

March 2007



Monthly Visions

Taking a Look Back

By Joon Choi, MSW*

It was the summer of 2001 when Emilee Thompson, Mieko Yoshihama and I first began discussing what we could do to address the issue of violence against women (VAW) in Southeast Michigan's Asian communities. New Visions was soon conceived. At the time, we were not sure what would be the best way to proceed. However, we knew that it would require the entire community's commitment to break the silence surrounding VAW, and we understood the importance of challenging attitudes that ignored or accepted violence. We understood that a new vision was needed to help create Asian communities where women are safe, and that was how *New Visions* became our organization's name. Each Asian community may have



different visions to create a safe community, but we firmly believed that community members know how best to achieve their visions of a safe community.

With this new vision in mind, we began talking with Asian community members and domestic violence organizations. In March 2002, after months of planning, we held the first meeting of Asian community members and representatives from several domestic violence organizations. Those who gathered that

night knew that it would be a long and hard journey to accomplish our mutual vision, but they still came. Since then, New Visions' members continue to work towards addressing and ending VAW in Asian communities. Whether it be through small gatherings or community-wide events, New Visions continues to dialogue with community members about their visions of safe communities and how to achieve them.

We asked community members about their knowledge and attitudes about domestic violence and strategies to end it in Asian communities through surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Through the New Visions' kick-off event in October 2004, where the findings of the assessments were shared with community members by skit performances, and the *Creating New Visions* event in May 2005, where we celebrated the strength and courage of women impacted by domestic violence by vocal and dance performance, we realized how theater and other creative arts could be utilized as effective and powerful tools to engage community members in dialogue about the issue. Since then, theater has become one of the primary strategies for New Visions efforts to achieve its vision of safe Asian communities.

Over the past five years, some community members and domestic violence organizations have left New Visions due to personal or organizational reasons. I am one of those who have left New Visions due to my family's relocation to Virginia. It was hard for me to leave New Visions behind, and even harder to say goodbye to the members who worked so tirelessly; they became researchers, event organizers, playwrights, actors, and most importantly, leaders. However, I was comforted knowing that I was leaving New Visions in good hands. More community members and organizations may leave New Visions in the future, but, I believe, many more will join its efforts to stop VAW in Asian communities. I am also certain that those who are no longer members of New Visions are still pursuing their visions of safe Asian communities in their own ways.



* Joon Choi is the Co-found and former Project Coordinator of New Visions. Currently, Ms. Choi lives in Richmond, Virginia and is pursuing her doctoral degree in Social Work at the Virginia Commonwealth University.



Celebrating New Visions' Five-Year Anniversary

By Emilee Coulter-Thompson, MSW*

I am deeply honored to help New Visions commemorate five years of outstanding community organizing. In this brief time, New Visions has grown from three women strategizing to hundreds of community members mobilizing to end violence against women in Asian communities. New Visions has blazed an impressive trail, successfully securing grant funding, assessing community attitudes, and launching Community Action Teams, events, a website and publications, all with modest (yet very respectable!) financial resources.

Most importantly, I would like to recognize all New Visions members for their exceptional commitment and contributions. All of the representatives from community organizations also deserve praise for dedicating valuable staff time and resources to New Visions. Thank you all for having the courage to speak out about unpopular issues and for thinking outside the box to create these exciting initiatives. **You are the heart of New Visions, and your leadership, creativity, and vision are an inspiration to communities everywhere.**

While New Visions is a regional, grassroots project, its work is connected to a global movement to end violence against women. Amidst this challenging political climate, which limits the resources that non-citizens can access to obtain essential services such as health care, New Visions' efforts are more critical than ever. We must never stop envisioning a world of equality, justice, and liberation – a world in which “Asian women are safe, and Asian communities are free of violence.”

** Emilee Coulter-Thompson is the Co-founder of New Visions. Ms. Coulter-Thompson lives in Portland, Oregon and works in the Family Planning Program of the State of Oregon Public Health Division. She remains active in the anti-violence movement as an Instructor for the Sexual Assault Training Institute of the Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force.*



Empowering Culture in Domestic Violence Work: The New Visions Alliance

By Paula Callen, M.A.O.M*



When I attended the first New Visions planning meeting back in September 2002, I wasn't sure what role I would play but I knew something important was happening and I wanted to be part of it. I had no idea, at the time, of just how critical this group would be to domestic violence prevention in Michigan, or how this group would evolve into a model for community action that can be replicated in other communities of color or any community working to create a collaborative response to domestic violence. The most significant component of New Visions is the social and systems change it represents. New Visions began as an initiative to bring attention to the issue of domestic violence in Asian/Asian American communities. Under the thoughtful guidance of Dr. Mieko Yoshihama at the University of Michigan, School of Social Work, New Visions created a collective for important dialogue about domestic violence for the first time within the Asian/Asian American communities. And, it permitted domestic violence programs an opportunity to take part and hear what these communities thought about domestic violence programs.



New Visions' work in Southeast Michigan has resulted in the mobilization of domestic violence programs in the region to really examine whether their services and programs are socio-culturally competent for ALL the individuals they serve. New Visions challenges domestic violence programs to not allow culture to divide or exacerbate conditions that work as barriers for engagement, but consider instead what *can* happen if domestic violence programs make the commitment to provide multiethnic services. New Visions has been ardent in working with domestic violence programs to bridge gaps in service to Asian/Asian American survivors. Furthermore, through public education, community discussion forums, and community-wide events New Visions has really demonstrated that domestic violence programs must work harder to be representative of the communities it serves.

New Visions is a grassroots organization 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 are a partnership of local Asian communities and domestic violence-related agencies dedicated to one vision: “Asian women are safe, and Asian communities are free of violence.”

While the lessons learned have not always been easy to hear, New Visions work has given domestic violence programs an enormous opportunity to make domestic violence advocacy that is more effective, empowering and socio-culturally relevant. As domestic violence programs, we have an obligation to ensure that domestic violence survivors, regardless of their culture or ethnicity, receive services that are sensitive, respectful, supportive and safe. We should never stop looking for ways to improve the quality of our work and we should be open to developing the partnerships in the community that will help us achieve this goal. **Congratulations New Visions on the work you have done, and continue to do.**

** Paula Callen, M.A.O.M, is the Program Services Director at the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. Ms. Callen is a member of the Organizational Accountability Community Action Team.*

CAT Updates:

New Visions is always looking for individuals or organizations to work with in ending violence against women in Asian communities in Southeast Michigan.

If you would like to learn more about our organization, our activities, or how to get involved, please contact Eun Joo Lee

(eunj@umich.edu,

734.615.2106) or Neel

Pandya

(pandyan@umich.edu,

734.615.2123).

- **AA CAT:** On March 24, 2007, AA CAT members will present on "Theater as a Tool for Social Change" at the APA High School Students Conference to be held at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor).
- **OE CAT:** Korean community movie showing/discussion and Sikh community assessments are being planned. Please contact Eun Joo Lee for details.
- **APA Youth Theater Program (YTP) Planning Committee:** If you would like to be involved in planning and developing the YTP for Summer 2007, please contact Neel Pandya.

New Visions: Alliance to End Violence in Asian/Asian American Communities

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Review of *The Widow Colony*

By Raman Singh, Outreach & Engagement Community Action Team Member

The award-winning documentary, *The Widow Colony*, was screened for the first time in the Detroit area on February 24th, 2007.

The Widow Colony is about the women and children who survived the anti-Sikh massacre in New Delhi, India, in November of 1984. This 3-day massacre took place after the assassination of Prime Minister Indra Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguard.

The documentary covers the events of those three terrible days, as well as the ensuing 20 years. There were approximately 4,000 Sikhs killed in New Delhi alone, and yet not one person has been prosecuted for these crimes. It has been shown that members of Parliament and the police were directly responsible for instigating the violence.

It is an important story on many levels. It demonstrates the maltreatment of a minority population by the government, police and mobs in the largest democracy in the world. It also shows the unfair bias of the legal system,

International Women's Day: March 8th

The International Women's Day (IWD) has been celebrated annually around the world on March 8th. Since 1975, every year, various organizations celebrate the day with large-scale and local activities to honor women's advancement as well as continue to pursue women's equality in all aspects of life. To women around the world, IWD symbolizes an opportunity to review women's advancement for equality, peace, and development as well as to unite, network, and mobilize for meaningful change. This year's theme for IWD is "Ending Impunity for Violence Against Women and Girls." Violence against women (VAW) is prevalent in all societies regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and disability. VAW includes domestic violence, sexual assault, female genital mutilation, trafficking, child marriage, female infanticide, rape as mechanism of war, and others.

To honor IWD this year, New Visions organized an event at the University of Michigan School of Social Work on March 6th, 2007. The event included a PowerPoint presentation on the history of IWD, its significance, and women activists from the past and present. The presentation featured activists such as Susan B. Anthony, a social activist who lobbied against slavery and for women's rights, Mukhtar Mai, a survivor of gang-rape in Pakistan who spoke out against the violence through a legal battle despite the cultural taboos against talking about such issues, and Asha Haji Elmi, a Somali activist against female genital mutilation.

New Visions also screened a short film entitled, "A Nice Arrangement," directed by Gurinder Chadha. The film follows a young Indian bride as she explores with her divorced sister the notion of marrying the "perfect" cultural choice for their parents. After the film, there was a discussion among audience members about how socio-cultural issues (e.g. religion, role of women, and views on marriage) affect choices that women make in their lives.

For more information on IWD, please visit,
<http://www.internationalwomensday.com/about.asp>

Monthly Visions is a collaborative project between New Visions and authors. The views of the authors may or may not reflect the views of New Visions. We encourage submissions (poetry, artwork, articles, short stories, prose in English or your native language) to further the mission and philosophy of New Visions. Submitters will work with New Visions staff to ensure content is consistent with its philosophy and mission. For more information about the newsletter, please e-mail us at monthlyvision@umich.edu.

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particularly toward those who are poor and working class.

The documentary focuses on the stories and experiences of Sikh women during the massacre. These women spoke about witnessing their husbands, brothers, fathers and sons being killed right in front of them. They also described how they were gang-raped, and made homeless and sent to refugee camps.

Despite these crimes of violence, these women have no platform in the political or legal system, and many are still being subjected to threats and intimidation.

For more information on this documentary, please visit

<http://www.thewidowcolony.com/index.php>

