

This is the third in a series of reports on issues of interest to kids by the young journalists of Children's PressLine.

The youth journalism program gives children and youths an opportunity to represent themselves in the media. It trains kids, ages 8-18, to interview their peers on issues that directly affect them and publish these stories in newspapers and Web sites. Visit [www.cplmedia.org](http://www.cplmedia.org) for more information or to submit story ideas.



**Keiasia Young, 18, (right) at Children's Aid Society program discussion and "Veronica" share personal experiences of abusive relationships.** Photos by Anne Lai/CPL Media

# Fighting back against abuse

BY PRINCESS WEEKES

LAST MONTH, Michael Silva, 16, was stabbed to death by his girlfriend's ex-boyfriend. According to reports, the ex-boyfriend had come to the girl's E. 163rd St. apartment with the intent of hurting her.

The incident is just one of many abusive relationships happening to teens in the Bronx.

According to the New York City Risk Behavior Survey, 10% of teens report being hit or slapped, and 7% report being physically forced to have sex.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, dating violence was more prevalent among black students (14.2%) and Hispanic students (11.1%), a large demographic in the Bronx.

However, Bronx teens say they are getting little education on how to detect signs of abuse and what to do if it happens to them.

Bronx teen Alhaedge Perez heard about the abuse of her school

## But too little domestic-violence education – kids

friend. "She was abused because her boyfriend was really jealous," said Perez, 18. "I know many teenagers that think every relationship is like this. I feel like they do not know the difference because they are only focused on the good, but not looking on the negatives."

Danielle Luciano, 15, actually witnessed the abuse of her friend. "He pushed her, shoved her really hard onto the wall, shook her and then smacked her," said Danielle. "I was pretty aggravated that she let that happen."

Many of these abused teens lack awareness of what abuse really is.

"I think they know the basics about it, but when it happens to them, it's like different," said Karen Leiva, 16, a participant in the Children's Aid Society's teen dating violence awareness program.

Veronica (not her real name), was only 15 when she got involved in her first abusive relationship. She

is now 25 and just a few years ago broke the cycle.

Her last relationship opened her eyes, and made her contact the Children's Aid Society for help. "One day I received a phone call that my daughter was at the hospital for brain trauma. She was 3 at the time," Veronica said. "My daughter was sent into emergency brain surgery. Before she flatlined she said, '[Veronica's boyfriend] punched me.'"

When questioned by a police detective if her boyfriend was violent, Veronica said, "He only pushed me and punched me before. But that's it. Nothing serious. [The female detective] looked at me and said, 'Honey, that's domestic violence.'"

Often, it takes dramatic events such as these to break the cycle of abuse that goes on because young people are often unable to detect signs of abuse or stop it when it starts.

To counteract this, two organizations have formed in the Bronx. They aim to educate young people on how to be in healthy relationships.

"Everybody gets sex education in schools, but no one teaches them how to have healthy relationships," said Kerry Moles, director of Family Wellness program at the Children's Aid Society, which runs Teens Against Relationship Abuse.

The Children's Aid Society discussion participant Keiasia Young, 18, wasn't interested in the program at first, but now realizes how important it is. "I've been in situations where I've been, you know, hit before," she said. "But never anything serious other people have been in." Moles added, "TARA can make teen violence and teen relationship abuse prevention a part of the health curriculum in schools from an early age."

Along with TARA, the

organization Start Strong Bronx is a program created to prevent dating violence in the Bronx.

"We see there's a growing level of teen violence, teen domestic abuse and teen relationship abuse," said Ruben Diaz Jr., Bronx Borough president, an advocate for Start Strong Bronx.

"Part of the Start Strong Bronx program," Diaz said, "is there'll be a tracking mechanism for individuals for four years, throughout their high school years. Hopefully we'll have a healthy cohort of healthy individuals."

The possibility of teen domestic abuse awareness programs spreading seemed to excite Young.

"I think that if it was talked about more in school, that more girls would know what signs to look for when it starts to happen," she said. "Cause I think people don't notice the signs."

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