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since 1983

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steppin' out



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

The Northwest Afrikan American Ballet took the stage in a whirl of rhythm and color Dec. 1, as the opening performance at World AIDS Day ceremonies held at the Portland Art Museum's North Wing. Some 550 participants attended. The event was sponsored in part by Metropolitan Community Church, the Portland Area Business Association and the Urban League.

guest editorial

Bully for you

Portland needs services to help men who are victims of intimate violence

by E. Ann Hinds

After attending a recent Kaiser Permanente Conference on domestic violence, it struck me again just how much denial, invisibility and stigma is attached to the concept of men being abused by men in our culture.

In Portland, there are still no services available for men who need to find safe shelter to escape abusive domestic relationships. There are no resources for young men who want to end a "career" in the sex industry. There is certainly no social support evident in our sexual minority communities for men who are victims of intimate violence. What can be done to get this issue out of the closet and to begin to address the needs of countless men who find themselves in intolerable situations?

The resources in this town do at least exist to enable help for women—although those resources are stretched taut. The Council for Prostitution Alternatives is struggling just to stay alive. The shelter at Bradley Angle House is always full.

We can be thankful that the services for women include lesbians. Much work has been done by domestic violence shelters in the past few years to make sure that issues of same-sex violence among women are addressed. But knowing what to do and finding the resources to provide the services remain separate issues.

Other important aspects of domestic violence addressed at the conference included abuse of the elderly, the disabled and U.S. residents who don't speak English or who are trapped by immigration laws in situations of violence. These problems are wide-ranging and cross gender and socio-economic lines. It was reassuring to see that health care providers are making themselves aware of indicators and methods of intervention, creating new avenues for support.

We live in a culture that promotes violence. Men have to break the stereotypes and the constant messages that define them as people who can't feel, can't cry, must take it like a man—or worse—dish it out in order to be manly. This analogy

can also apply to women who don't identify as female and who search for ways to manifest behaviors other than those imposed by our culture's view of women as vulnerable or powerless. "Taking power" can go too far when we translate it as power over another.

For those of us who are targets of another's abuse, internalized homophobia can feed into situations where the abuser perceives us to be weak or worthless, especially if we buy into those messages and behave as if we are undeserving.

The main message from the conference about same-sex relationship violence, whether man to man or woman to woman, is to view the dynamics of the relationship over time rather than looking at a specific incident. Same-sex couples may appear to be equal, but over time, if there is one who is more consistently the underdog, take stock. If you suffer abuse, seek help. And don't stop until you get it! Talk to someone you can trust. Isolation, invisibility and familiarity with the role (whether as perpetrator or victim) are key factors in abusive relationships.

If you are outside the relationship, you can help by listening well, offering support and reiterating for someone the ways in which they have succeeded in providing for themselves. A sense of economic dependence keeps anxiety high and independence at bay. Breaking a cycle wherein a pattern of relating has become an identity may feel impossible: patience, willingness and persistence are basic ingredients to healing.

Remember, the only difference between violence against a queer kid on the playground and a partner in the home may be the level of intimacy.

For more information on domestic violence contact the Bradley-Angle House Crisis Line at 281-2442. To volunteer at Bradley-Angle House, call 282-9940.

For information on how to escape prostitution, or to volunteer, contact the Council for Prostitution Alternatives at 282-1082.

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