

Domestic violence subject of Women's Center forum

By Alan DeCorla-Souza & Seferina Liriano

Staff Reporters
adecorlasouza@novafortnightly.com
sliriano@novafortnightly.com

On Feb. 12, the Women's Center at Alexandria campus co-hosted a lunch-time discussion with the Arlington-based charity Doorways for Women and Families about violence in dating and relationships. Talks are just one element of Doorways' Red Flag Campaign, charged with engaging students in dialogues about healthy relationships. Each of the seats around the discussion table featured red flags, the symbol of their campaign.

Implemented by Candice Lopez and Kelly Blanchard of Doorways, the Red Flag Campaign intends to raise awareness of violence in relationships in the community, educate young people about healthy relationships, create "active bystanders" and "de-normalize" violence in society. The campaign has already caused a stir of discussion, as students are blogging about the posters around campus. Organizers have targeted three major educational institutions in the Northern Virginia area: GMU, Marymount University and Northern Virginia Community College, because colleges hold the largest concentration of women and men at the greatest risk of domestic violence. According to Doorways, 30% of women ages 18-24 will experience domestic violence.

Many attendees knew people who were in abusive relationships (some were social workers) so it was personal to them. But others were simply interested in activities at the Women's Center. Two of the 12 attendees were male, one of whom was a pastor and student at NOVA. There was an active dialogue between attendees; their discussions were pertinent but informal. Overall, the room's atmosphere fostered participation and respect for the complexity of the subject.

Topics of discussion ranged from the technical (how to detect signs of violence at early stages in relationships, what is a healthy relationship and what is not, the little-known fact that men are victims too, why people become abusers or victims of abuse, and harassment tactics like victim blaming) to the personal (ex-

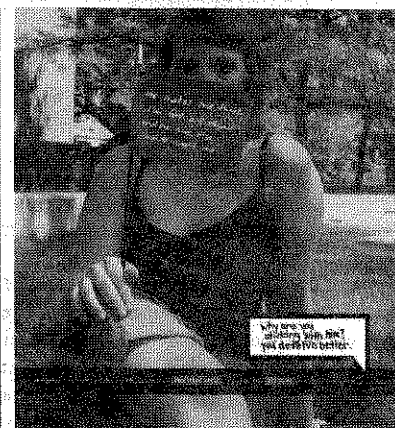
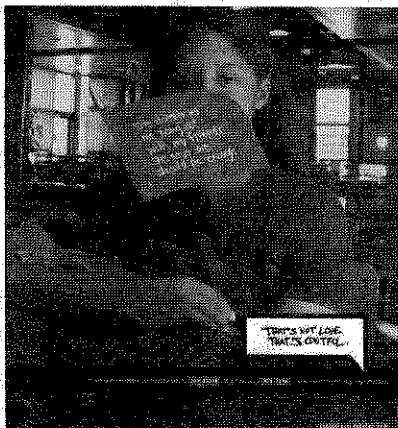
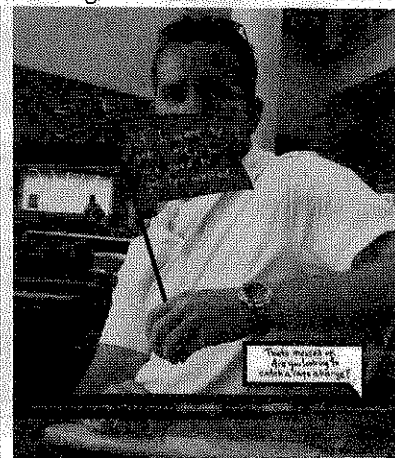
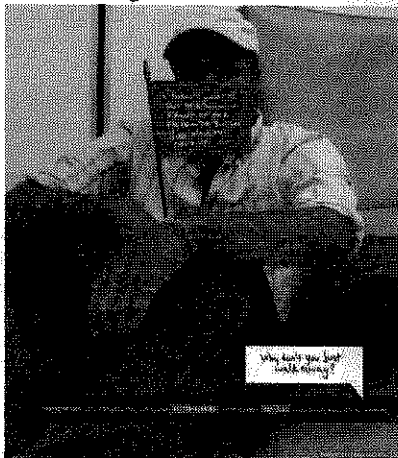
periences with domestic violence in one's own relationships or those of friends or family members). However, most people were concerned about how best to support someone in an abusive relationship.

Participation escalated across the table as the ladies from Doorways and the Women's Center projected PowerPoint presentations and images on different subjects. The slides explored the reasons of violence in dating. Participants voiced disquiet over a culture with pre-established gender roles that tolerates

either continue as victims or become victimizers."

Another participant, Meg Breeden, affirmed that "people are not taught in their families to have strong boundaries. In the fundamental levels of their education, people are not taught to put a stop [to abuse] at the early stages."


The forum ended with two important and positive directives: how to help those trapped in violent relationships and how to prevent violence in relationships. Most agreed that in the case of abusive



violence as a form of expression. A television ad was mentioned wherein a little girl complains with her dad that a little boy is being mean to her. Her father explains, "He is only mean to you because he likes you."

Abusers have often been victims themselves (this was another topic that provoked deep deliberation). As Pastor Weathers put it: "Some victims of abusive families later in their relationships

relationships in friends or family members, it is important to show compassion, understanding and support. To prevent violence, Doorways advocated monthly discussions to reach more and more students and spread the word. The audience at the Women's Center felt so strongly about domestic violence that they proposed including violence-awareness curricula in student development and orientation classes.



This fortnight's 14th Coffee award goes to
[Kimberly Arraradit]
 for her dedication and contribution to NOVA Fortnightly,
 far above and beyond that of her stated position.