WHAT IS SOCIAL ACTIVISM, EXACTLY?

When we think of social activism, a definite image often comes to mind. We envision people taking to the streets, marching and carrying signs proclaiming their cause to the world. Or we envision a crowd gathered in a public arena, listening as a series of speakers fire up the crowd to take action in support of their cause.

While marches and rallies are time-honored forms of social activism, there are numerous ways for people to get involved in working for social change. Other actions qualifying as social activism range from community education to involvement in coalitions that work for change and writing letters to legislators or television show sponsors. Activism can be very public, or it can be a behind-the-scenes endeavor (an important factor for trauma survivors with safety concerns).

Here are just a few examples:

• **Lobbying.** This includes tracking public policy and legislation that has the potential to impact the people we serve, and persuading elected officials to make the appropriate decisions. Lobbying activities can range from calling or writing legislators to testifying before legislative committees and organizing formal Lobby Days.

• **Public education.** A variety of public education efforts can be used to change societal beliefs about interpersonal violence and the people victimized by it. Schools, places of worship, civic organizations and public television stations are just a few of the venues that advocates and community partners can target for educational presentations.

• **Media campaigns.** This can include paid advertising in news outlets or on billboards, or free media coverage in the form of news articles, radio or television programming or public service announcements. This can also include monitoring advertising and other media for accurate or inaccurate messages about the people we serve as well as messages that seem to glorify violence or promote negative stereotypes, and contacting editors or sponsors to let them know our feelings about these messages.

• **Grass-roots organizing.** This means encouraging as many people as possible to join us in all of the above efforts. There is strength in numbers. One person or organization can too often be easily ignored. When several people or organizations join together, people begin to take notice.