

"From this day forward, I promise to be part of the solution in ending violence against women."



Massachusetts White Ribbon Day Campaign

A Men's Initiative Project of Jane Doe Inc.

DISPLAYS OF CHARACTER: Men Reimagining Manhood



Andy Polanco

Haverhill High School Student Support Specialist
Haverhill Community Violence Prevention Coalition

Andy Polanco first began working with survivors as a sexual assault advocate with the YWCA of Greater Lawrence. Since then, he has branched out to become a part of the Haverhill Community Violence Prevention Coalition and gone on to work at Haverhill High School as a Drop-out Prevention and Student Support Specialist where he gets a chance to work directly with young men. Andy stresses the importance of working with young men in particular because of the attitudes that they sometimes come to adopt. "The earlier we can engage young men around this issue, the more they will bring it into their everyday lives and talk openly about it."

Andy signed on as one of the first WRD Ambassadors because it reflected his commitment to encouraging men to discuss the problem openly with others. "We have to show young men especially that these things are okay to talk about. So many men say that they never thought this was something that they could openly discuss before." He suggests that many men should better educate themselves about these issues so that they can have a more profound difference. "When I bring up how women are dying every day from domestic violence, these guys I'm talking to are shocked. They never comprehended before that something so awful could be happening so much."

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From his vantage point, men need to become more involved to reduce stigma and take ownership of this issue - without taking over. "Women have been doing this work for years, but guys are fairly new to it. Some young guys think that all men treat women badly. So when you have men standing up and saying that this is not okay, it sends a strong message." In order to get men to realize how destructive some views and comments about women are, Andy personalizes the problem for any man he discusses it with. "When they make a comment about a woman, I tell them to imagine someone saying that or doing that to their sister, their mother, their daughter. By doing that, they see how hurtful it really is." He encourages all men to do this when they hear others make a sexist joke, thereby reinforcing the importance of the issue.



While Andy is encouraged by some change he has seen, he cautions against comfort and complacency. "One thing that I have learned is that we still have a long way to go. This isn't something that is going to change overnight." However, he is optimistic that this type of work can make a profound difference. "Something that we have to realize is that this isn't just a campaign, it's a lifestyle. We have to be patient and keep encouraging men, keep speaking up, keep putting these ideas out there." Getting this message into the media, on TV, on the radio, better allows us to spread the message of ending men's violence against women. Since these are the media sources that so many people tune into, they can also help provide the solution.

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