

# ASSEMBLING THE PIECES

An African-American perspective on community and family violence

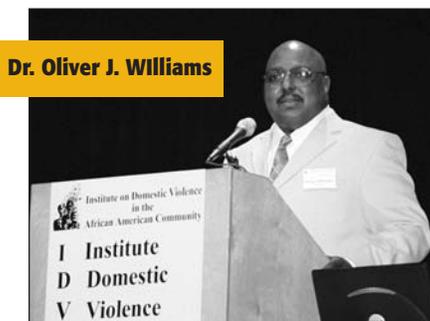
Spring 2004, Volume 6, Number 1

## IDVAAC national conference on DV and Hip-Hop Generation will be Aug. 8-10 in New York

*By Dr. Oliver J. Williams, executive director*

Although the dates have changed, our commitment to having another outstanding IDVAAC conference has not. Please join us Aug. 8-10, when we gather at York College in Queens, NY. As usual, we have an outstanding cast of academics, practitioners and experts in the communications arts.

This conference will explore how to address domestic violence among the Hip Hop generation, typically ages 15-35. This is a broad age group that is under siege with higher rates of intimate partner violence, suicide and homicide.



**Dr. Oliver J. Williams**

At this conference, we will explore the potential of Hip Hop as a popular culture to either help or hinder how we understand and respond to the problem of violence against women. This conference will explore various facets of this marketing, music,

poetry, dance, clothing, lifestyle, videos and print medium and how it relates to domestic violence.

We will highlight the good and critique the bad aspects of this influential cultural phenomenon. We will also bring together master practitioners who work with this age group to teach and discuss their challenges, interventions and triumphs in responding

to domestic violence in this generation. And we will compare the messages and communication methods of this generation with previous generations.

### An all-star cast

We've been fortunate to gather an all-star cast of speakers and performers for this event. One of the keynote speakers is Bakari Kitwana. Kitwana is acknowledged as an expert on Hip Hop culture by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *the Los Angeles Times*, *Salon.com*, *CNN*, *USA Today*, "The O'Reilly Factor" and other mainstream media. He is also the author of *The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* and former executive editor of *The Source: the magazine of hip-hop music, culture and politics*.

Dr. Carolyn West, an associate professor of psychology in the Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences program from the University of Washington, Tacoma, and Lateefah Simon, executive director at the Center for Young Women's Development in San Francisco, will discuss the portrayal of men and women in the Hip Hop culture.

West currently teaches courses on family violence, human sexuality and psychology of women. Simon's mentor-based program helps guide troubled girls from delinquency and poverty to healthy and productive lifestyles. These two panelists will take an in-depth look at the challenges that arise in building relationships for this generation, due to the negative images and attitudes depicted in the Hip Hop culture.

*Continued page 3*

# Seniors and domestic violence:

## Social service providers must reach out to help growing senior population

By Lynn Ingrid Nelson

“My husband and I have lived together for almost 40 years – for most of them, I have lived in constant fear. My husband is verbally abusive, hits me, steals my medication, and even rapes me. He threatens to kill me and threatens to kill himself if I leave. The abuse is harder to bear now that I’m older. I don’t know where I could go or how I could survive if I were to leave my husband.

“I’ve tried to tell my pastor, but he said there was no way someone like my husband could do the things I said he did. I tried to tell my children, and they accused me of being mean to their dad and wanting to break up the family.”

*The above story is a fictionalized account of an 80-year-old woman’s life, based on a compilation of true experiences.*

### Scope of the problem

Today, almost 35 million people in the United States are over 65, according to Dr. Linner Griffin, an IDVAAC Steering Committee member and professor and educational director of the Center on Aging at East Carolina University at Greenville, N.C. African Americans comprise 12.5 percent of the total – the largest aging minority population, followed by Hispanics. By the year 2030, more than 20 percent of the total U.S. population will be over 65. And over half will be 50 years old and older.

“These numbers are very scary,” says Griffin. “Because we aren’t prepared to provide services to these people. The natural inclination of younger people is to think of older people as ‘them’. We need to advocate today for the services we’ll need tomorrow.”

There are no definite numbers on the prevalence of elder abuse in this country, according to Griffin. “There are 5 million documented cases each year, but the real number is probably five times higher. No one really knows for sure.”

Because of the vulnerability of some older people due to diminishing physical and/or mental capacity, the categories of elder abuse is broad. Most of it occurs in a home setting, according to Griffin, because institutions are more proactive in preventing it through sensitivity training, monitoring, and aide turnover, which leads to lower levels of frustration and abuse by caregivers. Elder abuse encompasses harm by caregivers in the form of physical, sexual, financial, emotional abuse, or neglect.

Alice Lynch, executive director of BIHA (Black, Indian, Hispanic and Asian Women in Action) in Minneapolis, has seen these situations first-hand. Since she is a well-known resource in her community, she got a call from a senior citizen residence about a 80-year-old resident who didn’t appear to be getting enough to eat. Lynch met with the senior female and found out that the woman’s daughter was withholding her SSI funds from her. Lynch arranged to get the senior a checking account, connected her with local agencies that serve seniors, including Meals on Wheels, and programmed some resource numbers into her phone.

“The woman was worried about losing her relationship with her daughter,” says Lynch. “She ended up giving her daughter money, but she was getting her basic needs met.” Some see this situation as exploitation, adds Griffin, others may see it as a survival technique for families who can’t afford to get their basic needs met.

### Effective African-American approaches

Several issues conspire to make elder abuse a more serious issue and more difficult to resolve in the African-American community. First, says Griffin, African Americans typically have fewer resources to deal with it. Cultural norms of not telling other people “your business” and mistrust of health care and public safety organizations keep many elders suffering in silence. And most of domestic violence services aren’t located in the black

communities. Having to travel long distances is a barrier. So is the lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of providers.

Another significant barrier to providing services to elder abuse victims is the social service agencies themselves, according to Lynch. “Since elders are more atypical clients some agencies miss their needs altogether. Others may identify elder abuse but encounter challenges in addressing it. Counselors report feeling uncomfortable ‘respecting their elders’ and telling them what they should do with their lives.” Lynch received a grant to do some research on this issue during the mid-’90s and then developed a training manual and program on effective responses to elder abuse for practitioners throughout Minnesota.

“If we don’t reach out,” she says, “we’re part of the problem. In addition, we recommend that shelters and social service agencies dealing with this issue, hire a diverse staff. This should include diversity by age, race and economic status. We should try to look like the population we’re trying to serve. BIHA has hired older women for community outreach and to work with senior citizen programs. It also has board members who represent elder members of the community, as well as staff who specialize in senior resources to connect elders with available programs.”

According to Griffin, churches, storefront organizations such as OICs, nutrition sites, established senior programs and battered women’s shelters can be good resources for addressing elder abuse. These sorts of organizations are accessible to members of black communities, and they are trusted.

### Never too late

“Often, family and economic issues have kept elders in their abusive situations,” says Lynch. “They’ve been in these kinds of relationships for so long that it has become the norm for them. They don’t feel they have anywhere else to go; some believe that they don’t have much time left. Others wonder: who will believe me since I’ve kept this to myself all of my life?”

“If you’re dependent on your husband’s SSI or retirement income, and you don’t want to be a burden on children, there are not a lot of financial options. Some victims live in the same house with their batterer, but in different parts of the house. Of course, this is not optimal, but it is a reality for many.”

“This is a very tough population to work with,” agrees Antonia Vann, CEO of Asha Family Services in Milwaukee, Wis. “A senior’s caregiver is often the abuser. It’s tough turning in your own child, and the seniors are often reliant in many ways on their children.” Other barriers to getting seniors the help they need, according to Vann, include distrust of police and other authorities, as well as fear of the unknown.

“Seniors often stay where they are because that is what they know,” says Vann. They may not want to move out of an abusive situation, since a situation they’re familiar with is less threatening than the unknown.

Vann told a story about two sisters whose nephews lived with them. The young men’s mother had died, and the sons had become drug addicts and dealers. All sorts of thugs came to the house, and the nephews bullied their aunts for money. As things deteriorated, they turned their aunts’ basement into a shooting gallery, says Vann.

Friends of the family contacted Asha Family Services. The agency called the police, and the nephews were put in jail. Asha staff members helped assure that the house was secure. The locks were changed, and bars were put on the windows.

Vann arranged for a nurse to care for the two sisters, and obtained financial assistance to pay the nurse’s salary from the local Urban League, which offered a program to supplement the income of seniors whose living expenses exceed their income. Vann also made sure that the women had a list of numbers they could call if trouble arose again, including a direct dial to the local police.

Community-based services are crucial in getting elders the help they need. “Accountability and an objective intermediary are essential for seniors who face a situation like the one depicted above,” says Vann. “Unfortunately, these scenarios are all too common, and not every community is blessed with social service providers with the skills and resources to help seniors.”

“With folks living longer and often living beyond their means, this is a problem that is likely to get worse before it gets better,” concludes Lynch. ♦



## DV & Hip Hop Generation Conference (continued)

Another panel will go beyond the lyrics to analyze the capitalism and images promoted in the Hip Hop culture. Adoya Jones de Almiedo, a member of Sista II Sista will be among the panelists. The organization was developed by women, for young women of color in Brooklyn, NY. Sista II Sista works on linking personal development to collective social justice for young women ages 13-19.

## Working with members of the Hip-Hop generation

Leah Aldridge, a domestic violence and youth practitioner from Los Angeles, Dr. Howard Pinderhughes, an assistant professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences from the University of California - San Francisco, and Charles Pinckney, former producer of Youth Clicks, a public health TV show for inner-city youth, will look at ways to serve this Hip Hop generation.

Artistic presentations scheduled include a viewing of “Beyond Beats and Rhymes” by violence prevention film maker Byron Hurt, a music video on domestic violence and sexual assault by the National Center on Sexual Assault and a poetry jam led by author and editor asha bandele. Jazz and Hip-Hop dance performances by Endylene Taylor, who has appeared in several Broadway productions, and a group of young performers will also be featured.

For more information on the Aug. 8-10 conference, contact IDVAAC staff member Dawn York at 1-877-643-8222 or at [nidvaac@che.umn.edu](mailto:nidvaac@che.umn.edu). Information can also be accessed on the IDVAAC web site at [www.dvinstitute.org](http://www.dvinstitute.org).

We believe examining this topic will break new ground in creating useful knowledge for healing domestic violence, particularly among members of the Hip-Hop generation.

We hope you’ll join us at York College in this important endeavor. ♦

## Finding resources for seniors isn’t easy, but here are some places to start:

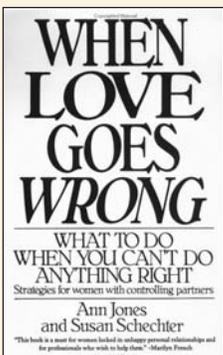
1. Administration on Aging web site [www.aoa.com](http://www.aoa.com) Click on “Elders and Families”
2. Association for Protection of Elders
3. National Center on Elder Abuse
4. Local councils and programs on aging
5. Local senior centers
6. State ombudsmen for seniors
7. Local welfare and social security insurance programs
8. Local battered women’s coalitions
9. Local branches of the Urban League and other advocacy groups
10. County-based social services

# Susan Schechter Memorial

## DV activist and author left a living legacy for battered women and their children

When Susan Schechter passed away on Feb. 3, 2004 of endometrial cancer, she left a strong imprint of a life dedicated to ending domestic abuse. She authored many books and consistently worked to raise awareness surrounding this issue.

Schechter's book, *Women and Male Violence: The Visions and Struggles of the Battered Women's Movement*, offers a historical analysis of women's activism against domestic abuse. The wide range and depth of topics addressed in the book made it one of the first of its kind.



*When Love Goes Wrong: What to Do When You Can't Do Anything Right*, which Schechter co-authored, provides a definition of abuse and demonstrates the variety of ways that abuse can occur. The book also goes on to explain how

one can deal with an abusive situation and what steps victims can take. Her expertise helped to show how women in abusive relationships still have options and resources available to guide them.

In 1999, Schechter co-authored *Effective Intervention in Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment Cases: Guidelines for policy and practice* with Jeffery Edleson. This book offers a framework for developing interventions and measuring progress. It encourages leaders of communities and institutions to develop public policies aimed at keeping families safe and stable. This book took one of the first steps toward looking at the connections between abused women and children within the same family. "Susan was the moving force that drew many of us to devote our

work to the issue of co-occurring violence against women and children," says Edleson. "She was gifted in her ability to communicate women's and children's stories not only to frontline workers but also to national policy makers."

### Author and activist

Schechter's work was not limited to the publication of her books. She was an extremely active advocate against domestic violence from the very beginning of her career. She helped organize the first shelter for abused women in Chicago when she graduated from the University of Illinois at Chicago, where she received her master's degree in social work.

In 1986, Schechter initiated AWAKE (Advocacy for Women and Kids in Emergencies), a program for battered women with abused children at Children's Hospital Boston. This was the first program of its kind in a pediatric hospital.

In 1993, she took on the role of a clinical professor of social work at the University of Iowa. During her time in Iowa, Schechter worked with the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation's Community Partnerships for Protecting Children (CPPC) testing a new approach working toward changing the type and the quality of support that families receive through contact with the child protection system. The goal of this program was to find new and innovative ways to protect children by protecting their mothers. Schechter conducted much of the necessary training to implement this program.

In 2001, Schechter became the director of Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence, an initiative to help



**Susan Schechter**

domestic violence organizations collaborate more effectively in their communities and build visions, policies, and practices that respond to the current realities facing battered women and their families, especially those living in poverty.

The National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators (NAPCWA) honored Schechter with its Award for Leadership in Public Child Welfare at the annual meeting in 2003. The award recognized her work as an author, advocate, and leader.

"Susan Schechter was an architect in this field," says Oliver Williams, IDVAAC executive director. "She was a true 'she-ro'. She understood the plight of battered women and dedicated her life to coming up with effective responses for them and their children." Susan is survived by her husband, Allen Steinberg, a professor at the University of Iowa and their son, Zackary, a high school senior. ♦

# 'I Am A Man': a powerful film about black manhood and violence in America

By Derrick M. Gordon, Ph.D.

"Black masculinity" has for centuries been misrepresented, not understood, and undermined. This has left our society and the black communities with questions about what truly are the quintessential characteristics of this identity, and how do we as a people transmit the important components to the young men and women in our communities, while healing those of us who have already reached the developmental stage of adulthood?

In this documentary by Byron Hurt and Andrew P. Jones, the producers posed the question of what constitutes black masculinity to male and female "experts" and "community" members. This impressive list of individuals includes Bell Hooks, Alvin Poussaint, John Cade and Richard Meyers. What is most valuable about this cast is the inclusion of "accomplished" experts, black men who live their identity on a daily basis and the women involved with them. In this eye-opening and sometimes philosophically challenging discussion, these interviews confronted how we think about black men and the impact of their views.

In this film, Hurt presented a discussion of black masculinity from seven perspectives, which challenge the viewer to consider how black manhood in America is shaped. The first area explored was the "**Images of Black Men.**" Here he explored the representations of black men in American culture, and how these images impact not only the general perceptions but interact with our internalized assessment of these images.

This discussion then naturally flows into "**The Cool Pose**" and the role that symbols play in the construction of black masculinity. This includes a brief exploration of the role of the cool pose as a "rite of passage" for black boys and its relationship to the ever-elusive search for respect.

Any discussion about respect and black masculinity raises feelings. In the section "**Emotions**" the focus begins with reactions to the attacks on black masculinity, attempted to integrate the other and the self of black masculinity and our feelings toward external and internal reactions to emotions. This called for emotional self awareness that is sometimes stifled due to the unwritten rules that stress not letting others know that there are feelings there. This highlights the threat that emotionality poses to black masculinity and resulted in one interviewee stressing that emotionality is not an abdication of masculinity!

"**Black Male Homosexuality**" within any discussion of black masculinity is important. In a thoughtful and skillful way, the producers challenged the audience to explore how their notions of masculinity influence their views and integration of homosexuality within the black community, as

well as the meaning of homosexual identity for black masculinity. The discussion presented the challenges that the black community and black men face as they think about their manhood and how their sexuality impacts on masculinity: Is masculinity more than whom I have sex with, and does homosexuality undermine masculinity? "**Violence and Fears**" tells the story of how with a misguided definition of manhood, black men can, at times, be self-destructive. The interaction between the expectations of toughness and bravery, and how these expectations could cause harm to us and others broadened the discussion. The tough exterior, its relationship to internalized and societal racist views, and the value it lends through protection were explored.

"**Sexism – Men's Violence Against Women**" was an important issue to explore and a natural springboard from violence and fears. This section underscored the oft-times ignored experience within black life of women being marginalized and devalued, while continuing to be important to the sustainability of the community. This discussion explored how black men, who feel stripped of their identity, strip their female partners of their identity through their use of violence. Black men's responsibility for their actions was stressed. Important in the development of this film was some exploration of the social forces that continue to affect how boys and girls understand their roles and the pressures of socialization for our community.

As the documentary looked to "**The Future**", the producers underscored the role that black men play in the construction of their identity, the responsibility for working collectively to ensure that we help to define that identity, the challenges faced given the social context in which we exist, and the value that each of us adds to the definition of black masculinity. This analysis clearly underscored the important role that women have as the black community works together to ensure that all parts of it are functioning in healthy ways.

The value of this documentary rests not only in the questions posed, but extends to the discussions that could be generated in our homes; on the street; in the churches, mosques, and synagogues; community centers; cultural events; and intimate discussions on viewing it. Its instructive strength from a domestic violence perspective rests with its initial emphasis on the black man's experience and its crescendo into a challenge for the future.

Let us think creatively as we seek to instruct and help, not only the next generation, but ourselves as we define and redefine what it truly means to be a black man in America. This, more so than any other reason is why I recommend this video.

*Dr. Gordon is the director of research, policy and the program on male development at Yale University School of Medicine.* ♦

# Meet Steering Committee Member and Executive Director Oliver Williams



**Dr. Oliver J. Williams**

When he was a kid growing up, Dr. Oliver J. Williams, executive director of IDVAAC, was aware that domestic violence existed in his family and community. But it really got his attention during college when he observed dating violence among his peers. There weren't any services to address the issue during the early-mid '70s.

In graduate school, he became so interested in domestic violence that he began investigating the research on the topic. He recalls that there weren't a lot of sources on the topic at the time. One of the first research articles was written

by one of Williams' professors, Dr. John Flynn at Western Michigan University at Kalamazoo; the article was based on one of the area's first battered women's shelters at the YWCA in Kalamazoo, Mich.

After graduate school, Williams worked at what is now Safe House, a local battered women's shelter in Ann Arbor, Mich., and then with men who batter. "There were few shelters then and fewer programs to work with men who battered. And the programs that did exist were not court-mandated," he said.

He has worked throughout his career as both a practitioner and as an academic. In addition to a master's degree in social work, Williams has a master's degree in public health and a Ph.D. in social work from the University of Pittsburgh.

His work in the field triggered an interest in how to affect policy and how to reach practitioners with the research that did exist. It seemed like a logical move to get his Ph.D. Between 1985-86, Williams began teaching at Illinois State University and West Virginia University, but he never gave up working with social services programs. He started one of the first programs for men who batter in the late '80s in Illinois.

## The move to Minnesota

In the early 1990s, he was attracted to Minnesota by a combination of academic and practical resources. Dr. Jeff Edleson at the University of Minnesota had written extensively about men who batter. And Phyllis Wheatley, a social services provider in Minneapolis, offered a domestic violence program that was designed specifically for African Americans. "There weren't a lot of people of color served by domestic violence programs until they were court-mandated," says Williams. "Then it was a challenge to figure out how to serve them well."

He became a full professor with the University of Minnesota School of Social Work last year. Ten years ago, while teaching at the U of M, he began working on the creation of IDVAAC. The Institute was inspired by Williams and other IDVAAC Steering Committee members who attended a conference in 1993 with Bill

Reilly, federal project officer for the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. African-Americans attending the conference pointed out that delivering services in a culturally sensitive manner plays an important role in program effectiveness. Other attendees argued that it was irrelevant.

Antonia Vann, the founder of Asha Family Services in Milwaukee, Wis. told attendees at that conference that cultural sensitivity in service delivery is absolutely important. It was hard to argue with her many years of working in this arena with people of color.

After the conference, Vann, Williams, Sheliah Hankins, an IDVAAC Steering Committee member, and some of the African-American practitioners attending the conference got together with Reilly to discuss the possibility of creating a resource on domestic violence for African Americans. Such programs for Asians and Hispanics already were operating successfully.

## Looking backward and forward

On the 10-year anniversary of IDVAAC, Williams says the organization has a lot to be proud of and some challenges ahead. "I'm pleased we've been able to connect people of all races who are thoughtful about domestic violence and African Americans. It's an important issue: Domestic violence reduces a community's capacity to care for itself.

"I believe we've broken the isolation of people who work in this area throughout the country, and that we've created groundbreaking knowledge through our web site, special reports, newsletters, conference proceedings and other products.

"We've talked about things that haven't been talked about before: the intersections between African Americans and domestic violence, substance abuse, fatherhood, as well as the role of faith-based groups. Our work speaks to real people, who we've tried to inform not only through traditional means, but through their usual communications channels: radio, video, plays, music and dance."

"Our biggest challenge has been to get this issue on the radar screens of social services providers, policy and community leaders and to obtain funds to maintain our programs," reports Williams. "Another is that some members of our own community don't want to acknowledge that domestic violence is an issue for African Americans. And the last is that program heads don't always want to devote meager resources to cultural sensitivity."

Future goals include: maintaining IDVAAC's focus on knowledge-building activities and finding new ways to engage with different age groups, including seniors and youth. Williams says the IDVAAC Steering Committee has played an integral role in the organization's success and in the personal and professional development of its members.

"We confront, explore, challenge and expand each other's thoughts." The committee includes a variety of experts in specific subsets of domestic violence, who are able to combine knowledge in ways that would be impossible if everyone came from the same vantage point. "There is incredible efficiency that comes from this opportunity to work together," says Williams. ♦



## Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community

290 Peters Hall • 1404 Gortner Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55108

Phone: 612-624-5357

Fax: 612-624-9201

E-mail: [nidvaac@che.umn.edu](mailto:nidvaac@che.umn.edu)

Web site: [www.dvinstitute.org](http://www.dvinstitute.org)

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### STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Kelly Mitchell-Clark

Family Violence Prevention Fund,  
Washington, D.C.

Linner Griffin, Ed.D., ACSW, CCSW

Professor and Educational Director - Center on  
Aging, East Carolina University

Robert Hampton, Ph.D.

President of York College, City University of  
New York, Jamaica, NY

Sheilia Hankins,

Safe Haven Project Director for the Michigan  
Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment  
Board, Lansing, MI

Esther Jenkins, Ph.D.

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Joyce Thomas, RN, MPH, PNP

President and Co-founder, Center for  
Child Protection and Family Support,  
Washington, DC

Antonia Vann

CEO, Asha Family Services, Inc.  
Milwaukee, WI

Oliver J. Williams, Ph.D.

Executive Director, Professor, School of Social  
Work, University of Minnesota Minneapolis, MN

William Riley

Federal Project Officer  
Office of Community Services, Administration  
for Children and Families, U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services, Washington, DC

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# Ozha Wahbeganniss Project explores need for visitation centers in Native American communities

Ozha Wahbeganniss is Ojibwe for “Yellow Flower,” which represents health, healing, peace, serenity, and the delicate balance of life. This name was given to this project as part of a ceremony to bless the collaboration between Mending the Sacred Hoop (MSH) and the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC). Together IDVAAC and MSH are looking at the issues on child visitation in families where there is a history of domestic violence.

According to Jeremy Nevilles-Sorrell, resource coordinator for Mending the Sacred Hoop, and Oliver Williams, IDVAAC executive director, we are specifically attempting to understand the extent to which there is a need for visitation centers in Native communities, and if there is a need, how they should be designed.

We want to increase our understanding about the need for visitation centers in



The work team from left to right. Front row: Philip Beadle, Babbette Sandman, Jeremy Nevilles-Sorrell, Carma Tucson and Shelley Miller. Back row: Debra Stone, Lori Crowder, Dr. Oliver Williams, T. Williams, and Margaret Celebrezze.



Native communities and also get Native people's perspectives on other methods that promote safety for women and children and connections among families, says Nevilles-Sorrell.

The methods we will use to gather this information include interviews on two reservations with professionals in the fields of domestic violence, human services, courts, and Native women and men who might be candidates to utilize these systems if they existed, says Williams, adding: “When finished, we will develop a set of principles necessary for creating an effective visitation center for Native communities and will provide the framework to develop such a center.”

## Family violence conference Sept. 17-22 in San Diego

The ninth international conference on family violence will take place Sept. 17-22 in San Diego, Calif. The event will be hosted by Family Violence & Sexual Assault Institute (FVSAI), Children's Institute International (CII), and Alliant International University (AIU). The month of September marks the 20th anniversary of FVSAI. This is an appropriate occasion for advocates, researchers, practitioners and policymakers to reflect on what has been done over the past 20 years, where we are today, and what can be done for the future.

For more information visit [www.fvsai.org](http://www.fvsai.org) or contact Rocky Rowley at 858-623-2777 or [fvtrain@alliant.edu](mailto:fvtrain@alliant.edu).

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