another student
- 43% felt unsafe at their school
- 24% had been penalized for speaking up

The survey also revealed that sexual harassment is pervasive: in school, on the way to school, in the classroom, between classes, in the cafeteria, the gym, the locker room, etc. It is happening before, during and after school.



The LUNA girls of Community Bridges teamed with Gandhi Brigade to create a video that shows how women want and deserve to be treated in a respectful manner by men. The girls rewrote the lyrics of popular songs to express their message. Then they filmed and acted in the video. The premiere of the video at the conference was a big hit.

Spring 2009

IN THIS ISSUE

Executive Director's Letter	1
Digalo Fuerte	3
Conference Highlights	4
CB Girls Are Exceptional Students...Positive Leaders	6
Families Struggle to Deal with Economic Downturn	6
The Importance of Dad in a Girl's Life	7

Our Mission

Community Bridges empowers diverse girls to become excellent students, positive leaders, and healthy young women.



Thank you! Gracias! Merci!

Our 2nd annual conference was made possible with the generous support of:

Montgomery College
Takoma Park Campus

Downtown Silver Spring

Department of Health & Human Services – Street Outreach Network

Bud Miller Associates Inc.

Montgomery County
Collaboration Council

Sanford and Doris Slavin
Foundation

Thanks, too, to:

IMPACT Silver Spring

Montgomery County
Public Schools

Pride Youth Services

DJ Yogi and his youth DJs

Jacqueline Samuda,
LCSW-C

2Deep, Tokia Carter

Raquel Rogers and
Edna Neslen

Gandhi Brigade

Movement Matters

Anu Yadav

And our fabulous interns,
volunteers and staff

Step Up & Stand Your Ground! (continued from page 1)

Conference Attended by More than 200 Participants

The leaders' meeting was held in conjunction with our 2nd annual conference – Step Up & Stand Your Ground. Greatly exceeding expectations, more than 100 girls of all ages, and an equal number of boys, parents and community leaders turned out for the event on March 7. The conference was an important first step in raising awareness about sexual harassment, and helping participants understand what they can do to stop and address this issue in their schools, homes and communities.

As one girl told us, "Listening to these stories [about sexual harassment] makes me feel scared, shocked and sad. It reminds me of when my friend was being threatened and I didn't know what to do."

Community Bridges agrees wholeheartedly with the advice of our colleagues — we need to SHOUT about the sexual harassment of girls. We will disseminate the information we have gathered as widely as

possible among service providers and stakeholders. We are also working on follow-up events for community participants. In addition, we will work to link our efforts with other groups committed to ending all forms of violence within relationships. Our goal is to ensure that our youth can find the safety and respect they deserve so that they can learn and prosper in our schools and communities.

If you would like a copy of the survey results, or any additional information about this issue, please contact me at alopez@communitybridges-md.org.

"Listening to these stories makes me feel scared, shocked and sad. It reminds me of when my friend was being threatened and I didn't know what to do."

The conference is already helping to make a difference in a local school. Alicia Deeny, Community Bridges board member and a teacher at Takoma Park Middle School, immediately shared the results of the survey about sexual harassment with the administration and counseling department of her school. She says, "Any data that can help us encourage positive behavior and create a safer environment for our students is valuable to us."



Elementary school age girls are participating in a getting to know you game of human bingo led by CB Staff Member, Sherry White.



SANFORD AND DORIS
SLAVIN FOUNDATION

Department of Health and Human Services
Street Outreach Network

Digalo Fuerte

~ By: 2Deep

No
Non
No
Nein
No
Por mucho que usted lo diga
It still means NO
In English
En Espanol
En Frances
In Yoruba
No means no
It will never mean yes
Maybe
Possibly
No is the gatekeeper to your safety
Don't be afraid to tell someone who is invading your space
No
Repeat yourself if you choose
porque usted es un príncipe y usted es una princesa
Dígalo fuerte!
I said NO and I'm proud
Trust me
You are worth it
Don't be afraid to say no to harassment
No to bad touch
No to bullies
Because if you are royalty
Then your body and your personal space is your kingdom
I bow to you and the decisions you make
I applaud you for showing self respect
I am not mad at you for saying no
It is your right
And I must obey
I apologize if anyone has ignored your no

I apologize now for anyone who will ignore your no
And I tell you now
YOU DID NOTHING WRONG
Keep yelling no
Don't give in
Speak up
Scream NO
Run as fast as you can
Become Wonder No Woman and Super No Man
With your self respect cape flapping in the wind behind you
As you are able to leap over unwanted advances in a single No bound
With your answer to everything including your name being No
Make a game out of it
Practice it in the morning
No, non, no, nein, no
No, no, no, no
Y sé es difícil
Pero hablo de experiencia yo soy un no sobreviviente
Y yo deseo que usted protejala
And it doesn't matter if you know the person or not
No one
I mean no one gets to invade your kingdom in a bad way
Especially without a war
I cant fight for you
But I will fight with you
You have the armor of NO
The sword of I SAID NO
And the shield of I know my self worth
So your highness
You will win this war

And you will return to your throne
Don't worry
Friends will come and go
Boyfriends will come and go
Cooties will come and go
Stinky head will come and go
And they need to go if they can't understand the definition of no
Tomorrow you will still be beautiful
Tomorrow you will still be handsome
Tomorrow you will still be royalty
And NO will still be both King and Queen
No, non, no, nien, no
Digalo fuerte
I said no and I am proud.
Dios Bendiga
Ashae
Y No

2Deep the Poetess set the tone for the conference with a energizing presentation of her work. She is a military child with an eclectic heritage as well as an eclectic viewpoint of the world. She has her Masters Degree in Theatre from The Catholic University of America, is an undefeated PSI SLAM Contestant in the DC area and stays busy trying to better herself and others. She believes that you have to become the change that you want to see in the world. She can be found on many stages around the Metro area, including U Street NW.



Father and daughter were the first (really early) arrivals at the conference. "We didn't want to be late!" said Ricardo, Vanessa's diligent dad.

"Step Up & Stand Your Ground"

2nd Annual Conference | March 7, 2009



Imani, one of DJ Yogi's Youth DJs, was a star at setting an upbeat tempo for the conference.

Why we are here?

At Community Bridges, we do our best to listen to the girls we work with and to understand everything that impacts them.

At our recent conference, executive director Ana Lopez welcomed the girls, boys, parents and community leaders and told them one of the things girls have told us is that they feel challenged about how they should feel, dress and act with everyone around them — especially with boys.

The goal of the conference was to create a positive environment in which attendees could learn more about themselves and the power they have to protect themselves from harm. Everyone can learn that they don't have to go along with what they think they need to do to be accepted, but rather, do what makes them feel comfortable and strong.



Shelby Cochran, LUNA Program Leader, and Judy Hurlon, Youth Programs Director, led Spanish-speaking girls (many of them participants in our LUNA program), in interactive activities that encouraged girls to share their own experiences, reactions, and feelings about situations involving sexual harassment.



Conference workshops, held in classrooms at the Montgomery College Takoma Park campus, gave students a preview of college life. Middle school girls enjoyed their "first day" in college.



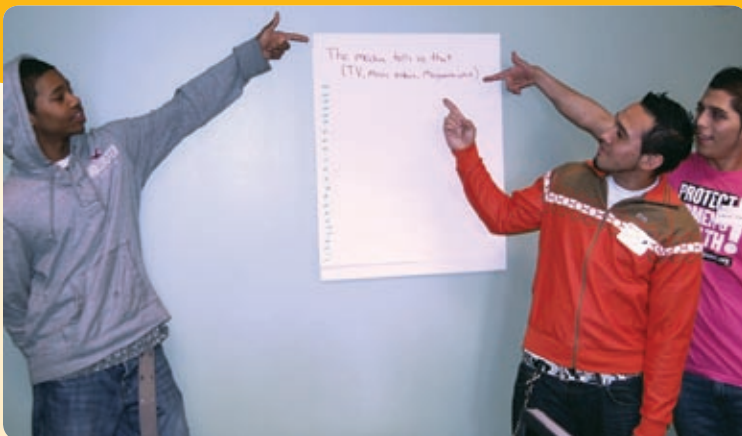
Spanish-speaking parents were fully engaged in the conference by using headphones.



Parents engaged in an interactive exercise in which they were human barometers, discovering how people can react differently to statements such as, "It's OK for a guy to whistle at a girl walking down the street."




CB program leaders, with the help of girls in the program, prepared a booklet of resources and tips that everyone can refer to after the conference.



In their workshop, boys discussed how the media influences the way they treat girls.

CB Girls Are Exceptional Students... Positive Leaders...Healthy Young Women



Elementary school — Program leaders are focusing on our “Exceptional Student” unit objective. Popular themes included having girls identify what things hinder them from staying focused on schoolwork and homework. After girls identified the distractions, they created recipe cards to combat these hindrances. Many students began using their “Recipe for Success” cards for classes they find challenging. Many girls also asked their teachers and parents to help remind them to remain focused. Girls also set goals for the classes where they faced challenges and created an improvement strategy during program.

LUNA girls — Two groups of LUNA girls worked on and completed the entire process of creating a video that was presented at CB’s March 7th conference. In order to complete the storyboard for the video, girls were asked to reflect upon how sexual harassment has impacted their lives. Girls later stated that they felt more aware of how

sexual harassment impacts their self-esteem and discussed ways to combat it in their lives.

Dream Catchers — Participants finished our “Healthy Young Women” unit by learning about healthy vs. unhealthy relationships. They explored what boundaries exist (or should exist) in their lives and how they can advocate for themselves if they feel mistreated in relationships with peers and adults.

High School — The pilot phase of our High School program commenced at 3 schools: Chelsea, Einstein and Northwood High Schools. Girls involved are deeply committed and outcomes are demonstrating positive change. Recent activities were centered on analyzing ideals of beauty, including looking at beauty as propagated in the media and multicultural ideals of beauty, to pull out their personal beliefs and themes about style and presentation of self.

Families Struggle to Deal with Economic Downturn

As the economic crisis ripples throughout the world, “hard times” are nothing new for the girls in our programs and their families.

All of our program participants qualify for the “Free and Reduced Meals” (FARMS) program at their schools. None of their families meet the Family Self-Sufficiency Standards for Montgomery County (\$72,600). In fact, at least 35% of our families earn **less than \$18,000 per year**.

*At least 35% of our families
earn less than \$18,000 per year.*

Because these families are among those who are hardest hit in a tight economy, many parents must try to find extra work to provide for their families. Often this means that the children are left unsupervised, and without the role models they need to grow up as healthy and productive citizens.

Working on the front line in one of the neediest communities in Silver Spring, we know first-hand how great the hardships are among our families. We are working to be advocates for our girls, and facilitators of change for their growth and development. We are working to help girls voice their concerns, fears and traumas, and to get their parents involved in our programs.

Often, our programs are the point of entry for families to the support services available through the Montgomery County government and other agencies. Especially with families who have a decreased ability to access services due to limited language skills and/or restricted time working two to three jobs, Community Bridges is a lifeline for 200 girls and their families in our community. We are committed to ensuring that our families are not overlooked in obtaining services for their basic needs.

As the saying goes, “It takes a village to raise a child.” We are grateful to the individual donors, foundations, businesses, and Montgomery County government who help us in our work.

Thank you!

The Importance of Dad in a Girl's Life



What happens when a teenage girl doesn't have a father involved in her life? In her book, "Life Without Daddy," Janessa Grady Fleming says this absence can lead to many undesirable outcomes, including:

- having sex earlier and more often
- greater risk of sexually transmitted diseases
- twice as likely to experience non-consensual sex or rape
- six times more likely to become a teenage mother
- higher rate of juvenile delinquency
- onset of puberty 2 years earlier
- lower self-esteem
- higher depression rates

Other risk factors our girls are facing include teen pregnancy, gang involvement and high dropout rates from school. Teen pregnancy rates are on the rise (79 Latinas per 1,000 girls in Montgomery County, according to the County's Department of Health & Human Services, and 53% nationally, according to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and Unwanted Pregnancies).

Youth in our community also report minimal perceived personal safety, according to a study by Identity, another nonprofit organization that works with youth in Montgomery County. They found that 19% say they do not feel safe at home, 27% do not feel safe in our schools, and 55% do not feel safe in our communities.

These statistics confirm what we have learned in our work with the girls in our programs — that a crisis is at hand and prevention work is needed to respond.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Molly Knopf
Chair

Melissa Rosenblatt
Secretary

Mark Tootsey, CPA
Treasurer

Carmen Camacho

Alicia Deeny

Christine Dunathan

Estrella Levy

June Mickens, J.D.

Farrah Short

Schroeder Stribling, LCSW-C

STAFF

Ana Lopez
Executive Director

Sherry Marshall
Deputy Executive Director

Judith Hurbon
Youth Programs Director

Crystal Adegbola
Elementary School Program Leader

Shelby Cochran
LUNA Program Leader

Hana Kim
*Volunteer Coordinator
& Office Assistant*

Jacilyn Smith
*High School Life Leadership
& Career Development Manager*

Ashley West-Nesbitt
Middle School Program Leader

Sherry White
Elementary School Program Leader



Yes! I want to show my support for the girls of Community Bridges.



Enclosed is my contribution of:

\$300 \$200 \$100 \$50 \$35 Other \$ _____

Prefer to make your contribution online? Go to www.communitybridges-md.org and click on "Donate Now."

Be a Friend of Community Bridges! Life at Community Bridges is always changing and we want to include you in celebrating our achievements. Please update your information so we can share our stories. We do not share your information outside of our organization. Also, let us know how you want to get connected.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

Please send me: *(check all that apply)*

- Newsletter via e-mail
- Fundraising Appeals
- Invitation to Events
- Information on becoming a volunteer

Many thanks for your support!

- I prefer to remain anonymous

We want to hear from you!

Please contact us.

Community Bridges, Inc.
620 Pershing Dr. 2nd Floor
Silver Spring MD 20910

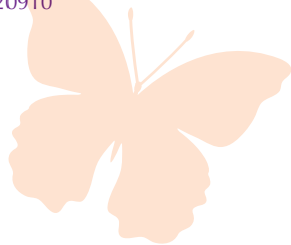
p 301-585-7155 f 310-585-6310

www.communitybridges-md.org
info@communitybridges-md.org

Community Bridges is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Your contribution is tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law. A copy of our current financial statement is available upon request. Documents submitted to the State of Maryland under the Maryland Charitable Solicitations Act are available from the Office of the Secretary of State for the cost of copying and postage.



620 Pershing Dr. 2nd Floor
Silver Spring MD 20910



We hope you enjoy the **fresh new look of our newsletter**, which was made possible by a grant from one of our funders.

We welcome your comments on the new design.