

Evaluation of the  
Dating Violence Prevention Project:  
The Use of Theatre as an Educational Tool

FINAL REPORT  
for SafePlace

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I guess they are learning whatever they're teaching their audience about healthy relationships, but then there's this whole other level, of well, then there's the learning that happens just interpersonally and in their relationships and stuff.

--Staff member of DVPP project

## **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

### Overview

The Dating Violence Prevention Project is a collaborative effort between SafePlace and the Theatre Action Project (TAP) with the goal to develop a prevention project that addresses healthy relationships and dating violence using youth theater. SafePlace is a nonprofit agency that serves domestic violence and sexual assault survivors, and the Theater Action Project is a nonprofit agency whose mission it is to create and promote interactive theater and educational programming that ignites community dialogue around socially relevant topics. Both agencies are located in Austin, Texas.

SafePlace and TAP developed the Dating Violence Prevention Project as a primary prevention program to provide peer education to teenagers through interactive theater and raise teenage actors' expectations about equality and respect in relationships. Sixteen (16) teen actors were recruited from area high schools and community organizations during Spring 2004. Over a period of five weeks during the summer, these teen actors received training from SafePlace on issues of dating violence, sexual violence, and healthy relationships. They were also trained in Theatre-In-Action (TIE) techniques, a unique method that combines theatrical elements with interactive moments in which the audience works with the actors toward an educational or social goal. An audience may help decide, shape, question, or examine issues in a TIE program. The teen actors created the performance piece and then met weekly to rehearse, receive continuing education, and perform. The teen actors received weekly stipends for their participation.

SafePlace contracted with the Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (IDVSA) at the University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work to evaluate this project. The IDVSA Principal Investigator (PI) used two methods to evaluate the project. The IDVSA first administered surveys that asked about attitudes toward violence, leadership, and dating to the teen actors before the program began (pre-test); the same surveys were given after the development of the production and several showings of the performance (post-test). The researchers also

conducted focus groups, one with the teen actors and one with the project staff. This report presents the findings from the surveys and the focus group discussions.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Texas at Austin approved this research study.

#### **BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW**

Dating violence is now considered an important public health concern that occurs more often than previously believed. A statewide survey of female Massachusetts high school students found that 1 in 5 young women reported being physically or sexually abused by a dating partner (Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001). Further, the survey found that dating violence was associated with "an increased risk for substance use, unhealthy weight control behaviors, sexual risk behaviors, and suicidality" (p. 572). In addition, male and female adolescent dating partners often report equivalent levels of aggression towards one another, and like adult women victims, adolescent female partners experience higher levels of severe violence and more physical injury and psychological distress than their male counterparts (Molidor & Tolman, 1998). Not only does dating violence pose health risks for adolescents, but many suggest that it is the pre-cursor to adult forms of domestic violence (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001).

Interactive theater targeting youth has been successful in changing the attitudes of actors and audience members about refugee issues (Day, 2002), alcohol and drug use (Portes, Howell, Kirby, Kidwell, & Dunham, 1993), and adolescent pregnancy (Safer, Harding, & Gibb, 1993). To date, this model has not been developed as a means for preventing dating violence.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

##### Pre- Post-Test Survey

Pre- and post test surveys were administered to teen actors. The pretest was administered at the beginning of the project before the play was developed, and the post-test was administered after the teen actors developed and performed the play for the first time.

The pre-test (see Appendix A) included closed- and open-ended questions. Of the open-ended questions, three (3) were related to the actors' expectations about their participation in the project. A final question asked, "Is there anything else you'd like to say?" The closed-ended questions asked the teen actors about definitions of abuse and to rate themselves on various personal dimensions using a five-point Likert scale. To evaluate the teens' knowledge of abuse definitions, they were asked to indicate whether twenty-two (22) physical and non-physical abuse

indicators were abusive, not abusive, or whether they were unsure. Questions about physical abuse included three (3) indicators that described acts of physical violence; nineteen (19) of the indicators did not describe acts of physical violence. Instead, these indicators included behaviors reflecting the power and control dynamics that are often associated with an abusive dating relationship. One item that asked about showing "respect for boyfriend or girlfriend" was reverse-scored, since it was an indicator of a healthy relationship.

A post-test (see Appendix B) included two of the same sections from the pre-test, as well as fifteen (15) new questions. The teen actors were again asked to rate themselves on the eight personal dimension questions, as well their perceptions of the twenty-two abuse indicators. In addition, the teen actors were asked to rate their experience on fifteen (15) project evaluation indicators.

### Focus Groups

Two separate focus groups were conducted, one with the teen actors and one with key project staff members. The teen actor focus group was conducted in August 2004, and the staff focus group was conducted in November 2004. Data for each focus group were analyzed separately using a thematic analysis that included a careful reading and coding of the focus group transcripts and the researchers' notes. Themes were organized conceptually by visual display (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The teen actors focus group yielded four themes that included: developing cohesion and trust while making a play, personal growth and maturity, new learning about the characteristics of abusive relationships, and helping and accountability for others. The staff focus group themes included: relationships make the group strong, witnessing teen actor success, and learning happens in the process. Examples and quotations were identified for each thematic category and used illustratively in the report.

## **FINDINGS**

### Pre- Post-Test Surveys

#### **Pre-Test**

##### *Teenage Actors' Learning Expectations*

Nearly half (43%) of the sixteen teen actors expected to learn something about relationships, whether skills or knowledge. Almost a third (31%) saw the program as an opportunity to gain employment skills. In addition, more than one person expected to

gain group skills, socialization, and goals and responsibility from the program.

Getting information about domestic violence, helping others and learning to be a leader were also mentioned as expectations of project participation. Table 1 depicts the learning expectations of the teen actors.

Table 1 Top Learning Expectations

Themes	Examples from Teen Actors	# of Teen Actors Reporting
Gain Better Relationship Skills	How to communicate better; I expect to learn what is a respectable relationship; How to make your relationship better	7
Gain Work/Employment Skills	Learn how to work with people in a job; Learn how to act when working; How to get up on time and leave in time; Being in a work environment and working efficiently	5
Gain Skills for Group Work	I expect to learn how to work as a group	3
Gain Other Socialization Skills	I expect to have a good time; Different things like meeting different people and just having fun	3
Learn How to Set Goals/Take Responsibility	Learn to set better goals for myself	2
Develop Drama Skills	Learn how to act	1
Learn Information about Domestic Violence	Why do they have a SafePlace (SA/DV agency)?	1
Be of Service	Help others	1
Learn Leadership Skills	Learn more about leadership	1
Not Sure	Don't know what to expect	2

#### *Challenges Related to Program Participation*

Half of the teen actors (50%) identified that getting along with their peers would be the hardest part of the program. A quarter of the teen actors (25%) thought being responsible, organized and focused would be one of the greatest challenges. A quarter (25%) also thought that acting would one of the most challenging aspects of the program. Only one teen actor mentioned learning

about domestic violence as one of the hardest aspects of the project. Table 2 illustrates the challenges that the teen actors reported.

Table 2 Top Challenges Identified

Theme	Examples from Teen Actors	# of Teen Actors Reporting
Getting along with others	Participating with each other; learning how to be friendly with people I don't like; Working in a group cause I'm independent	8
Organization/Goals/Focus/Being Responsible	Learning to set better goals for myself; Waking up early and not getting distracted; How to keep my things organized	4
Acting	Working on a theater; Acting; Presenting in front of large groups of people	4
Domestic Violence Content	Abuse, teen pregnancy	1
None	Don't have any	2
Don't know	Don't know	2

*Teenage Interests in Project Participation*

Nearly half of the teen actors (44%) cited meeting people as one of the things they were most interested in getting from the project. Approximately one-third (31%) mentioned job skills as a primary interest; a quarter (25%) mentioned public speaking and acting skills. The teen actors also mentioned helping others, improving relationship skills, earning money, general learning, having fun, and visiting new schools as their interests in the project. Table 3 illustrates the examples given.

Table 3 Teenage Interests in Project Participation

Theme	Examples from Teen Actors	# of Teen Actors Reporting
Meeting people	I hope to meet new people; To know the other people; Meeting new faces	7
Job skills/Having a job	More job skills; To give more effort into your work; How to be successful in a job	5
Public	To talk to large groups of people	4

speaking/ Acting	without getting nervous; Acting and all the acting stuff that we do in groups and the different places we are going to go	
Service	Helping others; How to help other people	3
Relationship skills	Learning about relationships; What to do and not do	3
Money	To get paid; Get money	2
General learning	Everything is there for me to learn; Learning	2
Having Fun	To have fun	1
See other schools	Visit other schools	1

*Pre-Test Perceptions of Physical Abuse Issues*

Nearly 90% of the teen actor sample defined "pushed, grabbed, slapped, choked, or kicked" and "pressures them to have sex or do sexual things that they don't want to" as abusive behaviors. The majority (73%) of the teen actors also defined "throwing or breaking objects during arguments" as abuse. Only one teen actor considered the indicator "pushed, grabbed, slapped, choked, or kicked" as not abusive and another was not sure. Similarly, one teen considered the indicator "pressures them to have sex or do sexual things that they don't want to" as non-abusive and another teen was not sure. Slightly more teen actors (13%) were not sure that the indicator "threw or broke objects during arguments" was abusive; 13% felt that this wasn't abusive behavior.

Table 4 Pre-Test Perceptions of Physical Abuse Issues

Item	% Not Abuse (n)	% Not Sure (n)	% Abuse (n)
Pushed, grabbed, slapped, choked, or kicked	6.3 (1)	6.3 (1)	87.5 (14)
Threw or broke objects during arguments	13.3 (2)	13.3 (2)	73.3 (11)
Pressures them to have sex or do sexual things that they don't want to	6.3 (1)	6.3 (1)	87.5 (14)

*Pre-Test Perceptions of Non-physical Abuse Issues*

A significant majority (79%) of the non-physical abuse indicators were defined as abuse by at least half of the teen actor sample. In addition, seven indicators (37%) were defined as abuse by more than three quarters of the sample. These indicators included: "threatened to hurt," "calling names," "swearing at them," "yelling and screaming at them," "doesn't let them see friends," "kept them from calling other friends," and "pressures them to dress a certain way." In contrast, four items (21%) were much less clear-cut and were endorsed as abuse by less than half of the teen actor sample. These items included: "has to know where they are at all times," "was jealous or suspicious of their friends or family," "accused them of cheating," and "calling them crazy."

Nearly 40% of the entire sample reported being unsure of whether four indicators described abusive behavior. These included: "criticized them," "has to know where they are at all times," "was jealous or suspicious of friends or family," "accused them of cheating," and "calling them crazy."

Twelve of the non-physical abuse indicators (63%) were rated as not abuse by at least one person. The indicator "accused them of cheating" stood out from the other indicators as it was rated as not abuse by nearly one-third (31%) of the sample.

Table 5 Pre-Test Perceptions of Non-physical Abuse Issues

Item	% Not Abuse (n)	% Not Sure (n)	% Abuse (n)
Asked friends to spy	18.8 (3)	31.3 (5)	50 (8)
Threatened to hurt	6.3 (1)	12.5 (2)	81.3 (13)
Asked them to do something they did not want to	18.8 (3)	31.3 (5)	50 (8)
Criticized them	6.3 (1)	37.5 (6)	56.3 (9)
Abused drugs or alcohol	12.5 (2)	18.8 (2)	68.8 (11)
Ignored their feelings or withheld approval, appreciation or affection to punish them	0 (0)	25 (4)	75 (12)
Calling names	0	12.5	87.5



	(0)	(2)	(14)
Swearing at them	0 (0)	18.8 (3)	81.3 (13)
Yelling and screaming at them	0 (0)	18.8 (3)	81.3 (13)
Has to know where they are at all times	12.5 (2)	50 (8)	37.5 (6)
Was jealous or suspicious of their friends or family	20 (6)	40 (6)	40 (15)
Accused them of cheating	31.3 (5)	25 (4)	43.8 (7)
Doesn't let them see other friends	0 (0)	18.8 (3)	81.3 (13)
Kept them from calling other friends	0 (0)	12.5 (2)	87.5 (14)
Blamed them for his/her problems	18.8 (3)	25 (4)	56.3 (9)
Calling them crazy	12.5 (2)	50 (8)	37.5 (6)
Doesn't accept when they say no	0 (0)	31.3 (5)	68.8 (12)
Pressures them to dress a certain way	0 (0)	18.8 (3)	81.3 (13)
Shows respect for boyfriend or girlfriend*	62.5 (10)	18.8 (3)	18.8 (3)

\*Item reverse coded.

## Post Test

### *Perceived Benefits*

The program appeared to be beneficial to most teen actors in a number of important ways. In particular, the teen actors seemed to strongly agree that the program helped them to not only have a better understanding of how healthy relationships work, but to use what they learned in their relationships with others. In general, most teen actors felt that the program was a good

experience and were proud of their accomplishments; they seemed to have slightly less confidence that they had increased their teaching or performance skills.

In evaluating staff involvement, a majority of teen actors agreed that staff provided the support and guidance that the teen actors needed while in the program.

With respect to learning how to communicate better, being courageous bystanders, being better leaders, having more goals, and seeing themselves differently, most of the teen actors agreed or strongly agreed that they had made progress. Although nearly one-half (44%) of the teen actors agreed or strongly agreed that the program helped them set more goals, 19% did not feel they set new goals as a result of the program, and 38% were unsure.

The two items that asked about equality, both equality between genders and that within relationships, were strongly endorsed with three quarters of the teen actors (75%) strongly agreeing with each of these statements.

Table 6 Perceived Benefits of the Program

Item	%Strongly Agree (n)	% Agree (n)	% Not Sure (n)	% Disagree (n)	% Strongly Disagree (n)
Apply new knowledge to relationships	62.5 (10)	37.5 (6)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Better understanding of healthy relationship	50 (8)	37.5 (6)	6.3 (1)	6.3 (1)	0 (0)
Proud of accomplishments	37.5 (6)	50 (8)	12.5 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)
New performance skills	12.5 (2)	37.5 (6)	43.8 (7)	6.3 (1)	0 (0)
Increased confidence in teaching	31.3 (5)	37.5 (6)	18.8 (3)	12.5 (2)	0 (0)
Good experience	31.3 (5)	62.5 (10)	0 (0)	6.3 (1)	0 (0)
Staff gave needed support	25 (4)	50 (8)	18.8 (3)	6.3 (1)	0 (0)
Staff gave needed guidance	18.8 (3)	62.5 (10)	12.5 (2)	6.3 (1)	0 (0)
Can be a courageous bystander	0 (0)	68.6 (11)	50 (8)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Communicate better	18.8	56.3	12.5	6.3	6.3

	(3)	(9)	(2)	(1)	(1)
Better leader	25 (4)	37.5 (6)	50 (8)	0 (0)	6.3 (1)
More goals	12.5 (2)	31.3 (5)	37.5 (6)	12.5 (2)	6.3 (1)
See self differently	18.8 (3)	43.8 (7)	18.8 (3)	12.5 (2)	6.3 (1)
Boys and girls should have same respect	75 (12)	18.8 (3)	6.3 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
One person should be in charge in relationship*	0 (0)	12.5 (2)	0 (0)	12.5 (2)	75 (12)

\*reversed scored item

### *Post-Test Perceptions of Physical Abuse Issues*

Although most teen actors rated acts of physical violence as abusive before beginning the program, even more rated these indicators as abuse after the program. All the teen actors described "pushed, grabbed, slapped, choked, or kicked" and "threw or broke objects during arguments" as abusive behavior. Only one teen actor rated "pressures them to have sex or do sexual things that they don't want to" as not being abusive.

Table 7 Post-Test Perceptions of Physical Abuse Issues

Item	% Not Abuse (n)	% Not Sure (n)	% Abuse (n)
Pushed, grabbed, slapped, choked, or kicked	0 (0)	0 (0)	100 (16)
Threw or broke objects during arguments	0 (0)	0 (0)	100 (16)
Pressures them to have sex or do sexual things that they don't want to	6 (1)	0 (0)	94 (15)

### *Post-Test Perceptions of Non-physical Abuse Issues*

After the program, all of the teen actors considered "threatened to hurt" as abusive behavior. In fact, the majority of the teen actor sample rated all of the non-physical abuse indicators as abuse at the conclusion of the program. This is compared to only 79% of the indicators being rated as abuse prior to the program. Similarly, over three quarters of the teens rated 84% of the

indicators as abusive , as compared to only 37% of the indicators being rated as abusive prior to the program.

At the conclusion of the program, one-quarter of the teen actor sample (25%) was still not sure about whether two items were abusive: "calling them crazy" and "shows respect for boyfriend or girlfriend." Nearly one-fifth of the sample (19%) was not sure if "ignored their feelings," "called them names," "has to know where they were at all times," "blamed them for his/her problems," and "doesn't accept when they say no" were abusive behaviors. A small percentage (13%) of the teen actors were not sure if "asked them to do something that they didn't want," "swore at them," "yelled and screamed at them," "was jealous and suspicious of their friends or family," and "accused them of cheating" were abusive behaviors. Less than 10% of the teen actors were not sure if "asked friends to spy," "doesn't let them see other friends," "kept them from calling other friends," and "pressures them to dress a certain way" were abusive behaviors. Over one-half of the teen actors (56%) perceived "shows respect for boyfriend or girlfriend" as "not abusive." The remaining abuse indicators were perceived as "not abusive" by less than 13% of the teen actors.

Table 8 Post-Test Perceptions of Non-physical Abuse Issues

Item	% Not Abuse (n)	% Not Sure (n)	% Abuse (n)
Asked friends to spy	6.3 (1)	6.3 (1)	87.5 (14)
Threatened to hurt	0 (0)	0 (0)	100 (100)
Asked them to do something they did not want to	12.5 (2)	12.5 (2)	75 (12)
Criticized them	6.3 (1)	18.8 (3)	75 (12)
Abused drugs or alcohol	6.3 (1)	0 (0)	93.8 (15)
Ignored their feelings or withheld approval, appreciation or affection to punish them	0 (0)	18.8 (3)	81.3 (13)
Calling names	6.3 (1)	18.8 (3)	75 (12)

Swearing at them	6.3 (1)	12.5 (2)	81.3 (13)
Yelling and screaming at them	6.3 (1)	12.5 (2)	81.3 (13)
Has to know where they are at all times	12.5 (2)	18.8 (3)	68.8 (12)
Was jealous or suspicious of their friends or family	12.5 (2)	12.5 (2)	75 (12)
Accused them of cheating	12.5 (2)	12.5 (2)	75 (12)
Doesn't let them see other friends	6.3 (1)	6.3 (1)	87.5 (14)
Kept them from calling other friends	12.5 (2)	6.3 (1)	81.3 (13)
Blamed them for his/her problems	6.3 (1)	18.8 (3)	75 (12)
Calling them crazy	12.5 (2)	25 (4)	62.5 (10)
Doesn't accept when they say no	6.3 (1)	18.8 (3)	75 (12)
Pressures them to dress a certain way	12.5 (2)	6.3 (1)	81.3 (13)
Shows respect for boyfriend or girlfriend*	56.3 (9)	25 (4)	18.8 (3)

\*Item reverse coded.

#### Pre-test/ Post-test comparisons by individual teen actors

Each teen actor's pre- and post-test perceptions about twenty-one (21) abuse indicators were compared to provide a clearer picture about the level of change that was occurring for individual teen actors.<sup>1</sup>

As indicated in Table 9, eleven of sixteen teen actors (69%) increased the number of abuse indicators they perceived as

abusive from the pre-test to post-test. Seven teen actors perceived the same indicators as abusive at both pre-test and post-test. Four of the teens noted a slight decrease in the number of indicators they perceived as abusive.

Table 9 Pre- and Post-Test Comparison of Indicators Endorsed as "Abuse" by Individual Teen Actors

	Pre-test	Post-test	Change in score
Teen actor 1	14	20	+6
Teen actor 2	13	12	-1
Teen actor 3	7	5	-2
Teen actor 4	20	21	+1
Teen actor 5	13	20	+7
Teen actor 6	8	20	+8
Teen actor 7	17	17	0
Teen actor 8	19	21	+2
Teen actor 9	14	21	+7
Teen actor 10	17	16	-1
Teen actor 11	16	20	+4
Teen actor 12	21	20	-1
Teen actor 13	19	21	+2
Teen actor 14	9	10	+1
Teen actor 15	15	21	+7
Teen actor 16	1	6	+5

*Inconsistent Individual Results Analyses*

Fourteen of the sixteen teen actors (88%) reported that they were not sure whether an indicator was abusive or not fewer times on the post-test than on the pre-test. One teen actor reported no changes in perception between the pre- and post-tests. Teen

actor 2 reported being not sure on two more items at post-test compared to pre-test. Interestingly, this teen actor's answers shifted quite a bit. For example, five of the abuse indicators (23%) that were perceived as abusive in the pre-test (i.e. ignored feelings or withheld approval; calling names; swearing at them; yelling and screaming at them; and doesn't accept no) were shifted into the "not sure" category at post-test. Conversely, four of the indicators (18%) that were perceived as not sure in the pre-test (i.e. asked friends to spy; asked to do something they didn't want to; doesn't accept no; and pressure them to dress in a certain way) moved into the "abusive" category at post-test. Similarly, teen actor 3's responses diverged from the larger group of teen actors. For this individual, eight of the eleven abuse indicators (73%) which were marked as not sure at pre-test were marked as not abusive at post-test. The two remaining indicators (9%) that were marked "not sure" at pre-test (i.e. threatened to hurt them; ignored their feelings) were marked as abuse at post-test. Thus, this individual reported a change in his/her perceptions, but not always in the expected direction. These results may also be an indicator that the teen actor did not read the questions and answers carefully.

Table 10 Pre- and Post-Test Comparison of Indicators Endorsed as "Not Sure" by Individual Teen Actors

	Pre-test	Post-test	Change in score
Teen actor 1	3	0	-3
Teen actor 2	6	8	+2
Teen actor 3	11	0	-12
Teen actor 4	1	0	-1
Teen actor 5	4	0	-4
Teen actor 6	9	0	-9
Teen actor 7	0	0	0
Teen actor 8	1	0	-1
Teen actor 9	6	0	-6
Teen actor 10	4	3	-1
Teen actor 11	1	0	-1
Teen actor 12	0	1	-1

Teen actor 13	2	0	-2
Teen actor 14	12	11	-1
Teen actor 15	5	0	-5
Teen actor 16	14	13	-1

*Abuse Indicators Perceived as "Not Abuse"*

One-half of the teen actors (8) endorsed a smaller number of abuse indicators as not abuse on the post-test than on the pre-test, suggesting that they were less likely to label an abuse indicator as not abuse after the program. Seven teens (44%) had no changes between pre and post-test. However, for six of these seven teens, none of the abuse indicators were endorsed as not abuse at either pre or post-test. Teen actor 7 endorsed the same four items as not abuse at both the pre- and post-tests. These items were: "has to know where they are at all times," "was jealous or suspicious of their friends or family," "accused them of cheating," and "kept them from calling other friends." Teen actor 3 was distinct in endorsing 14 more items as "not abuse" at post-test compared to pre-test.

Table 11 Pre- and Post-Test Comparison of Indicators Endorsed as "Not Abuse" by Individual Teen Actors

	Pre-test	Post-test	Change in score
Teen actor 1	4	1	-3
Teen actor 2	2	1	-1
Teen actor 3	2	16	+14
Teen actor 4	0	0	0
Teen actor 5	4	0	-4
Teen actor 6	3	0	-3
Teen actor 7	4	4	0
Teen actor 8	1	0	-1
Teen actor 9	0	0	0
Teen actor 10	0	0	0



Teen actor 11	0	2	-2
Teen actor 12	0	0	0
Teen actor 13	0	0	0
Teen actor 14	0	0	0
Teen actor 15	1	0	-1
Teen actor 16	6	1	-5

### **Summary of Survey Results**

Before beginning the program, teen actors seemed most interested in meeting new people, getting job skills, and learning public speaking and acting skills. The issues about which they were the most interested in learning were also the factors they felt would be the most challenging, such as getting along with their peers, being responsible, and performing in front of others. Nearly half of the sixteen teen actors (43%) expected to learn something about relationships, and nearly one-third (31%) saw the program as an opportunity to gain employment skills.

The program appeared to be beneficial to most of the teen actors in a number of important ways. Most felt that the program was a good experience and were proud of their accomplishments. In fact, the teen actors strongly agreed that the program had helped them to not only have a better understanding about how healthy relationships work, but also to use what they learned in their relationships with others. A majority of the teens agreed that the project staff provided needed support and guidance. The teen actors felt they had made progress in the areas of communication, leadership, setting goals, as courageous bystanders, and seeing themselves differently. Three quarters of the teen actors (75%) strongly endorsed ideas that reflected equality between genders and within relationships.

Overall, the teen actors seemed to have an increased knowledge of abuse indicators after the program. However, this was not as strong for non-physical abuse indicators where some individuals perceived these indicators in more inconsistent ways. It may be that teen actors have an easier time identifying abuse contextually, as they did in the play and reported in the focus group, than on measures that were de-contextualized. In terms of physical abuse indicators, all of the teen actors described "pushed, grabbed, slapped, choked, or kicked" and "threw or broke objects during arguments" as abusive behavior, and all but one

teen rated "pressures them to have sex or do sexual things that they don't want to" as being abusive.

### **Summary of Focus Group Findings**

The teen actor focus group produced themes that included: developing cohesion and trust while making a play, personal growth and maturity, new learning about the characteristics of abusive relationships, and helping and accountability for others. The staff focus group produced a related set of themes: relationships make the group strong, witnessing teen actor success, and learning happens in the process.

In many ways, the staff and teen actor focus group discussions reinforced each other. Specific examples of how teen actors were experiencing personal growth and applying what they were learning in the program to their lives emerged from both focus groups. Staff members' ability to effectively facilitate key events and allow learning and growth was reflected in the teen actors' descriptions of their experiences.

#### Teen Actor Focus Group Findings

Four themes emerged from the analysis of the teen actor focus group transcript, including: developing cohesion and trust while making a play, personal growth and maturity, new learning about the characteristics of abusive relationships, and helping and accountability for others. Each theme is illustrated and explored below.

#### Theme 1: Developing Cohesion and Trust While Making a Play

Teen actors described the process of making the play as both artistic and technical. They also described the social and emotional aspects of this process as they learned to work creatively as a group, drawing on events from their lives as they wrote the script.

Teen actors described the process of learning the technical aspects of production and performance as challenging. In particular, they focused on the task of developing the material for the play:

We started out all breaking up into groups, and coming up with our own ideas, and what we would plot, how the play should go, and we came together and show[ed] our ideas, and like each group put their idea. So we can't put everyone's ideas. Before we came up with the final play, we had come up with skits about different subjects and topics or something. We took the little skit and changed it around a little bit to work in the play, and put them all together. So they

were little skits we had come up before we had an idea of play.

Working well together in groups to create and perform the play was described as an ongoing process that involved developing trust and commitment to each another. One teen actor described the emotional nature and eventual success of this process:

We at first were really shy around, like he [staff member] said, was nerve racking at first, and then we went on that trip, we all got to really know each other. I mean we got really tired of each other. Well, I mean, but we sat down, and we said everything was on our mind. We though all out. We figured it out, and then from that point on we realize if we did work as a group, there's nothing going to get done.

The source material for the skits that ultimately formed the play was largely drawn from the teen actors' lives. As one teen actor described: "the ideas were coming out a little by little, most of them like, the experiences either you deal with or other friends deal with it." Because of their close connection to the material as they developed the play they were also thinking through situations that personally affected them or people that they cared about. One teen actor described his emotional reaction to the play:

D: It got me right there. It got me right here real bad.

Staff: You point at your heart. What you mean it got you in your heart?

D: Everyone was giving all these ideas about bad stuff and how we try to play it. It exactly kind of true for some other people. That actually happen to them or something like that.

## Theme 2: Personal Growth and Maturity

Teen actors recognized important areas of personal growth as a result of the program both in themselves and in their peers. For example, a female teen actor described how the program increased her awareness about the ways that she was being possessive and jealous in her relationship with her boyfriend:

Another thing for me that it wasn't like, we talk a lot about what you want in a dating partner, but one thing that I realize I was doing after this program was that I acted out of my jealousy a lot. I don't know. For some reason I get so jealous of any other girl. This helps me a lot to not be so bitter, like

my boyfriend got something with some other girl, you got to just like control it. If you have no reason to be jealous, you just kind of have to let it go, and just trust that person you with. I just didn't realize before that I was been so horrible about every other girl. How I just automatically hate everybody. Every other girl that my boyfriend talk to. It's hard to explain, but I just learn not to act on my jealousy so much.

In another case, a male teen actor described observing the transformation of a male peer over the course of the program, from being quiet and introverted to "exploding" on stage.

V: Before P started it, P didn't want to talk. He didn't want to talk to nobody. He just wanted to watch, and sit in a lazy-boy. By the end, when we were at camp, he was dancing. He was doing little jiggy with it.

Staff: And then beyond that...

V: And then when we went to the play, everybody wasn't sure if P was able to his little part. That boy exploded.

### Theme 3: New Learning about the Characteristics of Abusive Relationships

Teen actors also expressed their heightened awareness about the dynamics of violent relationships. One teen actor explained how violence can creep into a relationship in the form of power and control which escalates over time:

[It's] always a little violence at first. It doesn't start [with] violence, but starts off with, kind of like, holding the other partner back, sometimes [it] is the female, most of times, but sometimes it could also be a male, and the that's how it starts, and one of partner starts setting rules for the other partner to follow, and then that other person does not want to follow the rule, and start to rebelling against it. And then eventually makes one of the partner mad and then violence comes in - threatening and um, hitting. It can build into something fatal. Fatal thing comes up.

A female teen actor, who had previously been in an abusive relationship, described how the program expanded her definitions of abusive behavior and influenced her thinking about healthy relationships.

I knew all the signs of the unhealthy relationships [prior to the program]; so when I came here, it opened my eyes even more because I always thought of them like verbal abuse or physical abuse, but there is a lot of other stuff. People kind of overlook like jealousy and like bad communication, they are all signs of unhealthy relationships. I learned a lot from that, just discussion of everything that makes bad relationships and good relationships.

Not only were some of the teen actors thinking about relationships more complexly, they were also making different dating choices as a result. A different female teen actor described how she decided if someone was the right person for her to date:

I think in order to know if it's the right person, it's to get to know them, talk to them a little bit. Get to the dislikes and likes, and find out what the last past relationship had been like. What happen wrong? So what way I get an idea of how they are, and something like that.

Finally, a male teen actor pointed out how teen actors were getting help with their own relationships by working on the play and having discussions about relationships, even when they might not be willing to ask for help directly.

There were a lot of people that were kind of nervous or scare to ask for help or telling them that they have this problem because they don't everybody know about it. So I guess in the way, instead of ask, we talk about it. You know where the thing while you are doing it. You are working, and you are also getting help for whatever the problem you might have for yourself.

#### Theme 4: Helping and Accountability for Others

During the focus group, teen actors also talked about wanting to help others struggling with relationships and learning how to do so respectfully. One male actor invited his little sister to join the program when he became concerned about the relationship that she was in:

The main person I want here is my little sister because she picked this stupid little boy she could find. Really retarded you know. They don't about relationship. She wants to go out with him. You know that makes me mad. Knowing that she is going with that little boy, I can't do until they are 12, 11

something. I can't do nothing. I get mad my sister getting hurt herself. I mean I am mad too. He is like, She cry over her little boyfriend. It makes me mad. I just feel like punching that boy.

Though he was frustrated with his sister, he chose to reach out to her by exposing her to different ideas about what constitutes a healthy relationship.

Similarly, a female actor described how she gives advice to peers in a manner that is less "preachy" and more non-judgmental:

So, when I give people advice about things, I will tell them what I think is right but I also tell them, 'I understand you're gonna make your decision, if you end up making a mistake, you will learn from it', because that is just how I work. So, I know that telling people, and drilling into them some advice doesn't always help. But, by giving them some option, telling them look at yourself or you can look at me also makes them think that maybe better to look into our lives.

#### Staff Focus Group Findings

During the staff focus group, the three key staff members explored their experiences and observations of the program. They described the relationships that developed between staff, the growth of the teen actors over time, and gave specific examples of key events that became catalysts for learning. Three themes emerged during the staff focus group: relationships make the group strong, witnessing teen actors' success, and learning happens in the process.

#### Theme 1: Relationships Make The Group Strong

Because the program was a continuation project from the previous year, two of the three staff members had a history of working together on the project. One of the original staff members also had a relationship working with the newest staff person professionally on other projects. They all expressed coming into this year's project with a high level of trust and comfort with each other and with the experience of working with many of the same teen actors in a previous theater project.

The staff recognized the complementary skills that each person brought to the endeavor. One of the original staff members seemed to bring a sense of leadership and vision to the project. The newest staff member joined the project this year, bringing what was described "as a very technical knowledge of producing interactive theater" that allowed the project to grow creatively.

In contrast, one of the other staff members, a counselor for many years, often took the lead in managing group and individual dynamics that threatened to interfere with the learning environment. As will be discussed later, sometimes these dynamics created teachable moments which actually facilitated deeper learning for the teen actors.

Throughout the course of the project, the staff continued to come together as a team, learned how to set limits, and learned how to trust themselves and the strength of the group as a whole. When a key staff person was unable to attend one of their earlier performances, the rest of the staff and teen actors rallied and performed well. A staff member described the value of this experience in increasing his confidence and highlighting that the group's strength lay beyond any individual member.

Staff also described their own learning about how to work effectively with adolescents. One staff member emphasized the importance of letting go of control while working with the teen actors. She described learning that it "isn't important about my agenda, [that I need to know] how to trash my agenda and when I need to have a better agenda".

## Theme 2: Witnessing Teen Actors' Success

All staff noted important changes in the teen actors that they attributed to participation in the program. They were particularly impressed by the teens' commitment to the quality of the production and to each other. One staff member noted that being paid for their participation resulted in the teen actors taking their work with the project more seriously: "They felt that it was different than school because they were getting paid." At the same time, their commitment and professionalism extended beyond being paid. Near the end of the summer, before their first public performance, the teen actors requested an additional rehearsal "even if we don't get paid" in order to make sure that the performance would be one in which they could take pride.

Staff also reported that they were "blown away" by the teen actors' reliability. The majority of teen actors participated in all of the performances despite the potential barriers of being responsible for their own transportation and getting to places that their parents had never even been. Their commitment to their cast-mates was also apparent as they spontaneously learned ways to help one another with forgotten lines and cues. Staff commented that the teen actors seemed to be learning about trust—that they could count on and take care of each other.

Staff described their observations of the teen actors' growth in a number of ways: through changes in appearance, patterns of

interacting, and increased awareness of the ways that issues of power and control were present in their own lives.

Staff members noted that a particularly reserved girl returned to the program after the summer more self-possessed and asking for a larger role in the play. One staff member described the changes in this young woman's presentation:

This fall, she always looked attractive but this fall she looked beautiful, her acting, she's just, I had no idea, she's doing a bigger part, her voice has grown.

In another instance, a male teen actor who was prone to conflicts and arguments with the staff learned how to better control his emotions. Near the end of the program, a staff member who experienced continual power struggles with this young man was impressed by his request to leave the room when he found himself becoming angry with her.

And to me that was huge because for him to be able to self-regulate in that way and express what he needed and be able to do that.

Sometimes, to their surprise, staff members saw evidence that the teen actors were applying what they were learning about healthy relationships directly in their lives and talking about these issues with their friends and dating partners. One staff member described a conversation that she had with one of the male actors over the phone:

I was on the phone I called the night before the performances or rehearsals, and he (J) was like, "Well I'm on the other line with my girlfriend" and I said "Well, can you get off the phone with your girlfriend, I need to talk to you for a minute" or whatever. So he was like, "OK" and he got back on he was like, "Yeah", and he starts going on about—I thought he was joking at first he was "I was just talking to her and I'm trying to talk to her about trust and how trust is the basis of a relationship and you gotta trust each other" and I thought, "He's got to be pulling my leg, you know," and I was like "Yeah J, that's our performance" and he was like "Yeah, you know" he just kept going on and it was real for him. That was such a cool moment because it was just seeing him apply directly this stuff.

Rehearsals also became the context for discussions about relationships and larger gender issues. Staff noticed the energy and openness of teen actors as they engaged in these dialogues and began to think about such issues more critically.



Before most of our rehearsals we do check-ins at the beginning, we have one check-in where [a staff member asked them to share] that you like about being male or female and we ended up having this awesome conversation and then everyone wanted to talk about what they didn't like too and the conversation kept going on because they wanted it to...he was talking about how guys feel afraid and the front that they put on when they feel afraid, everybody could relate to it, it was this immediate, "my girlfriend wants me to take care of her if she hears a noise, and she's like go check it out and I'm like hiding under the covers, more scared than she is..." it was so, it seemed so awesome for them to be able share that.

### Theme 3: Learning Happens In The Process

While the staff observed changes in the teen actors over the course of the program, they also described their role in facilitating the teens' learning by using learning opportunities that naturally occurred in the teens' work. Staff used these opportunities to help the teen actors process experiences in ways that were fruitful.

The most dramatic example that staff related was of an incident that occurred during the overnight retreat. One of the staff members brought a knife in his backpack to use in the kitchen. The morning following the overnight, the knife had disappeared. Feeling very angry, the staff member confronted the group about his knife and instructed them to return it as he left the room. When he returned to the room, the knife lay on his pack. Later, the staff member continued to process this event with the teens involved. He expressed his strong anger about someone taking his property while also conveying his respect for the teens as individuals. In this exchange, the teens experienced an adult respectfully expressing anger, while maintaining the relationship. While the experience was powerful in itself, the discussion and modeling by the staff member seemed critical in helping teens think about honoring relationships in new ways and how to express anger and respect in those relationships.

Similarly, the staff utilized another event that occurred in the process to highlight the importance of accountability and commitment. At the beginning of the project, staff made what they felt was a necessary decision to not invite three of the teen actors from the previous year back into the program. Staff felt that these teen actors were exerting a negative influence within the group through their non-participation and cut them from the program only after multiple efforts to improve the situation. They felt that the remaining teen actors not only understood the decision, but that it motivated them to be more engaged and

accountable. Although this incident did not generate group discussion in the same way, the staff's behavior reinforced the expectations about the need for the group to work together.

### **Conclusion**

From the perspectives of both the teen actors and the staff, the Dating Violence Prevention Project was successful in its' most important aims--to foster the development and growth of the teen actors and to enhance their understanding of healthy and abusive relationships. Additionally, both the staff and teen actor focus group interviews suggest that the model of interactive theater positively contributed to these favorable outcomes by creating experiential opportunities for teen actors and staff to develop relationship skills, such as communication and trust, and to examine their relationships with one another. Successful replications of this model should be mindful to provide for a structure that allows for careful attention to the on-going relationship processes among staff members and teen actors, as well as between teen actors and staff.

Although many of the teen actors entered the project with a high level of knowledge about abusive relationships, most actors increased their knowledge after the program. Only two of the teens appeared to have either the same or less clarity about abusive relationships after the program. Given the small size of this sample, it is impossible to determine whether these individual responses accurately reflected their perceptions or whether the program may affect the attitudes of some teens negatively or not at all. Notably, neither focus group revealed any negative concerns about the program on any actors' views of the acceptability of abusive behavior.

By the end of the program, teen actors were uniformly able to identify physical abuse indicators. While the non-physical abuse indicators were more challenging for the teens to identify as abuse than the physical abuse indicators, most of the teens were able to correctly identify the non-physical abuse indicators as abuse after the program. Because non-physical abusive behaviors are so much more difficult to label, future programs should continue to focus on this important aspect and the strategies of power and control that occur within abusive relationships.

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APPENDIX A

Pre Test

1. What three things do you EXPECT to learn from participating in this project?

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2. What three things do you think will be the HARDEST things to learn in this project?

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3. What three things are you most INTERESTED in learning from this project.

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Using the following scale, answer the questions:

1	2	3	4	5
terrible	not good	not sure	good	terrific

1. How would you rate yourself as a leader? \_\_\_\_\_

2. How would you rate yourself as a communicator? \_\_\_\_\_

3. How would you rate yourself as a courageous bystander? \_\_\_\_\_

4. How would you rate yourself as being able to set goals for yourself?  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. How would others rate you as a leader? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How would others rate you as a communicator? \_\_\_\_\_

7. How would others rate you as a courageous bystander? \_\_\_\_\_

8. How would others rate you as setting goals for yourself? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think the following are examples of abusive behavior? Check One.

If someone did this to someone who they were dating:	Not abuse	Not Sure	Abuse
1. Pushed, grabbed, slapped, choked or kicked			
2. Asked friends/family members to spy			
3. Threatened to hurt them			
4. Asked them to do something they did not want to			
5. Criticized them			
6. Threw or broke objects during arguments			
7. Abused drugs or alcohol			
8. Ignored their feelings or withheld approval, appreciation or affection to punish them			
9. Called them names			
10. Swearing at them			
11. Yelling and screaming at them			
12. Has to know where they are at all times			
13. Was jealous or suspicious of their friends or family			
14. Accused them of cheating			
15. Doesn't let them see other friends			
16. Kept them from calling other friends			
17. Blamed them for his/her problems			
18. Call them crazy			
19. Doesn't accept when they say no			
20. Pressures them to dress a certain way			
21. Shows respect for boyfriend or girlfriend			
22. Pressures them to have sex or do sexual things that they don't want to			

Is there any thing else you want to say?

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APPENDIX B

Post Test

Using the following scale, answer the questions:

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
strongly disagree    disagree            not sure            agree            strongly agree

1. How would you rate yourself as a leader? \_\_\_\_
2. How would you rate yourself as a communicator? \_\_\_\_
3. How would you rate yourself as a courageous bystander? \_\_\_\_
4. How would you rate yourself as being able to set goals for yourself? \_\_\_\_
5. How would others rate you as a leader? \_\_\_\_
6. How would others rate you as a communicator? \_\_\_\_
7. How would others rate you as a courageous bystander? \_\_\_\_
8. How would others rate you as setting goals for yourself? \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer by circling the number.

1. The summer program was a good experience for me.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
strongly disagree    disagree            not sure            agree            strongly agree

2. This program has helped me feel more confident in my ability to teach others.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
strongly disagree    disagree            not sure            agree            strongly agree

3. The games and theatrical activities helped me to learn new things that I used in the performance.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
strongly disagree    disagree            not sure            agree            strongly agree

4. SafePlace and theatre staff provided support that I needed.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
strongly disagree    disagree            not sure            agree            strongly agree

5. SafePlace and theatre staff provided guidance that I needed.
- |                   |          |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3        | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | not sure | agree | strongly agree |
6. I feel proud of my accomplishments.
- |                   |          |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3        | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | not sure | agree | strongly agree |
7. I have a better understanding about what a healthy relationship is.
- |                   |          |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3        | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | not sure | agree | strongly agree |
8. I will use what I learned in my relationships with others.
- |                   |          |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3        | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | not sure | agree | strongly agree |
9. It may be difficult to be a courage bystander, but now I will be able to do it.
- |                   |          |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3        | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | not sure | agree | strongly agree |
10. After this summer program, I communicate better now.
- |                   |          |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3        | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | not sure | agree | strongly agree |
11. After this summer program, I am a better leader now.
- |                   |          |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3        | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | not sure | agree | strongly agree |
12. I have more goals for my life now.
- |                   |          |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3        | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | not sure | agree | strongly agree |
13. I see myself differently than when I started this program.
- |                   |          |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|----------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3        | 4     | 5              |
| strongly disagree | disagree | not sure | agree | strongly agree |

14. I think that girls and boys are entitled to the same respect.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
 strongly disagree   disagree                      not sure                      agree                      strongly agree

15. I think one person in a relationship should probably be in charge.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
 strongly disagree   disagree                      not sure                      agree                      strongly agree

Do you think the following are examples of abusive behavior? Check One.

<b>If someone did this to someone who they were dating:</b>	<b>Not abuse</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>	<b>Abuse</b>
1. Pushed, grabbed, slapped, choked or kicked			
2. Asked friends/family members to spy			
3. Threatened to hurt them			
4. Asked them to do something they did not want to			
5. Criticized them			
6. Threw or broke objects during arguments			
7. Abused drugs or alcohol			
8. Ignored their feelings or withheld approval, appreciation or affection to punish them			
9. Calling names			
10. Swearing at them			
11. Yelling and screaming at them			
12. Has to know where they are at all times			
13. Was jealous or suspicious of their friends or family			
14. Accused them of cheating			
15. Doesn't let them see other friends			
16. Kept them from calling other friends			
17. Blamed them for his/her problems			
18. Calling them crazy			
19. Doesn't accept when they say no			
20. Pressures them to dress a certain way			
21. Shows respect for boyfriend or girlfriend			
22. Pressures them to have sex or do sexual things that they don't want to			

Is there any thing else you want to say?

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