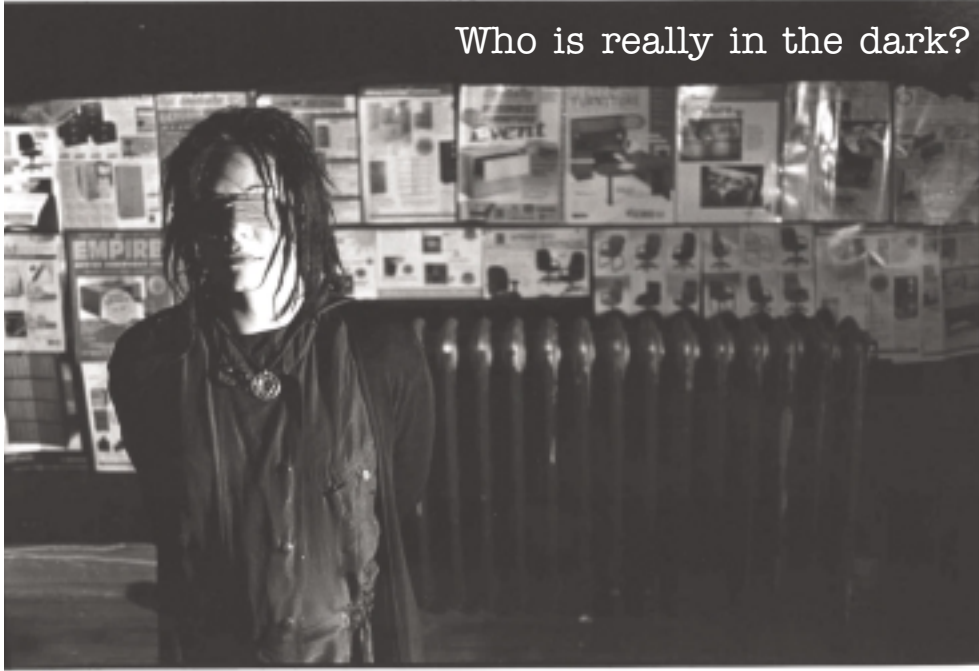


Heal
understand
Feel

LOVE

can change your world

Who is really in the dark?



Not
all
teens'
lives are
a dream.
Some are
more like a

nightmare.

The **LOVE** organization offers teens a way of coping with hardship in their lives.

LOVE

Listen
embrace

Learn

Help
Heal

Feel
Hope
care

Seventeen-year-old Andrew had an alcoholic stepfather who abused him until the age of 14, when he snapped. "I beat up my stepfather," Andrew recalls, "and my Mom called Children's Aid Services and had me removed."

From that point on he was in and out of group homes and detention centres and finally ended up on the street at 15.

Twenty-year-old Cynthia was molested when she was 11, got hit two years later when she stepped in the middle of a domestic dispute while babysitting, and became mixed up in

schoolyard bullying. Not exactly problems that can be solved by a parental pep talk (and even those weren't happening).

"There were not a lot of people in my life who were listening to me," explains Cynthia.

Fortunately, Andrew and Cynthia found Leave Out Violence, a.k.a. LOVE, a non-profit organization dedicated to reducing violence in the lives of youth and communities.

Twinkle Rudberg started the organization in 1993, after her husband was murdered by a 14-year-old boy who had been a victim of violence.

At LOVE, Andrew and Cynthia shared their situation with other teens. "They listened," says Cynthia.

"I discovered that I wasn't alone,"

adds Andrew. No, indeed. In the past year, 40 per cent of youths reported they had been victims of crime, according to Statistics Canada.

A safe place to discuss feelings wasn't the only thing LOVE offered. Both teens decided to take LOVE's free photojournalism program, offered after school at a local community college. They were given cameras and asked to take pictures that expressed how violence had affected their lives. Andrew shot a train, barreling down the track, head on. "The picture showed that I wanted to commit suicide," he comments. Cynthia snapped a photo of a fire escape, which represented her desire to find a way out of her situation. When they showed the

pictures to others at LOVE, no one judged. So they took some more. And Cynthia wrote poetry about being molested. "I saw my writing as buried treasure," she explains.

Their powerful words and pictures were published in LOVE's newspaper, ONE LOVE, which comes out once a year, and is distributed to 100,000 teens in schools and community centres across the country. "Publishing the teens' work shows them that their voices matter," says Joy Futerman, Toronto program director of LOVE.

With support and validation, Andrew's and Cynthia's lives began to change. "I became more self-confident," says Cynthia.

Andrew and Cynthia to help other teens. They enrolled in LOVE's 12-week Leadership Training Program, and received training on how to speak to youth about violence prevention.

Today, Andrew and Cynthia are two of 15 youth leaders who participate in LOVE's school and community outreach program. They visit schools and businesses to share their stories with students and decision makers, and



Cynthia, a victim of abuse, says this photo of a fire escape represents the desire to flee her troubled life.



Leave Out Violence encourages members to put their feelings on film by taking pictures

They learned to respond to challenging situations constructively. "At school I used to be a bully, because that's how I got what I wanted. LOVE taught me there are other alternatives," explains Andrew.

These positive changes motivated



embrace
courage
strength

Need LOVE?



Circle of kids.

At Camp **LOVE**, participants learn to trust, share stories and work as a team. They embrace people from different cultures and backgrounds to form a strong, supportive community.

LOVE

Listen
embrace

Heal
understand
Ideas

Feel

peace

Compassion

to speak about violence and prevention strategies.

LOVE wants youths to speak to each other because, according to Futerman, "It's the only way that works. Teens have credibility with teens and the solutions they give are real. Teens need examples they can relate to, not statistics or answers from a book."

Cynthia often uses humour to connect with other teens, while Andrew's unvarnished account sometimes takes students aback. Regardless of their individual styles, each is making a difference. "People have opened up to me because I've been

through what they've been through," explains Andrew.

LOVE also facilitates violence prevention committees in schools, where students meet once a week during lunch to talk about their experience of violence and how they can change the culture in their school and community.

Between 10,000 and 20,000 teens across Canada have heard LOVE's message. Certainly, it has reached Andrew and Cynthia. It's a long road from instigating violence to helping prevent it, and these two have made the journey.

— Deena Waisberg

- To qualify for the LOVE programs, you need to be between 13 and 19 years old and have been a victim, perpetrator or witness to youth violence.

- LOVE has offices in Halifax, Montreal (French and English), Toronto and Vancouver.

- You can contact LOVE by e-mail or by phone:
Montreal: 514-938-0006
Montreal@leaveoutviolence.com

- Toronto: 416-785-8411
Toronto@leaveoutviolence.com

- Halifax: 902-429-6616
Halifax@leaveoutviolence.com

- Vancouver: 604-709-5728
Vancouver@leaveoutviolence.com

- LOVE offers teens free training in photojournalism, broadcast journalism and leadership. Teens who have completed the leadership program may choose to become involved in school and community outreach and violence prevention committees in schools.

- Approximately 500 teens have taken at least one of LOVE's programs.

- The photography and writing from LOVE youth are showcased in two books: *LOVE Works!* (1998) and *The Courage to Change: A Teen Survival Guide* (2001).