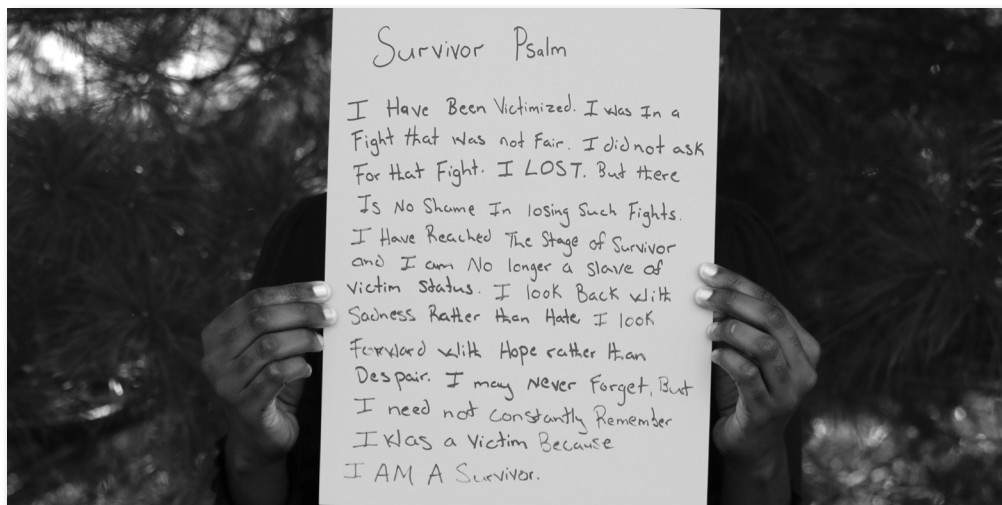




A community partnership
to Help, Empower and Lead



Latest news and updates



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October has become a nationally recognized month to bring awareness to the issue of domestic violence and provide a much-needed voice to its victims since the inception of Domestic Violence Month in 1989. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports that homicide is one of the leading causes of death for women 44 and younger and that more than half of those homicides involved domestic violence or intimate partner violence. Examined through a local lens, the surrounding "hotspots" around Jersey Shore University Medical Center that suffered from violent crime were Asbury Park, Neptune Township and Long Branch City. These areas also saw some of the highest numbers of domestic violence cases in Monmouth County, combining for 2,655 reported cases from 2017 through 2019, according to the N.J. Uniform Crime Report. Of these reported cases, 33 percent resulted in violent injury.

"You're missing the ones that don't come forward or the ones that aren't taking action. There are so many being missed," said Susan Levine, Program Coordinator for 180 Turning Lives Around, the leading domestic violence and sexual violence organization in Monmouth County. "The number is exponentially higher because victims don't always come forward for many different reasons."

Project HEAL provides services for clients who have suffered from all degrees of violent crime, including domestic violence. Internal program numbers have found that 68 percent of clients served have suffered from more than one type of violence in their life. Project HEAL has a collaborative relationship with 180 Turning Lives Around to ensure that individuals impacted by domestic violence receive the most appropriate and comprehensive care. Maria, who was originally helped by 180 TLA, became involved in a volatile situation with her abuser, which took her down a dark path for a period of time.

OCTOBER

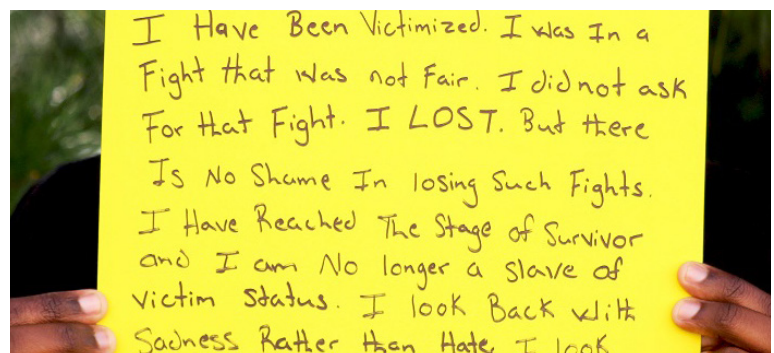


“It was really really hard,” Maria said. “I was with my abuser for five years.” Maria is an immigrant to this country and became involved in a toxic relationship, ultimately leading to abuse and fearing for her own safety. She recalled; “I finally left him and when I went to pick up my belongings, I was with the police and a social worker. He refused to give me my things in a situation where he still tried to keep power over me, and I said the only way I’m going to get away from him is to kill myself.”

The threat of self-harm led to Maria being hospitalized at Jersey Shore University Medical Center. Project HEAL was activated and responded to the call, meeting Maria at the hospital bedside for support and linkage to Project HEAL’s wraparound services. From there, Maria received a full psychological and physical evaluation and was then able to begin her healing journey.

Project HEAL was able to address the emotional stress that resulted from her abusive relationship with trauma informed individual counseling sessions. She coordinated any health concerns with the Nurse Navigator on staff. Project HEAL also provided her with emergency aid including gift cards to secure food and clothing for herself. “Who I was, three or four months ago, I’m no longer that person.” Maria said. “The Project HEAL nurse took care of me and I get to come and vent to my therapist. It’s been absolutely wonderful. I can tell her all my problems and she offers me solutions in ways that can actually help me. I just really appreciate you guys.”

Maria, who’s name was changed within this article to protect her, has been attending regular counseling sessions with Project HEAL for almost five months and is working toward learning to live a life of independence and being free from her abuser. Believing there is light at the end of the tunnel and better days are ahead, Maria wants others in similar situations to know that help is out there. There are resources available to help.



Maria holds up a home made poster containing a quote that spoke to her story. Her image has been concealed for her safety.

“Don’t think help is not out there,” Maria said. “Even if your partner tells you that nobody will help you, trust me, there are a lot of people out there who will help you, especially Project HEAL and 180.”

If you or someone you know is being victimized by domestic violence, call the 24/7 confidential hotline at 180 Turning Lives Around (888)-843-9262, or The National Domestic Violence Hot-line at (800)-799-7233, or contact Project HEAL at (732)-897-8190 for additional resources.

PROJECT HEAL GETS PRIME TIME SPOT ON NBC



NBC4NY has a nightly viewership of 86,000 people

Project HEAL was recently featured on NBC 4 New York evening news as part of an in-depth story by reporter Brian Thompson. The story focused on the creation of the Project HEAL as well as interviews with program clients who were victims of violence.

“We are no longer taking a treat-and-release approach to violence,” said Dr. Aakash Shah, Project HEAL Medical Director. “Instead we are forging a long-term relationship and maintaining it for months if not longer to make sure individuals get the care that they need and deserve.”

Project HEAL clients Nile Clark and Darnell Powell both shared their testimonials during the segment. After both were shot in the community, Nile and Darnell were stabilized at JSUMC and later linked with Project HEAL for aftercare services.

Nile, who was shot 10 times by her ex-boyfriend, miraculously made a full recovery and was committed to get back on track with the help of Project HEAL. “I’m gonna be able to get my life back in order, building block by building block,” Clark said.



Project HEAL client Darnell Powell sharing his story with NBCNY4

Darnell, who was shot while standing next to his son, came to Project HEAL post recovery to engage in services. “Still, to this day, I can call and talk to the program, and I know I’m not being judged,” said Powell. “To me they became like a family.” With the help of Project HEAL, Darnell was able to explore his dreams of enrolling in school to obtain his commercial driver’s license. He hopes to start his own business in the future.

Project HEAL plans to share more testimonials from its clients and community members. In discussions with other intervention programs and analyzing the landscape of this work as a whole, Project HEAL has found that too often, those affected by violence are not provided a platform to share their experiences and tend to become little more than a statistic.

Project HEAL and its clients want the stories of their suffering to be shared, as well as the stories of their triumphs. “Project HEAL helped change my life by being there,” said Clark. “They helped me grow as a person.”

PROJECT HEAL HAS A NATIONAL NIGHT OUT



Project HEAL team out in numbers for National Night Out

The Project HEAL team attended National Night Out to speak with community members about program functionality, community involvement, and available resources.

National Night Out is an annual, community-focused campaign that is designed to bring law enforcement and citizens together. Various organizations partnered with the Asbury Park Police Department to support the local community and its efforts to improve relationships and promote safety. The event included free food, live music and bicycle giveaways to kids in the community.

Project HEAL has found that while attending local events, they are able to hear the stories of numerous community members and their individual struggles. A reluctance to seek medical care after being victimized by community violence for fear of involvement by law enforcement is a common theme. While the Asbury Park Police Department has a track record of inclusiveness and community involvement, there is a long-standing inherent distrust between victims of violence and institutions of authority. The areas of Asbury Park, Neptune Township and Long Branch City combined saw 744 aggravated assaults in the past three years.

PROJECT HEAL HELPS WITH BACK 2 SCHOOL

The City of Asbury Park held its annual Back 2 School event at the Donald Hammary Courts. The event offered on-site haircuts, ice cream, free food, bounce houses, and live music. In an effort to continue community engagement, Project HEAL set up an event table with school materials and swag bags. “These families, these babies need this help,” said Keisha Harbour, a Project HEAL Violence Intervention Specialist. “I know these grandmothers, mothers and their babies. Just coming together to give them this little bit makes a difference.” Harbour mingled with local community members and handed out a variety of essentials for children in preparation for the new school year.



Keisha Harbour handing out school supplies in the community

Spending time with youth in the community is essential, as young people can often be the most susceptible to succumbing to community violence. Multiple studies cited in a publication by the The Health Alliance for Violence Intervention found that adverse childhood experiences can increase the risk for injury-related PTSD as well as a wide range of physical and mental health outcomes later in life.

Another study cited focused on young violently injured teenagers, which showed that after a violent event, almost 1 in 5 reported hurting someone else and 1 in 5 were hurt by someone else within months of the initial event. Intervention programs like Project HEAL that are based in the community can help reduce the numbers of perpetual violence and give options to those who feel they have no other course of action other than retaliation.

PROJECT HEAL JOINS THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE



Pastor Semoj Vanzant presents to the CDI about his latest launch program.

In May of 2021, Project HEAL was invited to introduce its program at The Community Development Initiative in Asbury Park. The CDI has been in existence since 2011, when Asbury Park became the fifth New Jersey city selected by the Attorney General's Office to form an initiative to prevent juvenile crime and promote positive outcomes for youth. Spearheaded by Asbury Park Mayor John Moore and the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office, the mission seeks to bring together community groups and create a safe space where communication and collaboration can take place.

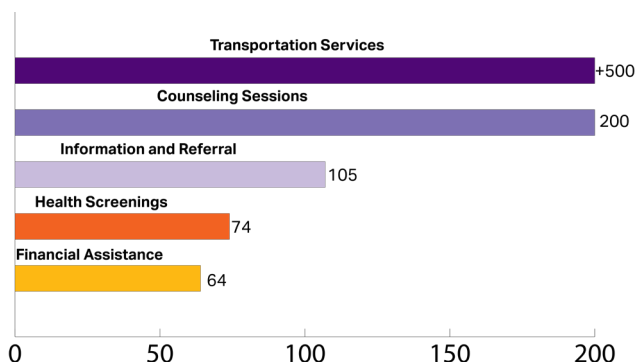
"The work we're all doing in our individual silos is extraordinary," said Pastor Lyddale Akins, Community Law Enforcement Liaison for the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office. "But coming together and getting on the same page and working together on these initiatives can only make us all stronger."

Project HEAL joined a variety of established community organizations including Interfaith Neighbors, Garden State Equality, Asbury Park Library, Community Development, Monmouth County Behavioral Health, Second Baptist Church and more. "The dynamic is getting stronger. There are so many people shifting different elements to what we are trying to do and bridging these relationships that are just so necessary and important," Akins said.

One Project HEAL's areas of focus is community involvement. The department values its inclusion in the Community Development Initiative and is dedicated to lending the necessary resources to show its commitment to the work and the community.

PROJECT HEAL PREVIEWS ITS SECOND QTR NUMBERS

Project HEAL saw a successful second quarter **serving 71 clients, 47 of which were new**, and provided a variety of services. The majority of clients were between the ages of 25 to 59. Just under half of all new clients were African American (46 percent), with 38 percent being Caucasian, and 12 percent being Hispanic. The most widely reported victimization was Adult Physical Assault (45 percent). Domestic/family violence accounted for 30 percent of victimizations. Of the 47 new clients served, **68 percent presented more than one type of victimization**.



In dealing with these instances of trauma, clients were able to come to Project HEAL and receive a variety of services. Clients engaged in close to **200 counseling sessions** including individual and group, received **74 health screenings** by the Nurse Navigator, and were provided **emergency financial assistance 64 times** in the form of food, housing, clothing, and other basic needs.