

# Videos to target abuse

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sent the reality of dating violence on the South Fork.

"Those numbers are pretty accurate and we are seeing, in general, a rise in domestic violence," said Bellem.

Which is part of the reason why The Retreat has launched a formal Public Service Announcement competition between students in area schools as part of its dating violence and awareness prevention campaign. As of press time, high school students from Bridgehampton, East Hampton, Sag Harbor, Shelter Island, Southampton and likely the Ross School are slated to spend the next three months developing short videos centered on the theme of dating violence prevention.

Bellem said the hope is to provide students with an opportunity to teach each other about the perils of dating violence, a lesson that may have more of an impact coming from their peers rather than their high school health teacher.

Students are encouraged, said Bellem, to work in small groups of two to four students in creating the videos with their media arts and health teachers working cooperatively with students to flesh out the content. The videos will be judged on impact, creativity and on the understanding of the many facets of teen dating violence. Members of the Retreat administration and board of directors as well as celebrity "friends" will judge final submissions. The top three finalists will be invited to The Retreat's Artists Against Abuse Gala in June where the first place winner will be announced.

"We wanted to create a program that can get youth involved, engage the community on this subject and make it a fun, creative event," said Bellem. The Retreat launched the competition this week, noted Bellem, on the heels of the announcement that Congress and New York State have proclaimed February Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month.

Working with local schools towards violence prevention is not new for The Retreat, which presents violence prevention education programs in

geared towards elementary and middle school students like "Hands Are Not For Hitting" and "Respect You, Respect Me."

With the rise of the Internet and use of mobile phones amongst children and teens, a cyber-bullying prevention program has also been developed for local schools.

"In the middle schools we work a lot on bullying and early prevention," said Bellem. "We really want to reach the kids before they start dating."

So far, once teens start dating, the state and national statistics are jar-

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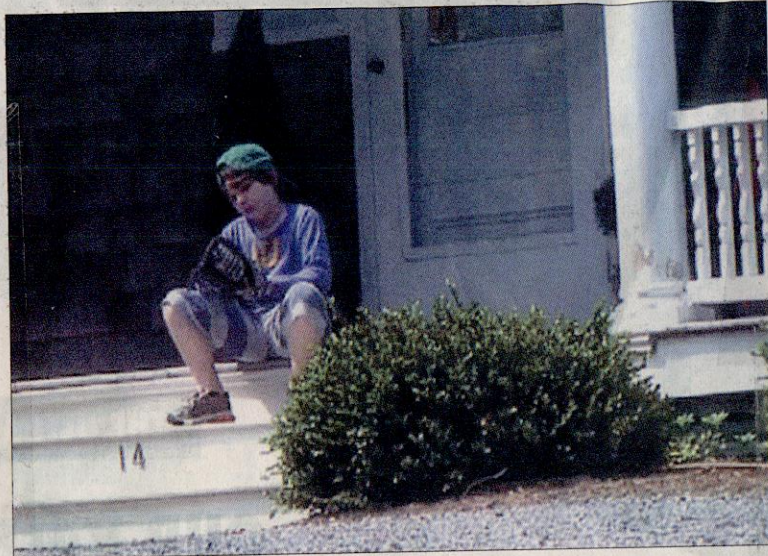
ring. In addition to basic statistics on sexual pressure and physical violence in teen relationships, more than one-fourth of teens in relationships said they have been put down by their partners.

According to statistics out of New York City, almost 11 percent of teenage girls reported experiencing physical dating violence, up 50 percent from statistics reported in 1999. The Retreat is working with Suffolk Community College's Riverhead campus and Stony Brook-Southampton to develop comprehensive statistics on the prevalence of dating violence on the East End, which Bellem predicted would model national and state statistics.

She added that in an effort to reach a new, technologically savvy generation of teens, The Retreat has also been creating multi-media lectures on issues like high school teen violence and the media's effect on gender identities.

However, it is Bellem's hope that the peer-to-peer communication the PSA competition will foster will lead to a deeper understanding amongst high school students about dating violence.

"They are in the same age group," she said. "They are relatable, they



A still from a public service announcement from The Retreat.

## Videos Will Let Kids Give the Warnings

*Target abusive dating*

BY KATHRYN G. MENU

ONE IN THREE teenagers has reported experiencing a form of physical, sexual, verbal or emotional abuse from their boyfriend or girlfriend with almost a third of girls involved in a relationship reporting they have been pressured to have sex

or engage in uncomfortable sexual behavior, according to the New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence.

And according to Stacey Bellem, the director of agency programming at The Retreat in East Hampton, these statistics likely repre-

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