From its inception in 1988, The Coalition against Domestic Violence (CADV) has worked to ensure that children, women and men in Trinidad and Tobago live in an environment free from physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological violence.

Through policy influence, advocacy, provision of services, and education, CADV as a coalition of organizations contributes to building a culture of equality, social justice, peace, and empowerment. CADV works to end the crisis of gender-based violence (GBV) and advance gender equality and non-discrimination.

CADV recognizes the many ways in which family violence impact communities. It disrupts community and intra-familial relationships, isolates people from social networks, encourages negative norms and perpetuates social exclusion. This creates the impetus for locally developed responses that are rooted in equal knowledge, experience, commitment and ideas of partners. As a result, we have been promoting the bystander approach as critical to ending family violence.

In this special edition of the Coalition Pulse, there is a focus on the 16 Days of Activism and the various ways in which communities are taking up the mantle to put the spotlight on violence against women and girls. We take the opportunity to highlight some of the creative ways in which communities are responding as active bystanders.
The idea for the 16 Days of Activism to end violence against women started in 1991, with a small group of women from 21 countries attending the Centre for Women’s Global Leadership, Rutgers University. It was an all-age grouping of women committed to feminist activism for social change and human rights.

In thinking of how to bring visibility to violence against women experienced everywhere in the world, this group, amongst whom I numbered, resolved to start an annual campaign that would commence on November 25 and end on December 10 – a period of 16 days.

November 25 was the day designated by Latin American activists to honour the struggles of the three Mirabel sisters (Patricia, Minerva, Maria Teresa), who were assassinated by the forces of the dictator Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. December 10 is Human Rights Day.

The campaign, which has been endorsed by the UN, is commemorated in 186 countries. It brings attention to the pervasive violence and harm which women and girls experience because of their sex and gender.

While the campaign is led by the feminist movement, a range of civil society allies, government, trade unions, private sector and faith-based institutions participate. During this period we take stock of our progress and challenges and recommit to working harder and smarter to transform social norms towards zero tolerance for violence and gender inequality.

Notwithstanding this annual activism, we live in a world where the number of women harmed as a result of gender-based violence is not abating. Child sexual abuse is prevalent, as are sexual assaults. Sexual harassment is rampant in the streets, public transportation and the workplace.

And we now have a better appreciation of how many young women go missing, leaving families and communities with the dread of the unknown. Sometimes, the bodies of some of these young women are found. There is a national outcry and common grieving. But what then?
This August we commemorated the 30th anniversary of the Domestic Violence Act. We listened to the voices of those especially affected and to organizations providing services. While there has been some progress in the development of laws and the establishment of special units within the police service, we need a comprehensive strategy that can change the culture of tolerance of violence.

We need thoughtful public policy, well implemented, that addresses gender and other inequalities, and which promotes accountability for the protection, promotion and fulfilment of women’s rights. We need the education sector to be fully engaged in promoting the values of empathy and equality.

Police must act investigate and respond to reports of domestic violence; and families in crisis should have safe spaces to take refuge, including through well-supported NGO shelter services and transitional housing. The private sector should embrace the Domestic Violence Workplace Policy adopted by the Chamber of Commerce. Public transportation must be safe and accessible.

Women should have unimpeded access to reproductive services and especially so when they have been sexually assaulted. State policy should not be discriminatory as it is now with the exclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity as prohibited bases of discrimination under the Equal Opportunity Act.

The harms experienced by gender non-conforming people, including stigma, harassment and violence, must be named, recognized and redressed.

But we must do more. Still, too many women speak of indifferent policing, of court delays; of how poverty keeps them trapped; and of the difficulty of getting transition housing to keep themselves and their children safe. Unhealthy notions of masculinity based on models of power and control over women persist.

The crime and insecurity in Trinidad and Tobago will not be solved if inequalities and harmful gender norms persist. We all have obligations as bystanders to intervene and support those especially affected by gender-based violence.

- Roberta Clarke
Domestic violence does not stay at home. It follows both victims and perpetrators to the workplace. As such, the corporate sector shoulders a tremendous responsibility as part of a wider community approach to family violence. Since the launch of the DV Workplace Policy in 2019, CADV continues to partner with the private sector as part of a whole community approach to addressing family violence. CADV is actively promoting the adoption/integration of DV workplace policies as a demonstration of responsible corporate action. Companies have responded in several ways, apart from adopting the policy and sensitizing staff, they opted to support CADVs provision of psychosocial support services and prevention programmes.

Locally, companies such as First Citizens Bank, Scotia Bank, South Homes, Republic Bank, NLCB, Sagicor, Angostura and Massy Foundation and Loreal have contributed significantly to CADV’s work on the provision of psychosocial support services to victims. Other companies such as BHP, Heritage Petroleum, Global Financial Trinidad and Nagico preferred to support a prevention agenda through CADV’s education and outreach programme.

L’Oreal recently announced its commitment to supporting the work of CADV through a substantial grant to be utilized towards CADVs provision of psychosocial services. This grant is part of the company’s ongoing efforts to support women’s rights through its Fund for women. Sagicor embarked on a campaign called “Protect our Women” to bring awareness to GBV. The “Protect Our Women” campaign was in partnership with four NGOs, the Rape Crisis Society of Trinidad and Tobago, The Shelter, The Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and Families in action. For this year’s 16 Days campaign, Nagico partnered with CADV in producing DV messaging.

This is a tremendous effort by these companies. We are hoping that this trend will catch on and other companies will recognize the value in making family violence “their business.”
There is immense satisfaction derived when a community is able to band together in times of celebration but also in times of crisis. Communities are the eyes are ears of society and are well-positioned as first responders to tackle family violence. Figures indicate that 43 women and 2 girls were killed for 2021 already. The total number of deaths attributable to DV (both men and women) is 25. In the aftermath of these deaths, families and neighbours disclose knowledge of abuse, threats and often regret their failure to act or take the situation seriously.

The Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CADV) and UN Women under the Spotlight Initiative is closing off a project in two communities aimed at preparing local civil society organizations to lead the charge in addressing family violence. The goal of this project is to build the capacity within community-based organizations to reduce family violence due to the need for more predictable and accessible support to persons especially affected by family violence in areas outside of urban centres.

This project ensured that nine (9) participating organizations completed two phases of training. The first phase involved Understanding Gender-Based Violence, Developing and Sustaining Effective Networks and Peer Engagement and Networking. The second component focused on Advocacy and Community Action which involved participating organizations developing strategic action plans for implementation in their respective communities. The groups also identified and implemented campaigns during the 16 Days of Activism to end Gender-Based Violence which was observed from November 25th to December 10th, 2021.

In Rio Claro/Mayaro the community organizations prioritized activities that focused on building awareness in their communities around safer transportation for women and girls. They partnered with the Taxi Drivers Associations and utilized community announcements and social media for their campaign. The Tobago campaign was also an awareness campaign through the use of posters and banners placed in high traffic locations.

- Michelle Boiselle-Morris
Rio Claro Campaign

Tobago Campaign
This article is one of six articles featured annually in the Trinidad Express for the CADV’s 16 Days of Activism.

One of the most beautiful things we can do as a Clergy is to bring comfort and a sense of wholeness to members of our congregations and communities. In the height of pain, these persons bring you into the very private spaces of their lives as they struggle and trust your influence in the way their family relationships should be shaped.

As a newly ordained minister in October 2020, I officially entered this type of pastoral care during a pandemic where horrific stories emerged about persons being abused physically, sexually, emotionally, and verbally abused by some of their closest relatives.

Particularly, sexual abuse which has been couched as a marital duty instead of marital rape. Pregnancies lost due to abusive partners. Predators waiting to pounce on women in vulnerable financial positions.

Spiritual abuse from relatives and “pastors” who encouraged them to stay in marriages and homes despite years of violence and infidelity.

And the lingering trauma which hadn’t been addressed for years as persons were only now coming to terms with their past and present with no clue of the future.

They shared their deepest and darkest fears, often with disbelief that someone was actually listening and believed them. Many had never considered the situation from the perspective of justice and simply felt that nothing would or could change.

Was God someone they could count on to provide in their lives when spouses drifted away to lovers, leaving nothing for their own children? Is there really an “Abba” Daddy God who loved and cherished them but didn’t try to control their bodies and sexuality?

As much as we are called to be “set apart” from the world, the reality is that all churches contain a microcosm of the culture it belongs to... which means that GBV exists within this space too.

We cannot remain silent, apathetic or ignorant, but must learn to deal with the very real plague of GBV present in our congregations.
I propose these three steps to begin the transformation in our spaces:

- To be mindful of the painful lives and histories of the persons in our communities and congregations;
- To manage our responses to that pain in a way that facilitates long term healing; and
- To strive to ensure that we model the healthy love and types of relationships that reflect our beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours as a Church.

While some believe the term “trigger warning” can seem unnecessary or pandering to a “snowflake generation who need to toughen up”. I believe trigger warnings (TWs) are an act of love and care for our neighbours as we become more aware of the ways in which our people have suffered. Our language must be prophetic and seasoned with a grace that shows special care and inclusivity that will build our trust in each other as a community that can truly bear one another’s burdens.

Secondly, when we are exposed to these stories of pain, it’s tempting to have instant solutions. Give money. Convince the person to leave the home. Report the abuse to the police. Get a protection order. Hold a march or vigil. But nothing is ever so easy or so swift. There are processes that take time and effort. Therefore, we must be willing to play the long game; strategize and journey with others in ways that build them up for hope and a future, not dependent on others or failure when aid runs out.

These are only 16 Days of Activism to combat millennia of violence and inequity. It will take endurance and commitment.

Finally, let us admit that churches can also be a place of abuse…. A place where the marginalized who should find sanctuary are instead turned away, but also in more subtle ways, as misogyny remains very much at play in decision-making and even in the language of worship. Gaslighting does not just happen in romantic relationships but also in our own groups and committees. It also exists in the ways we belittle and attack youth and young women, members of the LGBTQ community and those who challenge traditions. Churches must have that reckoning to actively pursue non-violence within our own systems and behaviours – perhaps then we can be a more active voice in society as a genuine source of love.

As we contemplate and work, I leave you with the words of theologian Dr Cornel West, “Justice is what Love looks like in public, just like tenderness is what Love looks like in private.” The so-called private spaces in the homes must be challenged by those of us with the ability to pierce that veil so that GBV becomes unacceptable in all forms. Lives depend on it.

- Rev. Sanya Beharry
Change takes work. It requires an approach that considers and understands all moving parts of a system for it to be effective. When it comes to gender-based violence and ensuring healthy relationships, legislation alone cannot bring about change - it requires a cultural shift, one that is birthed out of gender-transformative education and action as well as challenging the status quo.

The CADV recently launched 'First Time Last Time', a programme that promotes healthy, respectful relationships amongst adolescents, ages 15 to 20 years, to mitigate violence in their intimate relationships. This programme will be piloted in two communities, Rio Claro/Mayaro and Tobago.

To ensure that the needs of the programme are accurately met, a project advisory group consisting of youth leaders from both communities was established, consisting of, Chrisette Benjamin, Akiel Forgenie, Wole Hislop, Shanice Noray, Jahaziel Ramrooop, Dayreon Mitchell, Aleah Holder, Renesa Joseph, Reon Lyons, and Andiesa Weste. This dynamic team seeks to guide the outputs of the First Time Last Time programme, holding it accountable to its mandate and agenda.

The revolution is a community effort, fully reviving the “it takes a village to raise a child” mantra. The revolution sees young people at the forefront challenging and changing norms, standing on the shoulders of feminist pioneers who powerfully advocated for justice and legislation like our Domestic Violence Act of 1991 which now provides a benchmark for our advocacy and aspirations. Young people need to see each other as powerful too, able to create safe and brave spaces to question beliefs and practices that reinforces a culture of violence with impunity.

According to Trinidad and Tobago’s 2021 National Youth Policy, young people, ages 10-35, make up approximately 40% of the country’s population. Whilst young people may have priorities of school and career, it is important that they are equipped with important life skills and knowledge that will help them become better oriented to engage in healthy and non-violent relationships.

The 2018 Inter-American Development Bank study revealed that 1 in 3 women in domestic partnerships experienced abuse. It is no secret that the first experience of violence for young people happens in the home. Experiencing violence even as a bystander is also a form of abuse.
Amidst the rampant COVID-19 pandemic, reports of domestic violence have skyrocketed. Back in January, the head of the TTPS' GBV Unit, Claire Guy-Alleyne, reported a 300% increase in domestic violence reports. The pandemic has undoubtedly exacerbated the instances of violence as more victims and survivors are stuck at home with their abusers. Whilst many state actions are reactionary, we must examine the root of gender-based violence; gender inequalities and gender stereotypes.

The *First Time Last Time* programme does just that. It creates a space for young people to move from just knowing to learning and questioning their realities. Examining their lived experiences and various types of relationships that they exist in, not just on a romantic level but in every instance of life. Providing avenues for young people to see themselves as experts by virtue of their lived experiences is important as we work towards empowerment and transformation. A major component of the *First Time Last Time* programme is the Train the Trainers phase where young adults from the identified pilot communities will be trained using the programme’s manual which will then equip them with a new skill set to now deliver the manual to the cohort of 15 to 20-year-olds.

This manual, ‘*Heart of Rights*’ is being authored by artist, academic, and PhD candidate in Cultural Studies at the University of the West Indies St. Augustine Campus, Amilcar Sanatan. Peer learning motivates young people to learn as they are able to develop trust through relatability and similarities. When we rethink change, we must think about how best can we structure messaging to ensure maximum impact? How can we remove unequal power structures that can hinder learning and the willingness to learn?

The *First Time Last Time* programme is rethinking change.

- Ashlee Burnett
A group of women from southern Trinidad and Tobago, inspired by Canadian artist Jamie Black’s initiative, came together to form the TTREDress Project. This project is a call to raise awareness of violence against women in our native land. Violence against women from all walks of life, whether the violence results in murder or continues as silenced abuse, must be stopped.

As women, we want to feel safe again. We want our men to treat us with respect and dignity. We want to feel safe to leave an abusive relationship without a threat to our lives. We do not be blamed for rape or abuse because of what we wore or what we said.

Our objective is to focus on the issue and bring more awareness to missing and murdered women/girls by REDRESS-ing the violence against women in T&T. Our mission is to raise awareness on the high levels of crime against our women/girls, the risks they face, and the respect they deserve.

We’re part of a chat group of past St. Joseph Convent San Fernando classmates who keep in touch regularly, discussing international/daily events that occur and are of interest and concern to us.

We continue to be horrified by the violence being perpetrated against women/girls in T&T! More than a statistic, we are mothers, daughters, women...redressing violence against us.

The original REDress project was initiated by Jaime Black. The REDress Project focuses on the issue of missing or murdered Aboriginal women across Canada. It is an installation art project based on an aesthetic response to this critical national issue...as a visual reminder of the staggering number of women who were killed or cannot be accounted for.

We felt the need to adopt a localized approach to this project to highlight what is happening right here in our country.
The TT REDress Project
TTFA 'Draws The Line'

The Trinidad and Tobago Football Association (TTFA) is the governing body of football in Trinidad and Tobago. It is a member of FIFA and CONCACAF and is responsible for governing amateur and professional football, including the Men's and Women's National Teams.

The TTFA launched its adoption of the Draw the Line Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign during the Women’s friendly international matches against Panama in October 2021.

Football holds a special place in the consciousness of our society in Trinidad and Tobago. It has a transformative voice, with a far reach, that can connect with communities as a unifying agent. TTFA recognizes this responsibility and seeks to use its platform to highlight the ills, challenges, and struggles that women face to be respected and live safely in our communities.
TTFA currently operates women’s teams from the U13 age group to Seniors where many players have fallen victim to GBV and are members of a society where GBV is a prevalent and terrifying issue.

To this end, the TTFA not only understands its responsibility to make a stand against GBV, taking the opportunity to do so while utilizing the faces and voices of strong women who are role models in our society. We believe that women in sport can play a pivotal role in bringing about change. While we recognize the power of women to effect change, male voices are also vital for discussing the way forward in eradicating GBV, as such we intend to add our male team members to the cause.

The TTFA is firm in its support that we must all do our part to Draw the Line Against Gender-Based Violence.

At the friendly international match on 25th October 2021 at the Ato Boldon Stadium in Couva, the Panama Women’s National Team joined the Trinidad and Tobago Women’s National Team in taking the field with a line of paint drawn across their cheeks to show solidarity with the campaign and to highlight the need for a stronger focus to be placed on the fight against gender-based violence.

This action represented the first pillar of the ‘Draw the Line Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign’ – Awareness. The following trenches in this campaign will focus on Action and Education. The educational component, which will be piloted in 2022, will see both our women’s and men’s national football teams from youth to senior level attend seminars on Gender Sensitivity, dismantling gender stereotypes, Emotional Intelligence, Non-Violent Communication approaches, and working towards ending harmful behaviour that perpetuates rape culture and other forms of violence.
The Rio Claro Sporting and Leisure Foundation is a non-profit organization that was incorporated on 27 September 2017, under the Trinidad and Tobago Companies (1995) Act. The main purpose of the organization is to provide an avenue for children and 'children at heart' to engage with their community through sporting and leisure-based activities. We believe that these types of activities can be an effective and long-term deterrent to criminality as well as provide therapeutic support.

This year for the 16 Days of Activism, the Rio Claro Sporting and Leisure Foundation (RCSLF) has chosen to raise collective community awareness through its current initiative the ‘Clothesline Project’. The RCSLF has also chosen to create its own ‘Safe Community Spaces’ for local women to share their experiences on GBV. It is the Foundation’s hope that these actions will contribute to the incremental elimination of this violence.

The purpose of the Clothesline Project is to increase awareness on the impact of violence and abuse, to honour survivors’ strength, and to provide an alternate avenue for them to courageously ‘break the silence’ that often surrounds their experience.

The Project is a visual display of T-shirts made by GBV survivors which are hung on a clothesline. On these T-shirts, each individual illustrates a personal message on GBV. How do we finally put an end to the ongoing social global pandemic of gender-based violence?

Today in our world, all people should be forever vigilant of the scourge of GBV in all of its loathsome forms. GBV bows to no class, creed, race, or ethnicity.

Gender-Based Violence seems to be currently on the prevailing sociological philosophy of patriarchalism re: a ‘male-dominated society’. This contrasts sharply with the Eastern sociological philosophy of matriarchalism; female-dominated sociological principles and philosophy.

Historically, the records of human existence would have shown that in Matriarchal societies there were few incidences of crimes committed generally and crimes committed against either sex in particular.
Persons who were brought up in a home where domestic violence was prevalent, are more likely to inflict violent acts on their children, spouses, neighbours, animals, and in some cases even themselves.

The question that desperately needs to be answered by our society is this, “How do we finally put an end to the ongoing social global pandemic of gender-based violence?

The Foundation offers the following suggestions:

- Be your brother’s keeper
- Respect all persons, regardless of gender or orientation
- Support efforts to raise awareness and eradicate GBV.
- Develop a ‘Common-Unity Based Solutions Approach’ to eliminate GBV.
On September 30th 2021, The Shelter for Battered Women and Children officially re-opened its doors with the blessings of The Honourable Stuart Young, Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, The Honourable Donna Cox, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, and Ms. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt. Ms. Mahabir-Wyatt opened the Shelter in 1987 and at the re-opening the Shelter was dedicated to her. The Shelter provides a safe and secure haven for survivors of domestic violence and their children. The Shelter offers temporary housing, counselling services, medical care, therapeutic counselling, skill set training, legal support and school placement for the children of residents, which are all a part of its holistic healing programme.