

# ASSEMBLING THE PIECES

An African-American perspective on community and family violence

Fall 2003, Volume 5, Number 1

## IDVAAC turns 10—Looking back and looking forward

By Oliver J. Williams, executive director

You can't plan where you're going without fully appreciating where you've been.

That is how I look at the work of IDVAAC as we approach our 10th anniversary. I am really proud of what we collectively have accomplished. At the same time, I'm excited about where we are going.

A few of the accomplishments that are worthy of note:

- We've sponsored conferences on a wide range of topics related to domestic violence in the African-American community throughout the United States.
- We've sponsored conferences and projects in more than 10 major cities in every region across the United States.
- We've also had the opportunity to do focus groups in all of these cities. This has allowed us to compare special challenges and solutions implemented throughout the country. Please check out the article on page 6 about the report we completed this summer on



**Dr. Oliver Williams and conference sponsor, Merry Hofford of the NCJFCJ**

the research we did in the San Francisco Bay Area.

- We've covered a broad spectrum of issues specifically related to domestic violence in the African-American community, including:
  - The intersections of race, class and gender.
  - African-American institutions and domestic violence.
  - The role of African-American leaders.
  - The effectiveness of pop-culture interventions.

*Continued on page 7*

## New DV and substance abuse journal available

*Violence Against Women*, a journal series published by SAGE Publications, collaborated with IDVAAC on its May 2003 edition. The edition focuses on issues that have been addressed at IDVAAC conferences related to the intersections of domestic violence, African Americans and substance abuse.

The objective of this edition was to broaden the ways people think about and respond to violence in the African-American community. It includes a case study approach on how domestic violence and chemical dependency programs have been developed to respond to the particular needs of African-American battered women.

It also focuses on the prevalence and patterns of substance use among African Americans, and the health care status of middle-class African-American women. The special edition was edited by Dr. Oliver J. Williams, Dr. William Oliver and Naceema Thompson; the series is edited by Claire M. Renzetti. It is catalogued as Vol. 9, Number 5, and is available electronically at [www.sagepub.com/ejournals](http://www.sagepub.com/ejournals)

# Adult survivors of domestic violence as children discuss what did and could have helped them

By Lynn Ingrid Nelson

*Introduction: During the June conference, we heard from adults who experienced domestic violence as children and have come to peace with that issue. The domestic violence community spends a lot of time on prevention and protection, but despite these efforts there are many children who are not reached in time. It was instructive to hear from three courageous speakers, who shared stories of childhood victimization, partner abuse and childhood sexual abuse. Here they discuss their journeys from conflict and trauma to healing and restoration.*

The adult survivors of domestic violence as children may look like ordinary people, but all bear the scars of growing up scared, angry and unprotected. While these scars are invisible to passers by, they require a lifetime of healing.

Consider the childhood of Anthony Taylor, whose father regularly beat his mother, then repeatedly shot her and killed himself when Anthony was 18. As a child, Taylor wondered: “Why doesn’t somebody do something?” He knew what was happening wasn’t right, but everyone had justifications for not getting involved in “grown folks’ business”.

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**As a child, Taylor wondered: “Why doesn’t somebody do something?” He knew what was happening wasn’t right, but everyone had justifications for not getting involved in “grown folks, business”.**

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He learned early on to remove himself from what was going on and to emotionally disconnect. As the oldest son, he wanted to protect his mother and his younger brothers. He felt compelled to be in control, which he feels is a result of having no control in his abusive household.

Taylor became an over-achiever in school

and sports, and he created “an environment within the environment”. “There were two sets of what was normal,” he told the audience at the IDVAAC June conference. “When his father was around, and when he wasn’t.” When his father was away and often when he wasn’t, Taylor was the man of the house.

He couldn’t wait to get old enough to kill his father for the abuse inflicted on his mother and family. When he was 16, he literally had his father by the throat, but his mother made him stop with these words: “You cannot end violence with violence.”

When Taylor was in college, his mother moved out of the state. His parents got together during the holidays, and his father offered to give his mother a ride to her new home. On the way, he shot his wife five times, pushed her out of the car, and then went home and killed himself.

Miraculously, Taylor’s mother survived. After his father’s death, Taylor wondered, “how do I mourn this person?” His mother asked him to forgive his father. “Ultimately, I had to learn to forgive him not only for the years of abuse, but for killing himself and leaving us to deal with everything.”

Taylor was 42 years old before he married, which he told the audience might have been the result of growing up telling himself he didn’t need anyone. Although he is financially successful as the owner of the Spa.One, a day spa catering to black women and men in St. Paul, Minn., Taylor told the audience he has a pattern of “always starting over.” He attributes this to his childhood, when every day was like starting over.

His prescription for dealing with domestic violence is to confront it, reflect on it and to work toward healing. “It’s been helpful to be clear about my emotions, and accept how I really feel about things, especially my anger.” He also looks for outlets for his boundless creativity, which he finds in painting, developing his business, and working with kids. “The creative process creates opportunities for constant renewal,” Taylor says.

He also gives a lot of credit to his mother. “Domestic violence presents a great challenge for young mothers,” he says. “They are still developing themselves while raising their children.”



**Shirley Williams**

During the conference, the speakers were asked to identify an individual who had been instrumental in their journey toward healing. For Taylor, that person was his mother Atum Mary Azzahir, an executive director of a non-profit organization in Minneapolis. During the program, he recognized his mother with an IDVAAC Angel award. “My mother has been instrumental in developing my concept of manhood,” said Taylor. “She is my angel,” he told the audience.

## ‘My life began in darkness’

Shirley Williams began her presentation without lighting. “My life started out in darkness,” she told the audience. When she was three years old, her grandmother’s boyfriend began sexually abusing her. It went on for two and a half years.

She was filled with anger, fear and rage, but she never told anyone. “I knew that if I told the secret, his blood would be on my hands,” she said, suggesting her father and





**Anthony Taylor and his mother, Atum Azzahir**

presented an Angel award to friend and mentor Greg Huskisson, who was the executive producer of the film "Sister I'm Sorry".

## Silence plays a dangerous role in domestic abuse

"Who wants to admit that someone got the best of them?" began asha bandele, author of several books, including *The Prisoner's Wife*, and features editor for *Essence Magazine*. She was seven years old when a colleague of her mother's sexually abused her.

"Why did it take her 20 years to tell someone?" she asked rhetorically.

"Because no one talked about it." From age seven until age 25, she experienced molestation and rape. "Typical responses are fight or flight," she reported. "But I never did. I played dead throughout my adolescence."

Part of playing dead included eight years of drug addiction.

"No one asked why I acted the way I did," she told the audience. "I have no

concept of ever being a child. I have a hard time reconstructing what I needed then because I was so disconnected. My parents didn't have a model for speaking to an angry adolescent. Black people survived slavery and other atrocities in part by being silent." She added, "But today collective silence kills us, and people all over the world. "Now, I wish someone would have been interested enough to talk with me . . . pushing through the layers of anger.

"Today when I talk with my three-year-old daughter, I ask her: 'What's going on? I try to have the patience to stay connected. I stick with it until I find out what she needs. Is it attention? Is she hungry? Does she need a hug?'"

Part of bandele's healing process has been through a strong connection with her now husband, Rashid, who was serving a prison sentence when they met. At the time, she was among a group of black students who were giving poetry readings at prisons. Their story is documented in a 1999 book by bandele entitled *The Prisoner's Wife: A Memoir*.

asha asked Rashid if he would support her in dealing with the abuse, and he responded, "Yes. Come here asha. I will not leave you." Those were the words she needed to hear.

Reading from the memoir, bandele proclaimed that embraced by Rashid's love and support, "my soul rested for hours, days and years. She was smiling . . . my soul was and she hasn't stopped."

In conclusion, bandele read a poem whose final lines were: "I'm proud, even glad that I'm a survivor, and one day I'm going to be more than a survivor. I'll be a celebrant inside my ownself. . . bandele's IDVAAC Angel award goes to her husband.

The presenters provided the audience with three unique paths toward healing. Undoubtedly, there are many others. But it was reassuring for the audience to learn that over time, with the right resources and support, the scars from experiencing domestic violence as children do begin to disappear. 🌱

his brothers would have killed him. "If you know anything about Louisiana, you know folks can disappear."

The abused became an abuser. "I was abusive to animals and cousins," said Williams. "No one recognized my pain." She went to Detroit to live with her parents. "I thought I was free, but I had baggage."

She was very cautious of adults between ages 6-11. "I could sense the presence of a child predator, and I stayed out of their way." Her teen years were "terrible". She was consumed by anger, rage and "strong sexual desires". She finally shared what had happened to her as a young child with her boyfriend, and he used it against her.

As a young adult woman, she went on a campaign to hurt men. "I would make them a slave and then walk away from them. It amounted to seven years of misery."

Finally, she told her mother what had happened, and recovery began. I got to know Shirley and began to think about what Shirley wanted. Williams concurred with Anthony Taylor that domestic violence was tolerated in her community and lightly punished. "They took (abusers) away and made them walk home." Her aunt died of domestic violence at age 28.

During college, true healing began with the help of a therapist. "Today, this woman is healed," she told the audience. "It was not easy. It was like peeling an onion, one skin at a time." Williams



**asha bandele**



# IDVAAC June 2003 Conference Awards

June 5, 2003 • Minneapolis,  
MN University of Minnesota

The Sheila and Paul Wellstone  
Humanitarian Award presented to  
Radhia A. Jaaber

Recipients embody the same selfless  
commitment and altruistic spirit as  
demonstrated by Sheila and Paul  
Wellstone. This new award  
recognizes a person who shares the  
same goals and objectives as  
IDVAAC, raises public consciousness  
concerning the issues of domestic  
violence, and demonstrates  
unwavering personal support to  
domestic violence programs.

**Organizational Award** presented  
to **Merry Hofford and the National  
Council of Juvenile and Family  
Court Judges** in Reno, Nev.

This award recognizes your efforts  
in understanding the issues and  
challenges of diverse communities  
related to the child welfare system,  
the court systems and domestic  
violence community. We appreciate  
your efforts in encouraging these  
systems to promote better outcomes  
for those involved in the various  
systems.

**Esta Solar and the Family  
Violence Prevention Fund** in San  
Francisco, Calif.

This award recognizes your  
continued leadership and support of  
IDVAAC and your personal  
commitment to diversity when  
addressing the challenges of women  
and communities associated with  
domestic violence.

**Media Award** presented to  
**Margaret Avery**

This award recognizes your  
contributions and efforts that inspire  
and empower African Americans to  
confront domestic violence within  
the African-American community  
through theatre and especially for  
your role in the "Sister, I'm Sorry"  
video.

**Media Award** presented to  
**Bobby L. Smith**

This award recognizes your  
contributions and efforts that inspire  
and empower African Americans to  
confront domestic violence within  
the African-American community  
through theatre and especially for  
your role in the development and  
production of the movie "Jason's  
Lyric".

**Research Award** presented to  
**Dorothy Roberts, Ph.D.**

This award recognizes your  
outstanding research on African-  
American children who are  
challenged by the child welfare  
system, as well as your efforts to  
inform public policy and create  
supporting nurturing and responsive  
environments for children and  
families affected by child abuse and  
neglect, domestic violence,  
community child welfare, and other  
systems. 🌟



**Steering Committee member  
Dr. Beth Richie presents Radhia A.  
Jaaber with the first IDVAAC Sheila  
and Paul Wellstone  
Humanitarian Award.**

## Radhia A. Jaaber

Radhia Jaaber has been a human  
rights activist for social change for  
over 30 years. She works as a  
consultant, writer, therapist, gender-  
culture critic, speaker and mentor.  
Jaaber connects those personal, social  
and cultural experiences into living  
creative writing expressions. She has  
developed and written many articles,  
publications and keynote  
presentations related to the  
intercultural perspectives of  
oppression and violence against  
women. As an international trainer  
and speaker, Jaaber has traveled  
extensively in the United States and  
abroad. She currently resides  
in the Washington,  
D.C. area,  
where she is  
working on her  
latest book *The  
Garden of My  
Soul*, a rhythmic  
art journal of  
poetry, peace  
and wisdom  
writings.





# IDVAAC Community Assessment Summary now available

## ***Community Insights on Domestic Violence among African Americans: Conversations About Domestic Violence and Other Issues Affecting Their Community***

IDVAAC published a report this summer based on interviews conducted with representatives from the African-American communities of the San Francisco/Oakland areas of California. This report shares insights from these representatives and makes recommendations to bring about change. An overview of the summary follows.

### **Causes**

The high level of domestic violence is only one component of the violence issue that exists in the African-American community. Those interviewed indicated that while they were concerned about domestic violence, that they were also concerned about the prevalence of violence as a whole.

A parallel exists between violence inside and outside the home. This demonstrated the connection between violence witnessed to violence committed, and also indicated that stressors both in and out of the home are related. A lack of leadership and positive role models for non-violence directly contributed to the prevalence of domestic violence in these communities.

Violence and domestic violence are undeniably linked to a sense of hopelessness resulting from racism, social oppression, and marginalization of the social and environmental context experienced by African Americans, due to high stress related to community violence and poverty. This in turn has diluted attention to violence in African-American families.

Unaddressed community violence and domestic violence have resulted in the deterioration of African-American communities, with negative intergenerational impacts. The violence has created a feeling of helplessness by eroding the ranks of leadership in these communities.

### **Barriers**

A major barrier to the success of developing a community response to domestic violence is the competitiveness between

those who are responsible for addressing this issue. Some contributing factors to this problem include lack of a unified vision and limited sources of funding.

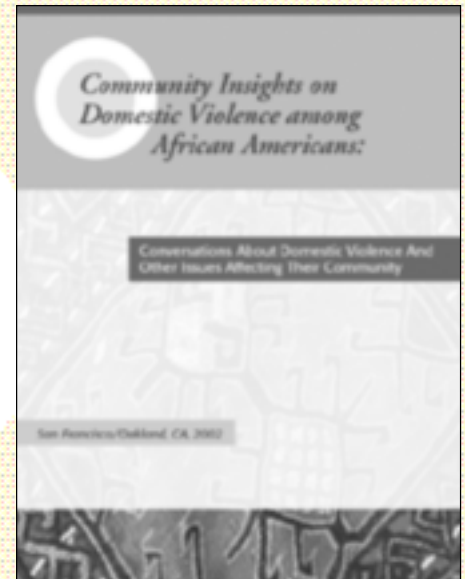
The lack of adequate resources also serves as a barrier to forming a community response to domestic violence issues. There is a lack of culturally-specific services for victims and batterers, resulting from both a lack of resources and a lack of understanding of the specific cultural needs of African Americans with regard to personal care/hygiene kits, psycho-educational materials, and racism issues within shelters.

The report suggests that communities must band together and commit to taking action against domestic violence. This will require developing systemic solutions that are supported by the major stakeholders both within the African-American and the domestic violence communities. It will also require developing multiple holistic strategies, and integrating a life-course perspective.

### **IDVAAC Recommendations**

After analyzing the comments and ideas of the interviews, IDVAAC made the following recommendations to the African-American community in the San Francisco/Oakland, California area.

1. A coalition should be developed to educate African Americans about various impacts of violence in the home; engage the community in prevention and intervention; and develop community norms about this issue.
2. A coalition led by African Americans should strive to support two or three facilities where culturally-specific services are offered to African-American families facing battering situations.
3. Community models should shift toward dealing with the whole family instead of treating only the victim of the batterer and child-bearing adults.



4. Community leaders should strive to include marginalized sub-communities, such as the GLBT sub-community, within the African-American community to deal with violence and domestic violence.
5. Leaders and those who exemplify and transmit values important to African Americans and who focus on non-violent ways of dealing with conflicts should be recognized and encouraged by community leaders.
6. Negative images of African Americans should be noted and addressed, while positive images should be supported through patronage and encouragement.
7. African-American children who are affected by domestic violence should ideally be placed with peaceful, non-violent families in the African-American community.
8. Above all, the African-American community, as a whole, should commit to teaching its children the moral and cultural values underlying their culture. In addition, respect and responsibility for elders who serve as a connection to their heritage should be emphasized. 🌟

To read more about this report, visit the IDVAAC Web site at [www.dvinstitute.org](http://www.dvinstitute.org). Click on Community Assessments or go directly to [www.dvinstitute.org/comm\\_assess/index.htm](http://www.dvinstitute.org/comm_assess/index.htm).



# Meet IDVAAC Steering Committee Member Beth Richie

"I am amazed by the enthusiastic response to IDVAAC programs," says Dr. Beth E. Richie, a sociologist, who has been an activist and an advocate in the movement to end violence against women for the past 25 years.



**Dr. Beth Richie**

Bringing together such a diverse group of people from such a variety of fields is not easy, but IDVAAC has been able to reach representatives of many communities, including grass-roots advocates, social service providers, government employees, public defenders and prosecutors, religious leaders and academics, as well as others.

"The forums are extraordinary," she adds. "They've been essential to creating a national presence for IDVAAC. "Even if someone attends an IDVAAC forum only once, it can have a ripple effect -- changing many lives in marvelous ways because of the connections that are made."

Dr. Richie has been a Steering Committee member of IDVAAC during the past eight years. She is an expert on how race, ethnicity, sexuality, as well as social position, affect women's experience of violence. She focuses on the experiences of African-American battered women and sexual assault survivors.

Today, Dr. Richie is the head of the African-American Studies Department at the University of Illinois at Chicago; she is also on the faculty of the Departments of Criminal Justice and Women's Studies there. She is the principle investigator on a project funded by the National Institute for Justice for work at the Cook County Jail and is a consultant to Women's Justice Services in Chicago, Ill. Dr. Richie was recently awarded NOW's Bella Absug Women of Honor award for her work on domestic violence with women in prison.

Dr. Richie is the author of many articles and books, including the book *Compelled to Crime: The Gender Entrapment of*

*Black Battered Women*, which is used in many college courses and is cited in the popular press for its original arguments concerning race, gender and crime.

Her current research explores the gender dimensions of youth violence, and focuses on African-American women and girls who come from low-income communities. Dr. Richie is also interested in studying the conditions

of confinement in women's prisons, an issue about which she is a frequent lecturer and speaker, nationally and internationally.

As IDVAAC approaches its 10th anniversary, Dr. Richie would like to continue having an impact on work affecting the scientific and activist worlds through the publication of research that explores responses to domestic violence in the African-American community. Although the IDVAAC Steering Committee members have many obligations to other institutions, she believes one of their most important accomplishments would be to produce an edited volume together.

She proudly admits that many of IDVAAC's initiatives have been unconventional, including linking performance art to educating the public about domestic violence. This, she says, recognizes that change most often happens at the grass-roots, community-based level.

"It's really difficult to measure the impact of an organization on systemic change, especially when its mission is related to something as complex as perception and behavior around gender roles," says Dr. Richie. "But if you go to any major city in the United States, African American domestic violence advocates, researchers and service providers are familiar with and have a high regard for IDVAAC's work." 🌟

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# Our next conference

## *continued from cover*

- How to bring partners together to work toward a common goal.
- Effectiveness of culturally specific treatment interventions.
- Health and mental health consequences of domestic violence.
- Substance abuse and domestic violence.
- A Southern perspective.
- Black Men: What do we know, where do we go?

## Hear a child's cry

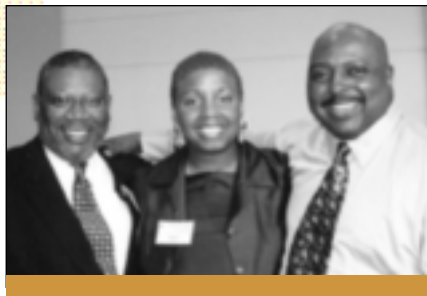
This issue is dedicated to our most recent conference called "African-American Children and Domestic Violence Prevention and Intervention: Stop and Hear a Child's Cry."

Research shows that African Americans experience disproportionately high rates of domestic violence compared to other racial and cultural groups. Some estimates place the rates as much as twice as high. Therefore, African-American children are exposed to significantly higher rates of domestic violence than their white counterparts.

Intimate partner violence, child abuse, neglect and substance abuse are closely related issues faced by the African-American community throughout this country. These issues lead to higher rates of out-of-home placements through the child welfare system and to higher levels of juvenile delinquency.

Research has also shown that families experiencing domestic violence are six times more likely to come to the attention of the child welfare system. And that it can interfere with parents' capacity to be effective in their parenting roles and with child development.

It is not unusual for children who have been exposed to domestic violence to exhibit signs of trauma, including developmental delays, nightmares, depression, and a higher likelihood of



NCJFCJ Executive Director, Judge David B. Mitchell, IDVAAC Project Coordinator Dawn York, and IDVAAC Executive Director Dr. Oliver J. Williams pause during the June conference. The National Council on Juvenile Family Court Judges was a conference co-sponsor.

becoming perpetrators or victims of abuse themselves.

Meanwhile, the IDVAAC conference on June 6-7 gathered experts and representatives from a variety of specialties, and featured presentations, panel discussions and workshops addressing domestic violence and the impact it has on African-American children. In addition, survivors of child abuse and family violence shared their personal experiences and made recommendations for prevention and intervention strategies. Check out the article on pages 2-4. Soon our Web site will include a summary of conference proceedings.

## Our next conference

Our conference next summer will focus on domestic violence and the hip hop generation. We plan to host it in New York City during June 2004. We are inviting record executives, journalists, DV practitioners and academics and performance artists. This fits with our vision for IDVAAC's future. During the past 10 years, we've learned a lot. We know that building healthier communities is a complex issue. We also recognize that domestic violence affects each generation and that to be effective in dealing with this issue, we have to provide messages, methods and approaches that are multi-generational and accessible to the general public.

## Remembering the Wellstones

It has been just a little more than one year since the death of U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone, his wife Sheila, their daughter Marcia Wellstone Markuson, a U of M faculty member Mary McEvoy, and others.

Many of you know that both Paul and Sheila were long-time supporters of the domestic violence advocacy movement, and of IDVAAC. In fact, we presented Sheila with an award for her ongoing support of the Institute's work at our June 2000 conference in St. Paul.

When Paul became a Minnesota senator in 1990, Sheila wanted to use her platform as his wife for positive change. When she worked as a librarian in Northfield, she saw a lot of dialogue in the media about the tragedies that resulted from domestic violence, but little or nothing about causes and solutions.

Although she was discouraged from taking on the topic of domestic violence by her political advisors due to its controversial nature, she didn't back down. She spent almost a year visiting shelters, talking with victims, shelter staff and judges, law enforcement officers and social service providers, according to the Nov. 6-19, 2002 *Minnesota Women's Press*. She gained incredible insight because she was a committed listener.

I am grateful for the support and leadership provided by both Sheila and Paul. And I was honored to be one of the advisors to the formation of the Sheila Wellstone Institute, which was established to focus attention on violence against women and children.

According to the Wellstone Action Web site at <http://www.wellstone.org/swinstitute/index.aspx>, it will reflect Sheila's emphasis on turning the best ideas and practices into public policy recommendations and meaningful action at a state and national level.

On the anniversary of the Wellstones' deaths, we wish their families well and are comforted by knowing they are with us in spirit. IDVAAC will continue to build on their work as we move into our second decade. 🌟

## Book Review:

### *I Will Survive: The African-American Guide to Healing from Sexual Assault*

By **Julia A. Boyd**

*I Will Survive* by Lori S. Robinson is the first definitive book for black women and men that addresses not only the devastation and trauma of being sexually assaulted, but the power of emotional healing.

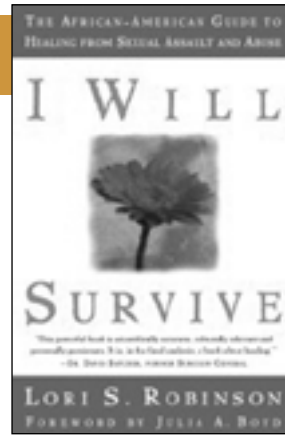
Using her own story as a backdrop, Robinson takes us on a step-by-step journey of healing. Robinson continues to remind us throughout the book that while the journey may be rocky, our destination is what's most important. *I Will Survive* gives us permission to take care of ourselves while acknowledging and validating the difficulty we may experience in needing support from others.

I read *I Will Survive* twice: once straight through from beginning to end as a body of knowledge, and, the second time, skipping around to different chapters for quick reference-guide information. Both times I felt I had gained supportive information and useful

techniques for putting one's life back together after the trauma of sexual assault. The book provides a realistic overview of both the medical and legal systems as they related to survivors of domestic violence.

Most importantly, she instructs the reader that "Emotional Recovery" (title of chapter 3) is not business as usual; we're not super-human, we're human, and with that distinction comes the ownership of feelings. Robinson reminds us that a violation of the body often involves a violation of the spirit, and having loving, supportive family and friends around is the best medicine. In this beautifully written, factual and well-grounded book, Robinson has given a long overdue voice to black survivors everywhere.

**Julia A. Boyd's poetry and short fiction have been published in several small press anthologies, and in *Essence* magazine. She is a contributor to both editions of *The Black Women's Health Book* (Seal Press, 1990 and 1994). The article above is an excerpt of the book's foreword.**



# SAVE THE DATES!

## *DV and the Hip-Hop Generation*

Next IDVAAC  
conference  
will be in  
York College in  
Queens, NY

**June 6-8,  
2004**



**next  
issue**

- Seniors and domestic violence • Meet Dr. Oliver J. Williams •
- "I Am A Man" video by Byron Hurt • Preview of June conference on *DV and the Hip-Hop Generation* •

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