

**Local**

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# **Young mother's death tells a broader story of relationship violence**



Ramon Vasquez, executive director of the American Indians in Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions, likes to tell the story of the mother and son at the bridge. It's a modern-day parable about troubled teens.

A lot of men — all kinds of men — are gathered in the middle of the bridge, and the woman is concerned about her son's safety. She can't take him across herself.

Her husband, however, already has made it to the other side. She yells out to him, "Come and get your son. Help him across this bridge."

He responds, "I can't. I'm scared. I just got here myself."

This story came to mind when Vasquez heard of the horrific attack just outside the Por Vida Academy last week, in which police say Eduardo Reyes, 17, killed his ex-girlfriend Megan Hernandez, also 17 and the mother of his 11-month-old child.

We don't know and may never understand why Hernandez was repeatedly stabbed as horrified bystanders watched, one of them grabbing her baby girl out of her arms to safety.

But Vasquez and other advocates for troubled teens and men know that unaddressed abuse and anger can lead to family violence.

It's common, actually. And if adult domestic violence cases are underreported, that problem is exacerbated among teens.

Every year, Vasquez oversees male-centered programming for 1,500 San Antonio boys and men that focus on education, awareness and counseling to prevent violence. At the heart of AIT's projects is teaching them the difference between maleness and manhood, he says.

Maleness is only how you're born. Manhood is becoming a loving, responsible man, a man of your word. Such men don't hurt themselves, or others, and don't view the people they love — mothers, sisters, girlfriends, wives, children and exes — as objects that can be beaten.



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AIT's Fatherhood Campaign, Rites of Passage for teen boys and Healing the Wounded Spirit retreats use culturally sensitive materials built on indigenous Mexican and Native American traditions.

Some participants are first-time offenders referred by the Municipal Court system. They've been truant or involved in fights.

Every freshman boy at the Por Vida Academy goes through AIT's Rites of Passage, which uses fatherhood expert Jerry Tello's Joven Noble curriculum. Joven noble is Spanish for noble young man. It's a school of last resort for teens who have exhausted other academic opportunities.

Some AIT clients are referred by single mothers having trouble with sons. Vasquez says AIT often deals with boys whose fathers were violent or absent.

Others land at AIT by way of the National Compadres Network, a California-based group that does training and curriculum aimed at reducing domestic violence, child abuse and teen pregnancy among Latino men and boys.

Storytelling is at the heart of AIT's programs, which include anger management and parenting classes, legal and domestic violence counseling and retreats.

Take that story of the mother at the bridge. AIT knows it's risky to count on the men congregated on the bridge to safely get your boy across. It wants to help.

Vasquez wishes he could have helped Eduardo Reyes at his bridge. His journey has become all the more difficult.

Vasquez takes solace in one young man, a freshman at Por Vida, who came to Megan's aid in her last moments.

Robert Ortiz sustained injuries in the attack. He and several others who tried to help Megan are, or have been, participants in AIT's Rites of Passage program at Por Vida, Vasquez said.

They're learning to become noble young men, and men of their word.

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## American Indians in Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions

Jerry Tello website

San Antonio Fatherhood Campaign

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