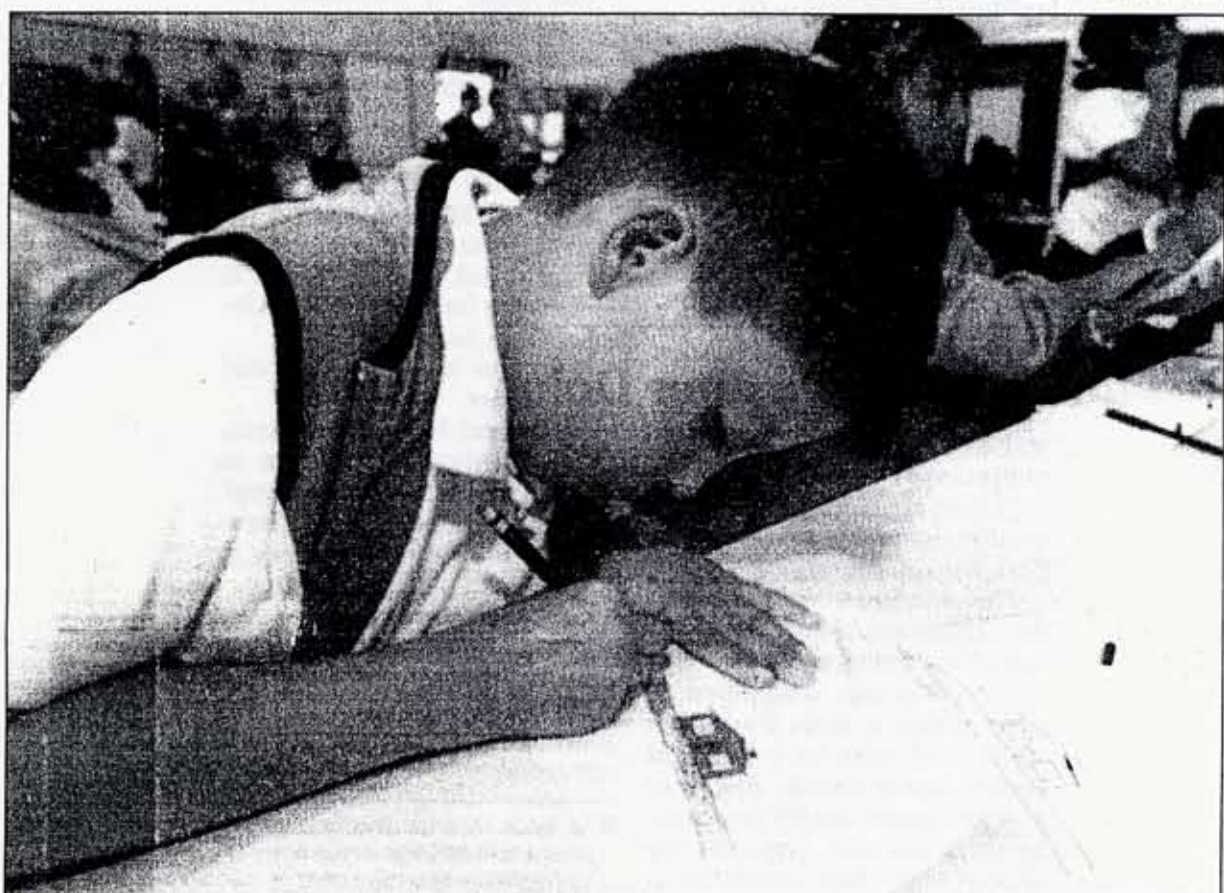
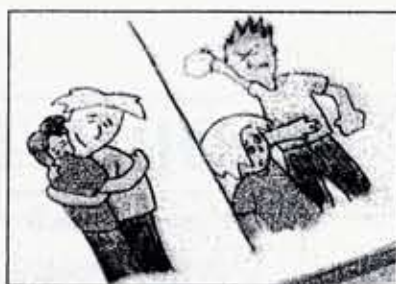


Drawing attention to domestic violence



Record photos by CLIFFORD OTO

Francisco Espinoza, above, colors an animation cel while doing his part to create an animated public-service announcement on domestic violence for Stockton's Nightingale Elementary School. Top, animation cels depict students' drawings on violence.

Workshop teaches students abuse is not OK

By Julie Davidow
Record Staff Writer

Using cartoon sketches and colored pens, 100 students at Nightingale Elementary School told stories Wednesday with titles such as "When men hit women," "Stop domestic violence" and "A woman and a man fighting."

Their drawings depicted life in abusive households or relationships: a man with a raised fist grabbing a cowering boy by the shirt. A woman with a black eye. A child dialing 911. An angry man screaming at a crying woman.

The fourth-, fifth- and sixth-

graders — a handful of whom have had direct experience with domestic violence themselves — spent two days seated in groups of 10 at the school's long cafeteria tables crafting their own 30-second, animated public-service announcements.

The exercise was part of a program sponsored by the California Human Development Corp., a private, nonprofit organization that provides educational services for farm workers and their families.

Teaching children that physical and emotional abuse are not OK in relationships was the workshop's primary purpose, said Paul Castro,

program director for the corporation.

"We thought about what happens at our houses, and we tried to put it all together," 10-year-old Rosa said. "We just want to show people what's the right thing to do."

Rosa's real name and those of other children quoted in this story are not being used to protect the children's families.

Once, when her father hit her mother, Rosa called the police.

Her father went to jail, and now her parents are divorced.

"He took all his anger out on her," she said.

An estimated 3.3 million chil-

dren a year watch as their mothers or female caretakers are beaten by other family members.

Studies show that children who witness violence at home are more prone to anxiety, aggression and depression. They are also more likely to become abusive or abused adults.

The macho norm adhered to in many Latino families teaches men to suppress their emotions and encourages women to accept abuse passively, Castro said.

"Your first school is your family," he said. "A boy looks at his father.

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and he's saying, "This is how an hombre is supposed to be."

In the southern reaches of impoverished southeast Stockton, Nightingale is nearly evenly split between Latino and African-American children.

But the domestic-abuse message applies across socioeconomic and racial lines, organizers said.

Using a grant from the state, Castro hired Hollywood-based AnimAction to provide the animation tools and techniques and to film the students' final products.

"These are messages made by children for children," said Nigel Zeid, from AnimAction.

The students must rely on their illustrations to send a message. No words are used.

Rosa's group developed a story about a man fired from work who goes to a bar and comes home drunk. Angry to find his dinner not yet prepared, he slaps his wife. She calls the police and then heads to a

women's shelter.

Several themes recur in the children's images: the violent stepfather, tearful apologies, frightened children.

The topic of domestic violence provoked discussion among some students who have lived what they are trying to teach.

"If they hit their wife or girlfriend, they don't really love them," said Maria, 11.

"They do love them, but they're drunk," retorts Elena, 8, whose own father went to jail for beating up her mother.

"But now he's nice," she said of her father.

Today and Friday, the animation workshops will move to Waterloo Elementary School. Organizers say they hope eventually to bring the workshops to every school in the county.

Students will see a screening of their short films at a school assembly. Some of AnimAction's public-service announcements also have been aired on network television.

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