

OVERVIEW

A brief history of Word and Action

“Word and Action is dedicated to respecting, honoring, protecting, and healing the children and families whom we serve.”

WORD & ACTION, INC.
“Hear The Silent Cries”



History and Milestone of our Organization

Word and Action (W&A) is a nonprofit organization that was created in 2009 by psychotherapist, Georges Bossous, Jr., who after many years of practice, had identified a need for cultural competency when treating Haitian victims of child sexual abuse and their affected loved ones. Mr. Bossous’ conviction about this need was a result of his encounter with a 14-year-old Haitian-American girl who was impregnated by her 70-year-old stepfather and whose mother was not supportive during treatment. Where his peers seemed baffled by the mother’s lack of support for her victimized daughter, Mr. Bossous, armed with a deeper understanding of the Haitian culture, understood that the mother was displaying signs of victimization herself. A second case, involving another 14-year-old Haitian-American girl who was sexually abused on multiple occasions by several men, was just as horrific, and her abuse had taken place when she was between the ages of 4 and 13. This compelled Mr. Bossous to write an outline of a culturally based approach to sexual abuse prevention and treatment: *“Strengthening the Family.”*

Some Facts

- ❖ 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys are sexually abused before the age of 18.
- ❖ 1 in 5 children is sexually solicited on the Internet.
- ❖ Nearly 70% of all reported sexual assaults, including those on adults, occur up to age 17 and under.
- ❖ The median age for reported sexual abuse is 9 years old.



*CHILDREN AND ADULTS DEPICTED IN THIS DOCUMENT ARE VOLUNTEER MODELS AND NOT ACTUAL VICTIMS. WE THANK THEM FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION AND THE CHILDREN’S PARENTS WHO GAVE US PERMISSION TO USE THEIR PICTURES.

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This outline was shared with friends and co-workers and became the catalyst for the launching of Word and Action (W&A). Mr. Bossous’ understanding of the Haitian paternalistic culture, coupled with his years of expertise as a psychotherapist and passion for the cause, fueled his desire for addressing the issue of cultural competency in prevention and treatment of child sexual abuse affecting the Haitian Community. As a result, W&A’s goal is to respond more effectively to the child sexual abuse “epidemic.” W&A was officially incorporated on September 16, 2009. The agency has been conducting various fundraising activities to support its work in the counties of Miami-Dade and Broward. The agency is currently very active in numerous seminars, panel discussions, conferences, and trainings pertaining to Child Sexual Abuse.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW:

W&A’s program is comprised of three components: 1) community-wide outreach, to provide education and raise awareness about child sexual abuse in a culturally competent way to the Haitian and Haitian-American community in Miami-Dade County; 2) cultural competency training, specifically



Word and Action Therapy Department

An experienced, state-licensed clinician leads our therapy department. W&A hires licensed and/or Master’s-level therapists who demonstrate a high level of competence and are experienced in the field. We assure that our clinicians are trained on our cultural based model, which enables them to be very proficient in service delivery. Also, our internal trainings help our qualified clinicians to provide accurate diagnoses and effective treatment to our clients.



W&A VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

To become a W&A volunteer call our Volunteer Coordinator’s office at 305-647-8973 – or log on our website, www.wordandaction.org, and download our volunteer package. Once completed, you may mail it to 13018 NE 8th Avenue, North Miami, FL 33161.

Our Different Services & Programs

Current:

- Psychotherapeutic Services
- Case Management Services
- Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Program
- Community Outreach Program

Future:

- Support Group Program
- Parenting Skills Development

MISSION & VISION

Present a culturally based approach to sexual abuse prevention. Word and Action’s program, “Strengthening the Family,” aims to prevent and/or decrease the occurrence of sexual abuse primarily within the Haitian community, as well as other communities throughout Miami-Dade and Broward County.

We will do our very best so that the children we are serving can learn safety measures against sexual abuse and sexual predators. They will learn how to cope with the trauma caused by sexual abuse. Our parents will learn effective ways to protect their children against sexual predators. Also, they will learn about sexual abuse and the symptoms pertaining to the trauma.

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tailored to the needs of Haitian clients, to better equip clinicians and therapists who treat Haitian and Haitian-American clients in need of treatment for child sexual abuse; 3) culturally competent treatment for victims of child sexual abuse and their loved ones.

Furthermore, culture plays a very important role in the recovery of sexually abused victims. For instance, a person’s ability to cope with sexual abuse may differ depending on his/her culture and environment. Further, parents’ behaviors and attitudes toward sexual abuse incidents may have significant impacts on the children’s recovery process.

Based on W&A’s observations and reports from numerous clinicians and health care professionals, in general, Haitian parents seem to have more difficulties dealing with sexual abuse. Sexual education seems to be less prominent within the Haitian culture, as well. Like in many cultures, sex is taboo and almost unspoken within the typical Haitian family. Because of the aforementioned, sexual incidents seem to be unreported, ignored, and totally repressed.



“No child should go through this at all – No family should go through this alone.”

The complexity of the Haitian culture may prevent both children and their parents from openly dealing with sexual abuse, which may sometimes lead to re-victimization.

As previously mentioned, the Haitian community is underserved when it comes to social services. It is generally expected for clinicians and health care professionals to be culturally competent, in order to accurately diagnose and effectively treat clients of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. Thus, knowledge of the Haitian culture, mentality, and perception of topics such as that of sexual abuse, may help clinicians to accurately diagnose and effectively serve this particular demographic.

Because of the aforementioned, we have found it necessary to develop a curriculum/program that is culturally sensitive, in terms of strategies and approaches to sexual abuse:

- 1) **Prevention**
- 2) **Education**
- 3) **Treatment**

Psychotherapeutic Service

W&A engages qualified and experienced Master’s-level and licensed professionals to work as clinicians with our clients and their families. Our culturally based approach to treatment is a unique model that enables us to render effective services to clients of different ethnicities and backgrounds. We pride ourselves in taking the lead within our community in raising awareness in a way that enables victims to reveal their hidden feelings and seek for treatment.

Furthermore, we believe that treatment starts from the moment a client steps into our agency. That is one of the reasons why we consciously create a child-friendly and soothing therapeutic environment, where our clients and their families could feel at ease and comfortable.

Our policy, pertaining to privacy, is paramount in our agency. The HIPAA rules are strictly reinforced in our office. We ensure that all of our clinicians and workers are well trained and certified on the HIPAA law, in compliance with the requirements of the United States Department of Health.

Our clients are treated with respect, empathy, and professionalism. At W&A, clients come first.

Targeted Case Management

Our regular clients are mostly in the lower bracket economically; therefore, social assistance and support are vital, in most cases. Without proper support and guidance, most families within our targeted demographic may face even more life stressors. Conscious of the family dynamic of our

targeted population, W&A enrolls qualified social workers to provide case management to clients.

Our Targeted Case Managers (TCM) are Master’s-level and licensed social workers who are experienced in the field. They are dynamic and dedicated to effectively assist our clients.

They assure that proper coordination is made between the clients and their therapists. They accompany the client throughout the process and link clients to external support and services, as needed.

Our TCM are culturally trained, which enables them to easily establish rapport with clients of different ethnicities and backgrounds. They are particularly trained on the complexity of the Haitian culture, which greatly enables them to render their service more effectively to this population.

Community Outreach

One of our Community Outreach Programs is called, “*Let’s Talk About It.*” The purpose is to enable professionals from different fields to provide new perspectives based on their background and experience as a unique way to tackle this very important issue.

W&A aims to take child sexual abuse to a higher platform by having professionals and other influential figures to talk and act collectively.

Our Community Outreach Coordinators (COC) generally take the lead in preparing and hosting panels for discussion. They also serve as a link between W&A and the community. They are equipped and involved in the community, in order to raise awareness about child sexual abuse. They also promote W&A programs and services to the community. Further, our COC are trained to assist members of our community and to link them to different social service agencies, if need be.

What Fuels Me Up Everyday

By GEORGES BOSSOUS, JR.

I had one of the most exhilarating experiences, as a psychotherapist, during my last therapy session with a 15-year-old sexually abused girl. At the end of our session, I asked her what she wanted to become when she grew up. “You,” she answered. “Why do you want to be me?” I surprisingly replied. “To give life to children,” she said. I paused a little and said, “Do you feel that I gave life to you?” “Yes, because now I’m feeling better. I wish you could come to my house and live there forever,” she added with a smile.

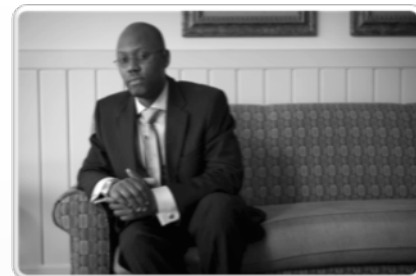
Because I had previously told her that I was leaving the agency where I worked as a psychotherapist, with a sad face, she looked at me and said, “Why are you leaving?” “I’m leaving because you and other children like yourself inspired me to serve more children who have been sexually abused—especially in the Haitian-American community,” I emphasized. “Is that the Word and Action thing you are doing?” she asked. “How do you know about that?” I surprisingly replied. “I was searching on the Net for ‘sexual abuse in the Haitian community,’ and your website came up. I saw your pictures on the net. I was surprised,” she told me. For the first time, I was speechless. Then, I told her, “Yes this is why I’m leaving. Your story inspired me a lot.”

“Why did you want to work with children like us, isn’t it hard?” she asked. “Yes, it is hard, sometimes, especially when the child you are trying to help is not ready to be helped. It makes you feel helpless. I love what I do; I love seeing the changes in your lives. That makes my day, every day,” I explained to her.

“Can I help?” she asked with a light smile. “You’ve already helped me a lot. You taught me to be a better therapist, and you inspired me every time you shared your story with me. I’m honored and very proud of you,” I said. I continued, “But if you really want to help, you should cooperate with the next therapist, you should continue to share your story until you no longer feel the pain. You will no longer be a victim, you will be a survivor, you should continue to do great in school, and then, when you become a psychologist you can come and help as you will share your story with other children. They will also be inspired by you. You will give them their lives back,” I added.

She looked at me with an innocent smile and said, “OK.”

I’ve never felt so good and so inspired. This is what fuels me and gets me going, every day. This is what makes my trip to the office “worth it.” It strengthens my passion to really help as many children as I can. I do believe that God has a special place in Heaven for these kids.



A Note from Our Executive Director

A friend once asked me: “How could the victims succeed in staying positive after being sexually abused?”

The following answer was simply provided, based on my many years of experience as a clinician and my faith in the service that we (therapists) strive to render to our clients. Allow me to share it with you.

“Oftentimes, the victims are understandably not positive. For example, one of their initial reactions is to blame themselves. The sexual abuse trauma can create shame, guilt, depression, anxiety, eating and sleeping problems, weight loss, nightmares (night terror in children), paranoia, fear, tearfulness, hopelessness, sadness, sense of insecurity, doubt, feelings of helplessness, anger, etc. Major problems in personal relationships include difficulties to engage in sexual activities with their partner, as well. The ability to trust themselves and others may seem to be a big issue for them. They tend to develop a negative idea about relationships, intimacy, and sex.

One of the effective ways they could succeed is through therapy. In therapy, they learn to process their feelings in an appropriate and constructive manner. They are able to make sense of what happened to them and place the blame where it belongs: on the abuser.”

W&A Ambassador and Membership Program

Word and Action relies on the volunteered services and supports of prominent individuals from the world of art, sports, literature, and entertainment, to highlight its priority issues and to draw attention to its mission and activities.

It has been shown that celebrities could be very influential in raising public attention to issues that are impacting our society. For example, the United Nations (UN) has developed a great program called “Goodwill Ambassador.” Many celebrities have been nominated as Goodwill Ambassadors to the UN, in order to further its many humanitarian programs around the world.

Furthermore, concerned citizens could have a similar impact, when acting collectively; therefore, W&A has developed an Ambassadorship as well as a Membership Program, in order to raise consciousness about child sexual abuse, not only in our community, but also globally.



Taylor Anne Erickson
Celebrity Chef, Supermodel, and
W&A Ambassador

Become a W&A Ambassador or a member, by contacting our Development Office, at 305-647-8973, or by e-mailing us at info@wordandaction.org. You may also download our Ambassadorship or Membership form on our website, www.wordandaction.org. You may either drop off or mail the completed form to our office located, at 13018 NE 8th Street, North Miami, FL 33161

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