A Look Back at the Taking Action Against Domestic Violence Campaign

... and planning for year eight

By Lissette Campos, Director of Community Affairs, WFTS TV ABC Action News

The project began on the floor of my office at WFTS TV in Tampa, FL. My dear friend and special projects producer Jen McVan was right there with me. Shoes off and staring at the carpet, we had piles of “Post-It” notes and print outs with statistics on domestic violence. Our assignment: take all that misery and make “good” TV. Seven years later, our team is still hard at work on the project, discovering new ways to tell domestic violence stories in ways that are relevant and empowering to our viewers.

Since October 2008, employees from many departments of WFTS TV ABC Action News help produce the ABC Action News “Taking Action Against Domestic Violence” campaign. It is a labor of love for everyone involved - from the front desk receptionist greeting advocates and survivors visiting our newsroom, to the photojournalist lighting the interviews “just right”.

We approach the subject of domestic violence from a different angle each year, but the core mission remains the same. First, we raise awareness about the statewide Florida Domestic Violence Hotline. The hotline is the fastest and easiest way for victims and worried loved ones to connect with local advocates. No matter where the caller is, trained experts at the 1-800-500-1119 hotline route each call to the nearest certified domestic violence center. The hotline is prominently displayed in all of our campaign components, from our domestic violence webpage and Facebook account, to the banner we show on the TV screen every time there’s a domestic violence related story in the news. During the 6 weeks of our 2015 campaign, FCADV received 3,454 calls to the hotline. Three-hundred and four of those calls came in during our 1-hour television special!

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Second, we expose the warning signs of abuse and do it in a way that promotes meaningful change. Simply giving our viewers a list of “don’ts” isn’t helpful! Instead, we let survivors do it for us, by answering questions and sharing their own unique stories and experiences. The uniqueness of our campaign is that viewers hear difficult messages, courageous stories of abuse and healing straight from the people with most credibility – the survivors themselves! Rather than “tell” viewers, we “show” them that domestic violence is never about love, it’s about power and control.

And third, our campaign raises awareness of local certified domestic violence centers and how they work. This helps eliminate the “fear of the unknown” for victims hesitant to reach out for help. This spotlight also helps viewers see all the different services and programs certified centers provide, which in turn has inspired many of our viewers to volunteer and make financial contributions to support those programs. A leader at one of our local certified domestic violence centers said it best:

“The idea of the Taking Action Against Domestic Violence campaign was to get information to victims to help them stay safe and learn about services. It certainly accomplished this, but the most surprising and most important outcome has been the awareness of the public. People have come up to me in the store and at church and said ‘I had no idea of the problem’ or ‘I never knew what you did was so important’ and they want to know how to help!”

Since launching the campaign in 2009, we produce public service announcements, news reports, and a one-hour special. We do this September through October to coincide with National Domestic Violence Awareness Month and include every campaign item on all ABC Action News media platforms – online, social media, and mobile APP. There are elements of our domestic violence campaign we do year round, including the www.ABCActionNews.com/DV webpage. It includes important links to local certified centers and the Florida Domestic Violence Hotline is prominently displayed. The webpage also contains important educational tools like “Safety Planning”, the “Wheel of Power and Control” and the “Wheel of Equality”. These two wheels are the most “clicked” items on the webpage! During the six-weeks of our 2015 campaign, there were 4,898 visits to our domestic violence webpage. Within the first five days our one-hour special was posted, it had more than 1,160 views!

The campaign, entering year eight, is an incredible responsibility. One we take very seriously. It’s no accident our viewers will not see ABC Action News stories devoted entirely to the personal and painful details of domestic violence attacks. Instead, we devote the most amount of time to how this person became a survivor! What and how support from family, friends, co-workers or their local domestic violence center helped them. By shining the light on survivors, we are giving viewers tangible evidence that help, hope, and healing can happen. Even when covering “day of” domestic violence stories or “breaking news” stories, we include the Florida Domestic Violence Hotline in our coverage.

You could say “the secret sauce” is in the annual community outreach events we do. Our news anchors and reporters attend fundraisers hosted by the local certified domestic violence centers, promoting the events on air and on social media to help increase attendance and raise more money. And over the years, something else has happened— something none of us anticipated. We’ve become “accidental” advocates, so to speak. Every time our “local celebrities” prepare for these public appearances for certified centers in September and October, we “read up on” and research that center’s counseling services, job training, dating violence prevention program at schools, and legal assistance in court. The emergency shelter is only a fraction of what each domestic violence center does! It’s information that stays in our minds and our hearts and we share it, year round. When local businesses come to us seeking a charity to support, Florida’s certified domestic violence centers are at the top of our lists! A co-worker, who was new to
Florida-based Organizations and Hall of Famers Team Up to Promote Safe and Healthy Relationships

-Pro Football Hall of Famer Tony Dungy and Heisman Trophy Winner and College Football Hall of Famer Charlie Ward are partnering with Family First and the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence (FCADV) to take a stand against domestic violence. This unique partnership brings together two organizations that share the common goal of creating safe and healthy relationships.

“Engaging men, and especially fathers, in the work to end domestic violence is critical. The partnership with Family First, Tony Dungy and Charlie Ward provides us with the opportunity to collectively create messages, tools and resources that will educate and raise awareness about domestic violence and safe relationships in a way that will resonate with men, fathers and their children,” said Tiffany Carr, President/CEO of FCADV.

With the goal of reducing domestic violence while promoting healthy relationships, Family First and FCADV launched a statewide campaign to provide tools and resources specifically designed for fathers to begin a conversation with their children about domestic violence by supporting and encouraging safe and healthy relationships. The partnership has reached thousands of Florida families through breakfast chapters, Father and Kids Experiences, outdoor billboards, digital messages, and statewide radio and TV PSAs. As a result, 96 percent of fathers surveyed say they are more likely to have conversations with their children about domestic violence. This year, the partnership expanded by creating and implementing “Play it Out!” a unique nine-week primary prevention curriculum for middle schools boys. The successful Play it Out! pilot is now in the second round of its nine-week program. As part of the campaign, Tony Dungy and Charlie Ward share their experiences in order to teach the next generation of men to respect and value others. And, to encourage fathers to lead by example.

“I firmly believe it’s a father’s responsibility to take an active role in the lives of his children. This is why I enjoy working with the FCADV to prevent domestic violence by encouraging fathers to actively engage in conversations with their children on this important issue. Our efforts are crucial to the growth, development and success of children and fathers throughout Florida,” said Dungy.

“I take fatherhood very seriously, which is why I am thrilled to partner with Tony, All Pro Dad and the FCADV to advocate for hands-on parenting and the prevention of domestic violence. I want my children, and all children, to know the importance of respect and compassion in relationships,” said Ward.

This year, the messaging used throughout this campaign will focus on “5 Things Dads Must Teach Their Sons About How to Treat Girls” and “5 Ways Dads Can Be a Good Example of a Great Man.” So far during the campaign, 50,000 copies of these two resources have been downloaded on the campaign website.

For more information on the online resources fathers can share with their children, visit http://All-ProDad.com/Stronger.
Florida’s Chief Financial Officer Jeff Atwater and Tiffany Carr, President/CEO of the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, spoke during a Financial Literacy Month press conference about the significance of financial abuse and how it impacts domestic violence survivors’ ability to get free and stay free from abuse. The speakers also highlighted the joint initiative, Your L.I.F.E. (Learn Individual Financial Empowerment), created to empower and assist those who have overcome domestic violence and financial abuse to become financially independent.

“This I am reminded of the bravery it takes to stand firm against domestic violence and my commitment to helping those seeking to become financially independent,” said CFO Atwater. “Every Floridian should have the tools needed to make financial decisions that are best for them and their families. I am hopeful that the programs and resources that the Department of Financial Services and its partners offer are a step towards ensuring survivors will receive the proper financial education to help gain fiscal independence.”

Studies show that in 98% of domestic violence cases, financial abuse is a tactic abusers use to keep survivors trapped in an abusive relationship. Behind fear, survivors often cite income, employment and financial stability as the strongest deterrents to leaving abusive situations. The effects of financial abuse, such as ruined credit, sporadic employment and legal issues can be devastating while making it extremely difficult for survivors to gain financial independence and long-term financial security.

“Economic justice and financial independence are consistently identified as top needs by survivors of domestic violence,” said Tiffany Carr. “Survivors are often faced with the devastating choice of leaving behind a home, income, benefits and economic security in exchange for seeking safety away from violent perpetrators. The Your L.I.F.E. partnership with CFO Atwater as well as FCADV’s long-standing collaboration with The Allstate Foundation promotes financial literacy and economic justice and provides survivors with the tools they need to begin to live independently and free from violence.”

Financial safety is also a consideration for survivors when planning to stay in or leave an abusive relationship. Survivors must be equipped with the tools to make informed financial decisions and to take proactive security measures, both of which may be critical to their safety.

The Department of Financial Services and the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence partnered to create Your L.I.F.E., a comprehensive, online initiative that provides financial resources, and information to raise awareness and increase financial literacy among survivors of domestic violence. The program covers topics such as budgeting, saving, financial safety and repairing damaged credit. Through Your L.I.F.E., survivors can gain a better understanding of money management, how to prepare for a sound financial future, how to secure financial freedom and become fiscally responsible.

To learn more about Your L.I.F.E., visit www.MyFloridaCFO.com/YMM/YourLIFE/. For more information on FCADV, visit www.FCADV.org.
As part of an expanding partnership, participating certified domestic violence centers are teaming up with Allstate agents in their community for a spring donation drive to provide supplies for individuals and children currently living in emergency shelter, as well as those receiving outreach services. This annual Spring Donation Drive is the result of a unique collaboration between The Allstate Foundation and the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence (FCADV).

This year’s drive, provides two unique opportunities for giving with local Allstate agents taking a lead role in collecting supplies throughout the spring season on behalf of their community’s certified center. Donations are being accepted by participating agents through June 20th. During the season of renewal, this small gesture of hope can mean the world to those receiving emergency shelter or support from Florida’s certified domestic violence centers.

On May 8th, many of us will pamper our mothers and the other special women in our lives. Yet tragically, this Mother’s Day many mothers in your community will be living in a domestic violence emergency shelter to protect themselves and their children from an abusive partner. Last fiscal year, 15,397 individuals received emergency shelter in one of Florida’s 42 certified domestic violence centers, many of whom were mothers and their children. You can help make their day special by donating a gift card to stores like Walmart and Target so children can shop for their very own Mother’s Day presents. These too can be dropped off with local participating Allstate agents.

While this annual Spring Donation Drive focuses on obtaining necessary supplies for participating domestic violence centers and Mother’s Day gifts, the project also serves to bring together local Allstate agents with the certified center in their area as a part of a comprehensive economic justice project, Changing Lives: A Partnership between Florida Allstate Agents and Domestic Violence Centers.*

The Allstate Foundation is a leader in the work to end domestic violence. Their longstanding commitment to survivors of domestic violence through financial empowerment programs has assisted thousands of survivors by providing tools and resources to live independently and free from violence. Bringing together local agents and pairing them with their community’s certified domestic violence center is an outgrowth of Allstate’s support and continuing partnership with FCADV. Thanks to Allstate Foundation funding, the program is now available to more certified domestic violence centers in Florida.

The participating certified domestic violence centers, Allstate agents, drop-off locations, and needed supplies are available at: http://fcadv.org/fcadv-allstate or by email: AllstateProject@fcadv.org.

*As a part of the Changing Lives project, FCADV and Allstate Florida convened a Statewide Advisory Team comprised of participating domestic violence centers and local Allstate agents. They are working within their respective communities to create plans for increasing financial literacy, economic justice opportunities for survivors of domestic violence, and promoting activities and projects that engage Allstate agents as strong partners.
the project this past fall, told me ...

“It is an issue that, unfortunately, is near and dear to my heart...Seeing all you’ve done to help promote, advocate, and be the face for the cause, makes me proud to work for and support this station. I just wanted to take the time to let you know that your voice has not gone unheard or unappreciated.”

The campaign has allowed us to take domestic violence awareness to a statewide, regional and national level with recognitions from community leaders and journalism awards from the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) in Washington D.C.; Society of Professional Journalists, Florida Associated Press, and the regional chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences covering the Southeastern U.S. and the Caribbean. Among the highlights are the prestigious Service to America award by the NAB, three Emmy Awards, and more than 12 Emmy nominations! With each ceremony, we have encouraged other journalists to raise awareness about domestic violence in their communities.

The most gratifying recognition, though, comes in the form of hand written messages from our viewers, late night recordings left on our voice mailboxes, and heartfelt emails sent in within minutes of our one-hour special.

“Last night you made me feel less judged. And thank you for that.” said one viewer.

“I don’t even know where to begin” explained another woman after watching our profile of a survivor named Natalie.

“As I listened to her interview, I heard my own story and tears welled up in my eyes. It is utterly amazing how almost all of our stories as victims of domestic violence have so many similarities...from the depths of my heart, thanks to you, WFTS and the entire staff responsible for this series.”

Carol wrote...

“I keep learning so much about all the resources in Florida and wonderful people who are learning that they matter. You may never fully know what you have done for me this past year. Now I am absolutely certain that I am ready, willing and able to soar with passion and give back to other survivors.”

Coleen called in after hours with this story...

“I went to Sweetbay (supermarket) on Sunday, and Bob, the meat guy, was talking about it! (TAADV one-hour special) He was really impacted! When the guy next door is talking about it, mission accomplished!”

Kimberly wrote...

“What a fulfilling and wonderful effort to bring awareness that is so very vital. And not just awareness, but help in the form of information, and avenues with directions...places to go, and what to do...May I say that I truly admire, and commend you for this report...as it is truly a badge of honor...”

Margaret wrote...

“For all these years I have been quiet about my life. Seeing these ladies on the program is such an inspiration to me.”

Another anonymous viewer, who would only say her age, 46, wrote in...

“After watching the television special...I found myself struggling with secrets that for the most part, I’ve kept to myself. Initially, I did not want to watch the show, but somehow I couldn’t turn away from it. I believe that having it air a second time was God’s way of saying, ‘Open your eyes girl! You’re too good to let anyone or any ‘man’ treat you in a harmful manner.’ I continued to watch for a second time. Before sitting down to compose this, I went to the ABC Action News website, and began reading about the signs of abuse in the Wheel of Power and Control. Surprisingly enough, I have experienced six out of the eight signs! Experiencing even one is too much for a person to endure.”

The messages from viewers have been coming in every year—enough to fill eight large binders in my office—where it all began.