

## **Some "Proud to be Pinay" Thoughts Regarding V-DAY Pinay Hawaii**

Those of us who have been advocates and allies in the violence against women movement are often struck by what Eve Ensler refers to as the "normalization of violence". In some ways, our communities have turned their backs on the violence women experience daily in their lives, including battering, rape, assault, torture and trafficking. In Hawaii, we have been silent about the disproportionate rate of domestic violence related homicides against Pilipina victims.

One of the purposes of the Vagina Monologues is to encourage women to "break their silence" and increase community awareness of the many forms of violence perpetrated against women. V-DAY Pinay Hawaii seeks to support Pilipinas in reclaiming our bodies whilst urging the community to take ownership of protecting our women.

Today we are celebrating the intersection of the individual Pilipina spirit and the Pilipino collective, the individual pain of violence and the historical oppression of our people and our women, the personal resistance to violence and the collective struggle of the Philippines.

This play is dedicated to the comfort women and other sisters in the Philippines who were raped by the Japanese soldiers during World War II. Their torture is not unlike the modern day slavery of sex trafficking experienced by thousands of Pilipinas and other women living in impoverished nations...they too must be honored.

And let's not forget our local sisters who are survivors in every sense, surviving everyday, some who are here reclaiming their bodies and those who do not yet find the support to do so. We honor the women with which we work, those survivors who are transitioning into a life of peace, self-sufficiency and autonomy. We honor and uplift immigrant survivors of abuse, who struggle against numerous barriers in their attempt to access services, linguistically, and culturally.

We are also raising our voices for our local sisters in Hawaii who have not survived, who were taken by abusers and rapists. How will we continue to honor them beyond this night?

In the struggle to revitalize the movement, the V-DAY Campaign has also become a powerful vehicle to uplift and support the work being done in anti-violence organizations and within grassroots settings worldwide. The idea is that in turn these organizations will be re-energized to continue the work of ending violence against women.



So today we appreciate the opportunity to spotlight the work of the Pilipina Rural Project (PRP) of the Domestic Violence Clearinghouse and Legal Hotline. We are one of the beneficiaries of this momentous event and we share our gratitude with all of you for taking responsibility for this issue and supporting Pilipina sisters, mothers, grandmothers and daughters living in Hawaii.

PRP is one of the first and quite possibly the only current anti-violence project in the nation to provide bicultural/bilingual advocacy services, cultural sensitivity training to service providers, leadership development of survivors and capacity building for the community. Our goal is to utilize grassroots approaches to raise awareness and build capacity of the community to take ownership of the issue of domestic violence.

In the past, we have hosted Hawaii's first-ever conference on "Domestic Violence In the Pilipino Community". We have conducted leadership development trainings for Pilipina immigrant and local survivors, community leaders as they accept the responsibility to be "peer advocates" for other survivors who are still silenced or ambivalent about their abuse.

We continue to work with community and national partners such as the Family Violence Prevention Fund, the Pilipino Coalition for Solidarity, the Interagency Council of Oahu and other allies to raise awareness and build the capacity of the Pilipino community to address violence by its own terms.

We continue to organize around issues such as language access at all state levels, healthcare, faith-based outreach and working with boys and men to end violence in the lives of Pilipinas.

Our talented and community-focused Project Coordinator, Helena Manzano, leads our work through her community building and mobilization organizing. She has, amongst other accomplishments, worked to establish Pilipina advisory groups on Oahu, Maui, Molokai and Lanai.

Our bilingual/bicultural advocates Cristina Arias (Tagalog) and Lydia Abajo-Quides (Ilocano) are the only case managers in the State whose work focuses solely on intervention for Pilipinas (particularly immigrant survivors) Their work honors the regional and cultural world view and values of Pilipina survivors that influence them as they attempt to stop the violence in their lives.

Perhaps our true link to the community is through our advisory groups—a collective of Pilipinas on various islands who are survivors, community leaders, and service providers. I want to take a moment to uplift the work of our advisory, particularly on Oahu. The advisory is made up of community leaders and self-identified survivors of abuse who guide our community work and provide peer support for survivors. The Oahu advisory group has been instrumental in supporting the work of V-Day Pinay Hawaii, as individual participants of the cast and crew as well as through the behind-the-scenes work



of building community readiness and support for this event. We also want to thank the community of women and men—our leaders, our neighbors, our faith-based—who have been allies in the work of PRP and in supporting tonight's event.

When Grace Caligtan, Teen Alert Coordinator of DVCLH, shared her vision of a Pilipina intergenerational Vagina Monologues with PRP staff and the Oahu advisory group, there was an instant embrace of the significance of such an event. Grace's work, energy and leadership must also be uplifted tonight.

V-Day is a global movement. Today, we have taken steps to build the movement to end violence against Pilipinas. We must challenge ourselves to maintain the vision and energy created by the cast and crew. What is our strategic plan to protect our women, given that more of our women are dying in the hands of violence? How do we support the hundreds of women who are unable to come forward to night, who do not feel safe to reclaiming their bodies, who do not yet dare to value and hold sacred their human worth?

We must accept and honor the gift being given today and embrace that it could truly be the beginning of a cultural transformation.

As Eve Ensler says, "The struggle is the change". As we struggle together tonight, let's begin the dialogue that will create safety and support for Pilipinas everywhere. The cultural transformation begins with you.

In spirit,  
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