

A Journey to Healing: Finding the Path

By Tameka Davis

The Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC), in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women, held its 2009 national conference *A Journey to Healing: Finding the Path* Aug. 3-4 in Long Beach, Calif.

This two-day, ground-breaking event featured over 50 presenters, including a panel of former battered women who shared their journeys of healing with an audience of more than 600 participants. They told about their process of becoming more than a “survivor” after enduring domestic abuse.

The conference also featured a panel of adults who recounted their first-hand experiences of witnessing

domestic violence as children and offered their personal perspectives on healing.

The prevailing theme of the conference was that adults who witnessed violence as children and other victims of domestic violence can successfully engage in the process of healing. Survivors may tread different pathways in their journey, but true healing is possible.

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Executive Director’s Message—Where the journey began



Dr. Oliver J. Williams
Executive Director

The compelling story behind the convening of *A Journey to Healing: Finding the Path* began more than 25 years ago when I was a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh. I was working as the founder of a batterer intervention program in Beaver County, Penn., and I was a volunteer

with the local battered women’s program, where I met an exceptional domestic violence advocate and shelter director named Shirl Q. Regan.

We had regular discussions about the needs of battered women and the women’s desire to move beyond the physical and emotional pain they experienced. From those discussions, we recognized the need to confront the issue of **healing** for survivors of domestic violence, and we convened a recovery group for survivors in Beaver County.

The topic of healing really deals with the issue of how victims of domestic violence yearn for moving past the experience of victimization and survivorship. They’ll always be deeply affected by the violence, but they don’t want it to consume their lives. They also want to figure out a way to move past the experience, move past the trauma.

IDVAAC’s 2009 National Conference, *A Journey to Healing* brought the issue of healing for survivors of domestic violence and adults who have witnessed domestic violence as children to the national forefront. This effort was inspired by many of my heroes and sheroes over the last 25 years.

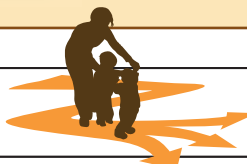
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This two-day, ground-breaking event featured over 50 presenters



Overview of the Journey to Healing Aug. 3-4
IDVAAC annual conference in Long Beach, Calif.

A JOURNEY TO
HEALING



Conference Highlights inside...

A JOURNEY TO HEALING



U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, Jr. received the IDVAAC Sheila and Paul Wellstone Humanitarian Award from Dr. Oliver Williams in Holder's office at the U.S. Dept. of Justice in Washington, D.C. Due to a scheduling conflict, Holder gave a video acceptance during the conference in Long Beach. Holder has been an effective advocate for domestic violence for more than a decade, according to Dr. Williams. The IDVAAC award is now displayed prominently in Holder's office.

Five stages of healing have roots in research

IDVAAC Executive Director Dr. Oliver Williams' presentation "Battered Women's Perspectives on Healing: Report on Focus Group Responses" identified the five stages of healing women typically experience when healing from domestic violence.

For the past few years, IDVAAC, in collaboration with several nonprofits, conducted focus groups and individual interviews with women who have been victims of domestic violence. This research was instrumental in the development of the five stages of healing. The nonprofits include: PROTOTYPES of Culver City, Calif.,

Jenesse of Los Angeles and Transformation Detroit.

Williams explained that healing is an individual process, and there is not a single path or ultimate truth. The experience of healing varies from individual to individual, but there are strong similarities in the stages experienced by most survivors.

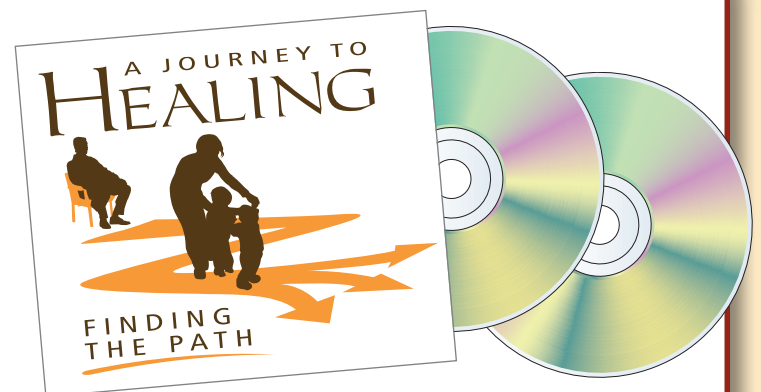
The five stages of healing will be the focus of an upcoming issue of the *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma*, a national scholarly journal. It will focus on adults and children who have been victims of domestic violence and will include

research gathered for the conference in Long Beach by Dr. Williams, as well as research and perspectives from IDVAAC Steering Committee members Dr. Robert Hampton at Tennessee State University and Dr. Esther Jenkins at Chicago State University.

Also writing for this publication will be Dr. Sandy Graham Bermann at the University of Michigan, Dr. Carolyn West at the University of Washington-Tacoma, Dr. Terri Pease at the Domestic Violence and Mental Health Policy Initiative in Chicago, and Dr. Robert Geffner from Alliant International University in San Diego.

Coming Soon: A Journey To Healing, Finding The Path Conference DVDs

IDVAAC's first two-disk set of DVDs showing highlights from the conference will be available in February. See www.dvinstitute.org for details.



Artistic performances helped tell stories of healing

Both days of the conference were filled with exciting and emotional artistic performances. IDVAAC goes to great lengths to incorporate song, dance and poetry into its conferences as an innovative way to share its research related to domestic violence.

One of the highlights of the conference was the live premiere of a play, based on research on healing from domestic violence. *Ms. May's Flowers* featured Academy Award nominee Margaret "Shug" Avery in the title role; she shared the stage with up-and-coming actress Ebani Edwards.

Ms. May's Flowers looks into the hearts and minds of women who have experienced domestic violence. It tells the emotional story of a young woman who is in an abusive relationship, but is afraid to leave. With the help of her caring neighbor, Ms. May, she learns that she's not alone.

Pickett-Line Productions, comprised of husband-and-wife team Prester and Bertha Lee Pickett, was commissioned to write the play. The Picketts often collaborate on projects that have "edutainment" value, combining education and entertainment. Prester



Dr. Oliver J. Williams presents an IDVAAC award to Gary Hines, founder and director of Sounds of Blackness.

Pickett described the play as "a way to encourage a woman's point of view from a garden that grew."

After the play, Andrea Tribitt of Sounds of Blackness gave an inspiring performance of the song "The Path of Healing," written specifically for the conference by Sounds of Blackness founder Gary Hines. (Two original songs written for the conference can be found on the Sounds of Blackness album, *The 3rd Gift: Story, Song and Spirit*.)

The day concluded with an emotional pinning ceremony during which hundreds of conference participants made a pledge to help end domestic violence and promote healing among its victims.

The conference artistic performances also included premieres of "On the Path to Healing" and "Journey to Healing" performed by Endalyn Taylor, director of the Dance Theatre of Harlem School in New York, and her dancers.

IDVAAC was grateful for the "amazing" scenery for the play, as well as other conference support services provided by Executive Director Carol Williams and her staff from Interval House in Long Beach, a multicultural shelter with staff members who speak 82 languages. ♦

The specially commissioned play "Ms. May's Flowers" featured actresses Margaret Avery (left) and Ebani Edwards.



Check out the IDVAAC website www.dvinstitute.org to see and hear these exceptional performances.

First-hand accounts shared in panel discussions

The conference featured a panel of formerly battered women who shared their personal accounts of victimization and affirmed that enduring the abuse was not the end of their story.

Although the women hadn't met before the panel, they quickly connected while sharing their stories. Each woman had a different story, but there were overarching themes, such as feeling alone, and ultimately healing from the emotional pain.

Panelists stressed the importance of recognizing emotional and verbal abuse, because although physical abuse gets more attention from law enforcement and society, panelists stated it's often the emotional scars that are harder to heal. They also spoke about the importance of cultural awareness in addressing domestic violence in the African American community. Each of the women spoke about finding peace and healing on their own terms.

The conference also featured a panel of adults who offered their perspectives on healing as they recounted their first-hand experiences of witnessing domestic violence as children. They spoke of the need for understanding – not judgment from counselors and those they sought help from, the role of forgiveness of self and others in the process of healing, and the need to begin healing – if possible – as children. ◆



Above: Members of the "adults who witnessed violence during childhood" panel, from left to right: Anthony Taylor, Rev. Jessica Jackson, L.Y. Marlow and Johnny Rice, II.

Below: IDVAAC Steering Committee members left to right: Johnny Rice, II, Linner Ward Griffin, Karma Cottman, Joyce Thomas, Esther Jenkins, Oliver J. Williams, Shelia Hankins, Antonia Vann, Beth Richie, Robert Hampton.



Journey to Healing “Survivors” Speaker Panel

IDVAAC Annual Award Winners

LEADERSHIP AWARDS: Marcus Pope, associate director, Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, St. Paul. Tara Shabazz, executive director, California Partnership to End Domestic Violence, Sacramento.

MOTHER OF THE FIELD AWARD: Ashley Walker, Family Justice Center in San Diego.

SHELIA & PAUL WELLSTONE HUMANITARIAN AWARD: U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder Jr., Washington, D.C.

MEDIA AWARD: Gary Hines, music director, Sounds of Blackness, Minneapolis. Endalyn Taylor, New York City.

RESEARCH AWARD: Tricia Bent Goodley, Ph.D., Howard University, Washington, D.C.

INSPIRATIONAL AWARDS: Atum Azzahir, Minneapolis. Brenda Thomas, Philadelphia. Jaycee Memminger, Detroit. LaVon Morris Grant, Atlanta. Anthony Taylor, St. Paul. L.Y. Marlow, Arlington, Va. Jessica Jackson, Minneapolis. Johnny Rice II, Baltimore.

ANGEL AWARDS: Carol Williams, Interval House, Long Beach, Calif. Debi Cain, executive director, Michigan Domestic Violence and Treatment Board, Lansing. Tianna Kirk, Los Angeles. Casey Gwinn, president, National Family Justice Center Alliance, San Diego.



From left to right: Atum Azzahir, president and executive director – Cultural Wellness Center in Minneapolis; Jaycee Memminger, president – Angelic Impact in Detroit; Shelia Hankins, State of Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board in Lansing, Mich. Lavon Morris-Grant, author of *Whom Shall I Fear: A Spiritual Journey of a Battered Woman* from Atlanta; and Brenda L. Thomas, author of *Laying Down My Burden* from Philadelphia.

Former wife of ‘DC sniper’ offers hope for healing

During a conference luncheon, Mildred Muhammad, former wife of “D.C. Sniper” John Allen Muhammad, shared her personal struggle of domestic violence, behind the national tragic event. Muhammad spoke about some of the warning signs she observed with her former husband and how she fought to protect her three children after he kidnapped them for 18 months.



Dr. Williams described Muhammad as “a fierce advocate for herself and her children.” While retelling her experience, Muhammad stated, “I had to help myself because no one was going to help me.” She told the audience about the legal obstacles she faced in protecting herself and her family.

Muhammad founded After the Trauma, a domestic violence resource organization, based on her own experiences as a way to help other survivors find resources when they’re preparing to leave a perpetrator of domestic violence. Muhammad recently published a book about her life story, a memoir called *Scared Silent*, which is in book stores now.

Those interested in photos, videos and additional content from the conference can find them at www.idvaac.org/healing. 

Meet new IDVAAC Steering Committee Member Johnny Rice, II

By Tameka Davis

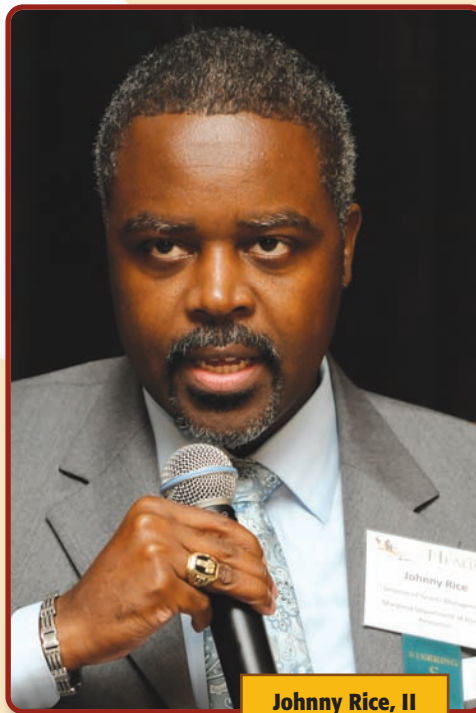
During the adult children's panel at the *A Journey to Healing: Finding the Path* conference, national violence prevention and intervention advocate Johnny Rice, II shared his personal experience of healing after witnessing domestic violence during childhood. Rice, whose father was a former abuser, was later able to reconcile with him once he realized that his father was able to positively transform himself and publicly acknowledged his past abusive actions. His father now is a respected family and community member that reaches out to other men through mentoring and ministry and models a lifestyle free of violence.

Currently Rice serves as director for the Office of Grants Management at the Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR), where he oversees funding for local and government agencies throughout Maryland that provide homelessness and transitional services, food and nutrition services, victim services (i.e., domestic violence, victims of crime, rape) and sexual assault education and prevention, and community-based, youth oriented and fatherhood services.

Rice also serves on the Governor's Family Violence Council and the State Board of Victim Services in Maryland, which focus on domestic violence policy and legislation that is central to victim safety and offender accountability. This year Rice became a member of IDVAAC's Steering Committee. His diverse experience in the field of responsible fatherhood and human services helps aid in IDVAAC's mission of increasing awareness and understanding of efforts that are necessary to prevent, reduce and eliminate domestic violence in the African-American community.

Rice has worked in human services and family strengthening for nearly 15 years. Working as a foster care worker at the Baltimore City Department of Social Services was where Rice first gained interest in human services. "I've always been committed to positive youth development," said Rice. "I was able to see the challenges youth faced as a teen growing up in West Baltimore, and as an adult child welfare worker. I have always acknowledged barriers families faced and attempted to acquire the resources they needed to become sustaining and self-sufficient."

"I've regularly worked with fathers and families in the community throughout the years, and they have shared a lot with me," said Rice. "I often have shared with them some of my personal experiences when it's appropriate, so they can understand that I can relate



Johnny Rice, II

to their struggle. It serves as a way to motivate people to succeed and to strengthen others."

When Rice was an adult, he recognized he had been a child who witnessed domestic violence. Rice says that it wasn't until he attended a meeting on domestic violence early in his professional career that he was able to identify his own experience with abuse. This is why Rice stresses for individuals in the field to make sure they address their own needs as much as they attempt to address others'.

Motivating others to succeed

"Often people in the field are so focused on helping victims that they can forget to also help themselves," said Rice. "I hope to be a motivational voice to encourage individuals in victim services. Often the work can be very exhausting, and it takes a lot out of them working with abusers and victims/survivors, but I want to assist in helping keep them healthy. That's why mentoring and teaching others committed to this work is so vital."

As an addictions counselor for the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, Rice worked with low-income fathers and saw the challenges they faced when reconnecting with their families. This inspired him to see how he could affect change on a broad scale for the community.

During Rice's first stint at DHR as a program specialist, he began to understand the importance of public policy. "As practitioners, we support families in different ways to help create a safe and balanced society as best we can," said Rice. "I learned early on that policy often dictates the resources and parameters in which practitioners must adhere to in carrying out their work thus making it so critical. It is even more important today that we don't ignore the issue of domestic violence. If we don't deal with violence in our homes, schools, workplaces and communities a new generation of victims and perpetrators will be birthed. My focus is to work on a societal level to eradicate domestic violence and in turn contribute to the field." ♦

IDVAAC

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Getting Out, Coming Home: From the Penitentiary to the Community

By Tameka Davis

Each year more than 650,000 prisoners are released back into their community nationwide. Upon release, they face many challenges, ranging from finding housing, maintaining employment, complying with parole stipulations, reconnecting with family members, and completing treatment programs for various issues. Yet one critical issue remains largely unaddressed: the potential for domestic violence among intimate partners.

Pernell Brown, a consultant for IDVAAC who works with incarcerated men on domestic violence issues, has coined the question: "Are you getting out or coming home?" He often poses it to inmates he works with. His point is that when they get out, they may not be prepared to stay out of prison and reconnect successfully with their families. According to Brown, "coming home" means that the men reframed their attitudes, thinking, behavior and commitment to coming home and positively engaging with community, family and self.

The criminal justice system is disproportionately represented by African American men. In addition, studies show that the incidence of intimate partner violence is unusually high in the African American community, with some sources showing rates for intimate partner homicides among African Americans as 2.5 times higher than rates for whites.

The Safe Return Initiative (SRI) is a program to deal with issues related to domestic violence and reentry. The intent of the program is to support battered women and children when men they are connected with return to the community from prison, regardless of the reasons for incarceration. SRI also provides technical assistance to domestic violence programs, as well as parole and community supports that work with battered women and men who may have histories of violence. SRI was created by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women and IDVAAC.

In August, IDVAAC was asked by the Batterer Intervention Services Coalition of Michigan and the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention & Treatment Board to recreate an SRI symposium IDVAAC hosted in 2005 in Minnesota. The Michigan-based *Getting Out, or Coming Home?* symposium was held on Aug. 19 in Detroit.

Presenters included experts in criminal justice, corrections, prisoner reentry, domestic violence, community supervision, batterer intervention, battered women's advocacy, and faith-based domestic violence support services.

Keynote speaker and noted criminal justice activist Dr. Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, who was portrayed by actor Denzel Washington in the 1999 biographical film *The Hurricane*, gave an inspirational speech on the first day of the conference.

His presentation was drawn from his own personal prison experience of transformation from a life of anger and violence to a life of peace and productivity, including his personal recommendations for working with men in prison to help them realize their individual potential.

IDVAAC hosts roundtable

A separate, invitation-only roundtable on reentry strategies was hosted by IDVAAC Aug. 20-21 in Detroit. The two days included presentations and discussions with representatives from the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) and 14 states from across the country. The roundtable was organized and sponsored by IDVAAC and was an SRI activity.

Representatives from Kansas, Louisiana, New York, the State of Washington, Oregon, Missouri, Texas, Minnesota, Michigan, Kentucky, Colorado, Washington, D.C., and California presented and shared projects from their states, which were completed or underway, that deal effectively with reentry, release and parole, victim services and batterer intervention.

The two-day roundtable culminated in a targeted report that showcases best practices on a national level and outlines solutions and recommendations for successful reentry programming.

In conjunction with the Safe Return Initiative, IDVAAC has created many resources to address this critical issue. These resources include roundtables, Webcasts, training videos, conferences, in-depth reports, and award-winning DVDs. To learn more about the Safe Return Initiative: www.idvaac.org/sri.

Finding the path with Shirl Q. Regan

One of those heroes is Shirl Q. Regan. A knowledgeable and dedicated domestic violence advocate with over 25 years of experience, Regan has been the executive director of the Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, one of the oldest programs for battered women and their children in the United States, for almost 10 years. She is an outstanding advocate who understands both sides of the domestic violence equation. She has done intense work on behalf of both victims and batterers.

Shirl has been a good friend and teacher since the early '80s. Over the years, we've often shared what we've learned from our respective programs. Regan would co-facilitate my batterer intervention counseling group, and I would co-facilitate support and recovery groups for battered women at the shelter.



Shirl Q. Regan

Historically, conversations regarding domestic violence have focused on the immediate impact on and needs of battered women: what they experience with abuse, how to safely exit an abusive relationship. Often missing from our discussion is: what does it take to achieve true healing and what it means individually for the victim-survivors.

The importance of healing can have a profound effect on whether survivors of abuse and adults witnessing domestic violence as children can achieve a personal sense of well-being. Yet for many involved in domestic violence, there's no clear pathway to achieving the healing that is so greatly desired.

During our conference in California, through a series of panel discussions, workshops, and artistic expressions, we explored the journey to healing with survivors of domestic violence and adults who witnessed domestic violence as children. Our two-day conference resulted in important steps toward revealing a path toward healing that is individual for every victim, but includes some very familiar collective steps.

The five stages of healing, which I presented at the conference, will be the focus of a national scholarly journal this year. The conference and the journal articles, which will be written by researchers who attended the conference, are two important steps on our path toward healing victims of domestic violence. ♦

Coming full circle

In an effort to open a national discussion on fully addressing the issue of healing from domestic violence, *A Journey to Healing: Finding the Path* came to fruition 25 years after my work in domestic violence began.



next issue

New DVDs from Minnesota prison reentry project • New Executive Director's videoblog • Retrospective on 10 years of IDVAAC newsletters

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