

WAKE-UP CALL

Our community is growing; day by day the population increases. In response to the changing social, economic and political landscape we have witnessed community members assume leadership roles in all aspects of community life including religious groups, social associations, political parties and trade organizations. We salute our community leaders and commend them for their willingness to share their invaluable commitment of time, energy and efforts to benefit our community associations. We are all indebted to our community leaders because their work exacts a price; it is not free for those willing to participate fully. Public criticism is their constant companion. Their family and friends are often impacted, too. Our leaders deserve special recognition for their efforts.

Despite the mammoth efforts of our community leadership complex social, cultural, political and legal issues force us to extend ourselves beyond our current reach. While many of us have successfully adapted to the social customs and norms of American society, many community members are struggling to adapt – not out of defiance but out of ignorance. Many new comers lack critical information about American customs and societal expectations. Their lack of knowledge can and does make them vulnerable to the American legal system. Language barriers and cultural differences can exacerbate the situation.

For example, the American legal system protects citizens from acts of corporal punishment perpetrated by family members. Domestic violence and child abuse are serious crimes. In American society, parents must obey the law when disciplining their children. Using excessive force or physical punishment may constitute child abuse. Issues of child neglect and child endangerment can result in the removal of the child from the home. Not only will children be placed in protective custody; parents are subject to legal prosecution. To protect our children, families and community we need to provide sufficient resources to eradicate ignorance and educate citizens.

Similarly, domestic violence is not only morally and socially discouraged it is illegal. Men and women are subject to legal prosecution in cases of domestic violence. Abusive behavior either physical or emotional is illegal. We must know the law to protect our family and ourselves. And, we must protect our family from acts of violence within the home. Cultural differences and religious customs will not excuse us from prosecution. The laws of the United States are blind to ignorance. There are no excuses for violence in the home – none!

Many members of our community need guidance. It is our civic duty to inform and educate community members. We favor a pro-active approach and we recommend a prevention program such as the New Immigrant Orientation Services. Education is the key ingredient. Community members need information on a massive scale. We believe an effective education and prevention program is essential. We envision an enrichment / education program with the following components: parenting classes, police and community relations programs, cultural awareness programs, access to multi-cultural counseling services, family counseling, domestic violence prevention programs, anger management classes, ESL programs, community health services, family planning, money management.

We know we cannot accomplish our goals overnight; this is a long process. We need the commitment of our community leaders and the assistance from local Foundations and Government. We need to develop a systematic and comprehensive community action plan to build a healthy and productive community. We urge our leaders to unite the strength and resources within our community to achieve our goals.