

ATLANTIC BALLET THEATRE OF CANADA

CELEBRATE COURAGE

Building Healthy Relationships for Youth

"I think it's so important that we talk about violence and what violence is...So, to see it conveyed in a ballet format, I think was really quite amazing, quite profound."

**Angela Williams,
Guidance Counselor
Moncton High School**



Teen relationship violence is a hidden epidemic in Canada. Canadian teens are experiencing dating violence in record numbers and need help to stay safer. Canadian Women's Foundation February 21st, 2012



"Dating violence is a frightening reality for Canadian teens from coast to coast." Dr. Claire Crooks

An Innovative Approach to Improving the Lives of Adolescence

Celebrate Courage is a first of its kind in Canada and has national significance in that it represents a new model for engaging young men and women to build healthy relationships and to understand and participate in reducing dating violence in urban and rural centres in Canada. The project integrates an original professional multi-media performance on violence against girls and women, entitled ***Ghosts of Violence***, in a collaborative interactive setting in partnership with service providers and includes: the performance; a social marketing community education campaign, community - student/youth presentation; unique educational tools/resources for teachers, and youth leaders; and direct access to service providers and community resources. By increasing access to services, fostering

dialogue and collaboration in an interactive and artistic environment, providing direct on-site education and educational tools we are building capacity of communities and young men and women to participate in improving healthy relationships. ***Celebrate Courage*** is being implemented in cooperation with a broad base of partners including: the RCMP - National Crime Prevention, the Canadian Nurses Association, the Canadian Association of Social Workers and to date 100 women's justice and social agencies in every Province of Canada. The New Brunswick Department of Education has assigned their Curriculum Division to assist with input to our educational materials. Additional partners on the educational materials are: RCMP, Victim Services and Public Legal Education This model, community process and partnerships is distinct from traditional approaches.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT: Teen Dating Violence on the Rise in Canada

In Canada rates of dating violence for females have increased 40%, over four years. Studies indicate that young people between the ages of 15 and 24 have the highest risk of dating violence representing 43% of incidents. 66% of all female victims of sexual assault are under the age of twenty-four. Women aged 15 to 24 are killed at nearly three times the rate of all female victims of domestic homicide. For youth in the 15 to 19 age group, 10 times as many females as males reported incidents of dating violence. Almost half (47%) of these incidents involved sexual assault and unwanted touching, and others involved common assault (27%) and uttering threats (12%). It is important to keep in mind that the reported incidents likely represent only a portion of those that actually occur. Canadian statistics on violence have shown that only 72% of victims reported abuse to the police.

Mental Health Impacts Last a Lifetime

The health effects most commonly associated with violence are those that relate to emotional and psychological functioning. Teens who experience violence in their relationship not only suffer the consequences at the time, these effects impact over a lifetime.



Coker and colleagues (2000) found that females with a history of dating violence reported: lower health-related quality of life, less life satisfaction, depression, anxiety and higher risk for suicide attempts. Similarly, research has indicated that, among males, a history of dating violence was associated with lower health-related quality of life, less life satisfaction, and higher rates of suicide attempts (Coker et al., 2000) as well as sadness/hopelessness, physical fighting, carrying a weapon, and sexual risk behavior (Howard, Qi Wang, & Yan, 2008 in Hunter). Further, adolescent dating violence is one of the strongest precursors to intimate partner violence in adulthood. In addition, the severity of violence among intimate partners has been shown to increase if the pattern has been established in adolescence (S.L. Feld & M.A. Strauss, 1989). Nearly one-half of adult sex offenders report committing their first sexual offenses prior to the age of 18 (Ron Snipe, 1998).

For women, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, personality disorders, dissociative identity disorder, psychosis, and eating disorders are the problems most commonly associated with the experience of violence. Women also make 3 to 4 times more suicide attempts than men, but there is a "significant correlation between a history of sexual abuse and the lifetime number of suicide attempts, and this correlation is twice as strong for women as for men" (Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario). Research has shown that the rate of reported violence among women living with mental illness is alarmingly high: 80% of psychiatric inpatients have been physically or sexually abused (Rajan, 2004).



*"I think it's just on the down-low.
People don't usually talk about it, but now I think
they'll be able to, if they see that. It kind of tells you
that it's ok to talk about it. Even the cops who were
there said it's ok to go to them."*

Student participant, Celebrate Courage

Building New Approaches - Understanding the Impact of the Arts

Research has suggests that due to interpersonal difficulties, adolescents may be in need of more health education, prevention and intervention programming, interpersonal supports than are currently available (Gutgesell & Payne, 2004; Munoz-Rivas et al., 2007; Silverman et al., 2001 in Hunter). The wealth of recent research on the impact of experiencing a live arts performance is very positive, particularly when we look at widespread social issues such as violence against women and girls.

Why are arts experiences different than other methods?

Art communicates beyond the limits of language; expresses difficult ideas through metaphor; and creates indelible images. Unlike most communication, which take place through discourse, art communicates through “felt experience”, and it is the personal, subjective response to a work of art that imparts positive intrinsic benefits” (McCarthy et al, 2005).

The “intrinsic” benefits of the arts provides a solid basis for understanding the value of the ‘direct impact’ of the arts and performing arts experiences on individuals, groups and communities. On a fundamental change level, the research tells us that experiencing a performance can be transformative. (Baker Richard and Wolf Brown, 2011; Brown, A. S., Novak, J.L. ; 2007; Callahan, S. with Jerardi, J. and Servilio, C. 2009; McCarthy et al, 2005). Research findings identified the following key intrinsic impacts:

- Captivation—focused attention leading to new ways of seeing and experiencing the world;
- Expanded capacity for empathy -increased understanding of others and more receptive to unfamiliar attitudes, people and cultures;
- Cognitive growth - reflection/ learning and capacity to gain a new perspective;
- Deepened understanding of complex issues;
- Social bonding as the result of a common experience together (McCarthy et al, 2005).

On an individual level, these impacts have the potential to not only change and educate for that moment -- ***in fact the impacts of live arts experiences can resonate over a lifetime.*** Arts experiences are a conduit for transmitting feelings, beliefs and values. Therefore performances with emotional weight, positive or negative, can bring about these lasting impacts. “Emotionally resonant arts experiences can yield intrinsic “benefit dividends” throughout life” (Brown, A. S., Novak, J.L.; 2007).

Further evidence shows that individual arts experiences can also be shared and create social bonds. (McCarthy et al.; 2005) In fact great value is derived from collective engagement in the arts, because it “allow(s) private feelings to be jointly expressed and reinforce(s) the sense that we are not alone” (Jennifer Radbourne, Katya Johanson, Hilary Glow and Tabitha White; 2009).

How the Program Works

Celebrate Courage offers an innovative format that brings together service providers and professionals in a youth friendly environment. Students attend a presentation of **Ghosts of Violence** at the theatre. The format includes the multi-media performance along with on-site participation of service providers and professionals. Educational content and dialogue are included at each presentation. The method utilized for this project is focused specifically on prevention by raising awareness of victim and healthy relationship issues, providing educational information and resources as it relates to youth. The project also reaches youth who would not otherwise have an opportunity of access to see this type of production and/or have the opportunity of meeting with professionals.

Teachers and youth group leaders are provided with a Resource Manual in advance of the presentation at the theatre. The Resource Manual integrates themes explored in the multi-media performance **Ghosts of Violence** with educational content on healthy relationships, dating violence and specific outcomes. Information on local resources and services are included.

Ghosts of Violence addresses the stories of four women affected by violence -- how they feel, problems they encounter including not knowing how or where to access resources. The multi-media performance raises awareness of problems, needs and issues related to violence in relationships.



Storytelling is central to the performance. Stories draw us into the emotions of the characters on stage. We relate stories to our own lives and experiences and this is the basis for increasing awareness, empathy, thought and action (Holland, Chris, 2009). Themes were identified that reflect the experiences of girls and women in abusive relationships. The specific themes explored on stage include: love, hope, isolation, entrapment, fear, loneliness. The multi-media ballet-theatre performance further uses symbolism to draw the audience in to how the woman feels-doors closing, brick walls, a hammer hitting ceaselessly. The production leaves room for discussion of all of these themes.



Most important is the discussion of what could be different - where might she or he go for help, how could things end differently in the production (in life). These discussion points combined with the creative performance experience can further increase relevance, empathy and impacts (Hester, Marianne and Nicole Westmorland, 2005; Holland, Chris, 2009).

Educational materials distributed to teachers and students include information on: the signs of abuse, what you can do, how to build healthy relationships and resources available in their community. Front-line resource partners including: policing/RCMP, victim services, social workers, Counselors are on-site and speak to the students about what they do and how to access services and resources.

These resource partners have booths set up with additional educational/resource materials. The booths are staffed. Students and teachers have an opportunity to stop at each booth, pick-up resource materials and to ask questions one on one. Resource partners are also available for follow-up educational opportunities.

Anticipated Results

The objectives of Celebrate Courage are as follows:

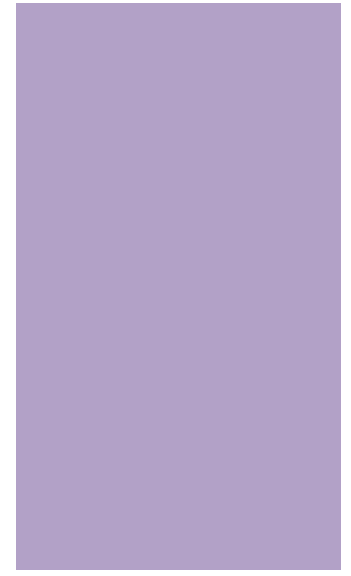
- To create a living legacy (the ballet) that will honour women killed through acts of intimate partner violence;
- To generate new insight and instigate new forms of thought and action on intimate partner violence and homicide, by using art as a catalyst for community dialogue and action;
- To build broad based public awareness;
- To reach communities small and large in every province of Canada, in particular young women under the age of 25, who are at the greatest risk;
- To increase community capacity to reduce intimate partner violence in urban and rural communities in Canada by facilitating increased access to services, resources and tools;
- To develop the capacity of young women and men in urban and rural communities across Canada to access services and facilitate their participation in identifying and responding to issues of intimate partner violence in their communities;
- To generate learning about the intrinsic benefits of art in addressing issues of social concern.

Celebrate Courage is expected to have the following results:

- A national tour of Celebrate Courage has played in at least seven Canadian provinces and a diversity of local organizations has been engaged in each community;
- Audiences of *Ghosts of Violence* experience heightened attention to intimate partner violence and increased empathy for the issue, and this leads to further understanding and reflection;
- Community members have an increased awareness of violence against women and girls and of services available in their communities;
- Youth participants have increased their knowledge of the specific signs of abuse and how to respond;
- Youth participants have increased their knowledge on the options and resources available in their communities and how to access them;
- Youth are better able to identify and respond to a situation of violence in their own relationships and in those of others;
- Youth take action to reduce violence against girls and women in their communities (through the development of a class/youth group project);
- The performance has demonstrated the intrinsic benefit of arts performance, and valuable lessons have been generated.



It is vitally important to get youth talking about dating violence and healthy relationships. The increase that we are witnessing in violence among youth makes it clear that new approaches are needed.



"Once the play [ballet] really started, people were putting their cell phones away. People were laying back and just grasping the idea of WOW! This play is really touching your soul. It's really showing you what you could be going through or what others are going through."

"It was my first ballet as well and seeing a ballet that was so emotional and so strongly moving towards a touchy subject like abusive relationships. It was really something that I'll be able to move on and share with people that I know."

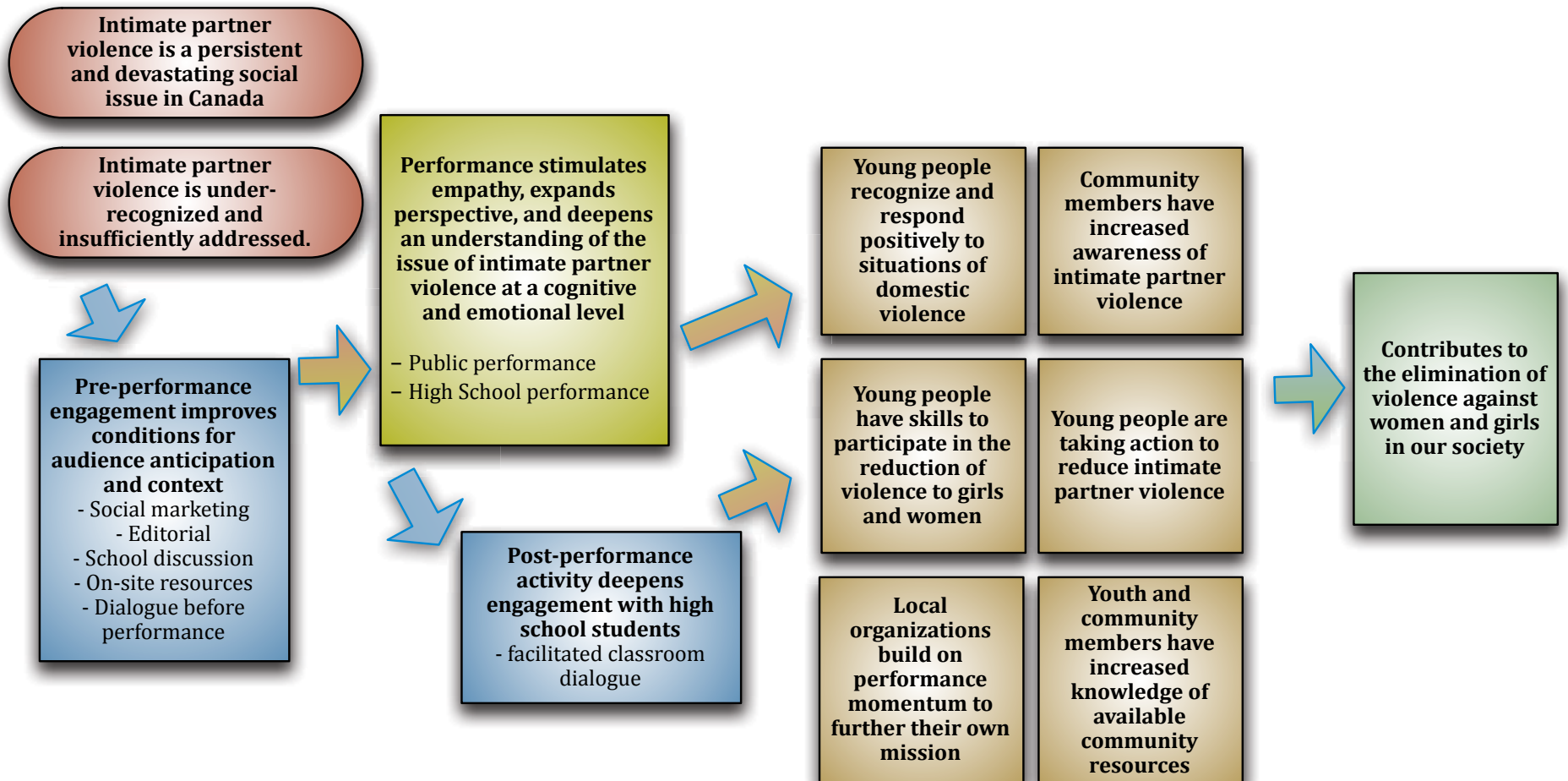
"I thought it was going to be boring, but it wasn't at all...It was kind of a shocker...I couldn't see it happening to me. It was really a big shocker for sure."

"It's hard on a person to see something like that. I'm going to remember that for the rest of my life."

Comments from Students who have participated in
CELEBRATE COURAGE after seeing Ghosts of Violence

Evaluation: Theory of Change

Summary Diagram



Celebrate Courage

P.O. Box 1783
68 Highfield Street, Suite 200
Moncton NB, E1C 9X6
Canada

Tel: 506-383-5951

E-mail: operations@atlanticballet.ca

atlanticballet.ca

Atlantic
Ballet Theatre
of Canada

Igor Dobrovolskiy, Artistic Director



Photos by: Aleksandr Onyshchenko

Celebrate Courage-A National Project of Atlantic Ballet Theatre of Canada