



# Monthly Visions

Reflection  
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## Domestic Violence Prevention Discussion Group

By Raman Singh, New Visions Outreach & Engagement Community Action Team Member

*On February 1, 2009, a group of eight women and men gathered to talk about domestic violence at the Gurdwara Sahib (a Sikh place of worship in Michigan). This discussion group is an extension of New Visions' efforts to engage community members and organizations in a dialogue about domestic violence on an ongoing basis, and in turn, promote community action to end it. First in its series, this discussion group was aimed at increasing community members' understanding about domestic violence (e.g., definition, causes, consequences, etc.) and exploring ways for communities to take action in ending domestic violence. A music video, "Babul," produced by a human rights organization in India, Breakthrough, was shown to spark discussion. "Babul" is about a reality of domestic violence seen through the eyes of a young girl. The following is a reflection by Raman Singh, New Visions Outreach & Engagement CAT member, who co-facilitated the discussion group.*

I came away with several impressions after watching the video "Babul" and the discussion that followed. First, I was surprised that I saw things in the video that I had not noticed on previous viewings. I was also conscious of the reactions of the other participants, not just of my own reactions. Other people reacted with several emotions, including surprise, shock, dismay, compassion, and anger. The discussion that followed was even more revealing. This was a group of people that I know fairly well, so I thought I could predict most people's responses. I was wrong about this. Most of the participants surprised me with their reactions and commentary on the video on domestic violence in the Asian community.



For example, some of the participants had firsthand knowledge of life in India and within a tight knit Indian community. It disturbed me that they felt some level of domestic violence – whether it is physical or psychological – was not uncommon in the Indian community, even in the Punjabi community. My impression had always been that domestic violence was fairly rare in our community. I was also impressed that some of the participants brought up campaigns within India to help prevent domestic violence such as the "Bell Bajao (Ring the Bell)" <for more information on this campaign, please visit, [www.breakthrough.tv](http://www.breakthrough.tv)> .

Participants had different opinions on the ways to address domestic violence. These included empowering the victim through community accountability, prayer, and spiritual support. They also felt strongly about being good role models to both boys and girls, specifically promoting mutual respect in relationships and gender equality.

In conclusion, there was a strong energy in the discussion; people were genuinely moved by this issue and felt they needed to take action. It is important to continue and grow these kinds of groups, so that awareness can grow, and community members become empowered to address domestic violence in our communities including helping people who are afraid to come forward to gain the support they need. <Contact us to learn how YOU can host a gathering or a discussion group, (734) 615-2106 or [newvisions@umich.edu](mailto:newvisions@umich.edu)>

New Visions is a community-university partnership whose mission is to inspire and support sustainable community action for ending violence against women in Asian communities of Southeast Michigan. Affiliated with the University of Michigan School of Social Work, we work with local Asian communities and domestic violence-related agencies to achieve one vision: "Asian women are safe, and Asian communities are free of violence."

Troy resident, senior at Troy Athens High School, and CAT member of The Shanti Project- Hari Vutukuru spent five months working for the Obama campaign as a field organizing intern.



Vutukuru will never forget the night of November 4, 2008. Since June, he had spent numerous hours campaigning for Barack Obama as a field organizing intern in Troy, Clawson, and Rochester Hills, in Michigan.

On election night, Vutukuru and hundreds of other campaign workers and volunteers celebrated Obama's historic victory at now, Congressman Gary Peter's headquarters at the Troy Marriott. When the final results came in, many cried, many stood up on chairs and screamed but for Vutukuru, it was a cyclone of emotions as he realized five months of non-stop work and perseverance finally paid off and he could now say he was a part of history.

Back in June, Vutukuru was an AP Government and Politics student deeply interested in politics and the electoral process. Things quickly changed after his teacher arranged for some students to see then Senator Obama at a town hall meeting in Troy High School, Troy Michigan. After listening to Obama in person, Vutukuru knew that his own moment has come, and he had to act.

As a field organizing intern, Vutukuru was in charge of outreaching to youth South Asians. His main responsibilities included organizing voter contact efforts and voter registration. For Vutukuru, the best part about the job was creating relationships with volunteers like a 70- year-old woman named Barbara and seeing their growth throughout the campaign. "My family values and background has always encouraged community service so developing relationships with the volunteers came very natural to me. I knew that I couldn't look at each volunteer as just a number. I had to get to know them individually and create personal relationships with them," said Vutukuru.

Asked if his significance in helping Obama get elected had sunk in yet, he replied, "It still hasn't fully sunk in and I don't think it truly will until this election is written about in the history books. I can then tell my kids, grandkids, children that I played a part in getting him elected."

When asked about the significance of this unprecedented election, Vutukuru said that, "I don't think it solves the problem completely. The truth is that, racism and unfairness towards minorities still exist in our society and country. However, we have come a far way. I hope that this election, and this moment in history can be an inspiration for people of all walks of life. For people who dream. For people who believe that nothing is impossible. For people who truly believe in the true decency of the American people. I wouldn't be surprised if history tells us that one day America will have a woman president, or even an Asian president. The election of Barack Obama opens up all sorts of opportunities. "

Vutukuru is extremely excited and optimistic about implementing the House Party approach (which was used by Obama Campaign) for the Shanti Project. He believes that this grassroots approach will help people better understand domestic violence. <For more information about house parties, visit [www.shantiproject.org](http://www.shantiproject.org)>

### Interested in making a difference?

### Join New Visions Community Action Teams!

We are looking for women/men who are interested in helping to raise awareness and dialogue about dating/domestic violence. As a member, you will have opportunities to gain and apply knowledge and skills in dating/domestic violence prevention, community mobilization/organizing, leadership, and facilitation amongst others to make Asian communities free of violence. For more information, call (734) 615-2106 or write to [newvisions@umich.edu](mailto:newvisions@umich.edu)

## New Visions Youth Arts & Activism Community Action Team Seniors

### SPOTLIGHT

*New Visions has been privileged to have such wise, mature, and creative minds on the Youth Arts and Activism Community Action Team (YAA CAT). This year, many of our YAA CAT members will be graduating from high school and going off to college. In honor of their dedication and contribution to the project, the seniors from YAA CAT will be featured in the Membership Spotlights for the upcoming newsletters.*

*In this month's Spotlight we will be featuring Millie Li, Helen Nguyen-Tran, and Patrick David.*

#### Millie Li



Millie Li is one of the founders of YAA CAT. She began as a participant in the first Youth Theater Program (YTP) back in the fall of 2007. In her performance with the YTP 2007, Millie played the lead character Gwyn, who was in an abusive relationship, in the sketch, "The Days of Our High School Lives." After completing the program, she helped organize and became apart of the YAA CAT. She had the privilege of facilitating the 2<sup>nd</sup> YTP in the summer of 2008 as well. She also facilitated the YTP 2008 Final Performance of the sketch, "What You Want."

On a more personal note, Millie anticipates attending the School of Visual Arts in New York and aspires to be a comic book illustrator. Currently, she is focused on art and building her portfolio.

When asked what skills and knowledge she gained from YAA CAT, Mille mentioned communication skills. Since she is pursuing a career in illustration, having the skills to communicate effectively is essential. She aims for her illustrations to have a meaningful message. The skills she gained through YAA CAT will assist in interpreting ideas and putting it on paper in a creative way.

While being on YAA CAT, Millie learned the intricacy of planning an event and gained both leadership and organizational skills. Most importantly, she learned that time was valuable. She has become more aware of having a realistic sense of how to reach her goals through managing her time.

Millie describes YAA CAT as a nurturing group with "really nice people." She mentions that the team is special because it tries to reach out to youth on addressing dating/domestic violence and helps develop members' insight on the issue. The team also provides a space to create leaders. In reference to YAA CAT, Millie states, "It's really worthwhile" and "one of a kind."

#### Patrick David

Patrick David is one of the founders of the YAA CAT. He started out as a participant in YTP in the fall of 2007. In his final performance with the YTP 2007, Patrick played the role of Calvin, who was the abuser in the sketch, "The Days of Our High School Lives." After completing the program, he helped organize and became apart of the YAA CAT. He had the privilege of facilitating the 2<sup>nd</sup> YTP in the summer of 2008. He participated in the YTP 2008 Final Performance of the sketch, "What You Want" and played the role of the abuser's friend.

While in high school, Patrick has taken theater classes and has performed in many of his school plays, such as High School Musical. After high school, Patrick plans to attend either Wayne State University or the University of Toledo where he will pursue a degree in social work.

His training in the program and his experience with YAA CAT has provided him with the skills of being a leader. Patrick has a better understanding about dating/domestic violence through his involvement with the program and as a YAA CAT member. He has used these skills and knowledge to educate others on the issue of dating/domestic violence.



Patrick mentioned that there are people in the community who are still not aware of the issue of dating/domestic violence because it's a taboo topic. YAA CAT provides a safe and open atmosphere to address this topic.

## SPOTLIGHT

### New Visions Youth Arts & Activism Community Action Team Seniors (*cont'd*)

#### Helen Nguyen-Tran

Helen Nguyen-Tran participated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> YTP 2008. For the YTP 2008 Final Performance, Helen played the lead character Lily, who was the victim of dating violence, in the sketch, "What You Want." She had such a great time with YTP that she decided to join the YAA CAT.

After graduating high school, Helen plans on attending Madonna University and majoring in Nursing. While completing her high school education, Helen has been actively involved with various organizations. She is involved with Asian Pacific American Club, Diversity Council, Youth Dialogue, and Michigan Round Table Inclusion. Some of her hobbies include contemporary and traditional dance, playing guitar, and knitting.



When asked what skills and knowledge she gained from YAA CAT, Helen mentioned communication and leadership skills. Having leadership roles within the team had led to personal growth such as in making decisions and helping others. The team also provided her with more experience in working with the community. She also gained knowledge on dating/domestic violence and being able to spread the message that dating/domestic violence happens in our communities too and we should do something about it. Lastly, the YTP guided her in taking further personal action to address dating/domestic violence, such as joining the YAA CAT.

A message that Helen would like to send the community is to be open-minded in talking about dating/domestic violence. People are usually afraid and try to avoid negative situations; however, our communities should try to listen and understand the issue/situation before disregarding it.

#### Human Rights vs. Women's Rights: Assessing their Intersection Through a Different Lens

Wednesday, March 25, 12:00—1:30PM

Center for Education of Women, 330 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor, 48104

Presenter: Mallika Dutt, Breakthrough

There are currently two major forms of discourse on the intersection of human rights and culture. One form sees certain cultures as being in opposition to women's human rights. The other, as identified by the United Nations, asserts that people have a human right to maintain their own culture rather than be subsumed by the culture of the majority. Mallika Dutt believes that human rights should be seen in a third way, as a part of a culture. Through this lens, she will discuss how a culture and its values may be supportive of women's human rights in some respects and restrictive of them in others. Her presentation will address some of the misconceptions about women's rights and culture that exist between different religions and ethnicities. Ms. Mallika Dutt directs Breakthrough, an international human rights organization that uses media, education, and pop culture to promote values of dignity, equality, and justice. Breakthrough themes include women's rights, sexual and reproductive rights, immigrant rights, racial, ethnic and caste equality and religion and peace. Please register online at [www.cew.umich.edu](http://www.cew.umich.edu) or by calling (734) 764-6005. Deadline to register: Friday, March 20th.

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