

## ONE-ON-ONE WITH VERNA GRIFFIN-TABOR

U-T profiles of notable local people

# Changing minds to prevent violence

BY LISA DEADERICK ■ PHOTO BY JOHN GIBBINS

For more than 30 years, Verna Griffin-Tabor has worked to help victims and survivors of sexual assault and relationship violence, and from the time she was very young, she knew there was a way to put an end to it.

"I have known since (I was) a little girl that the violence I was ... seeing family members and friends endure was preventable," she says. "I have been drawn to this work because I knew it was preventable and not inevitable."

As CEO of the Center for Community Solutions, her work also includes preventing and intervening in situations of human trafficking and elder abuse, along with domestic violence and sexual assault. The nonprofit provides social services to victims, including a rape crisis center, a 24-hour hotline for domestic violence victims, a temporary restraining order clinic, emergency shelter and transitional housing, legal services, counseling, and outreach programs.

Tabor, 66, lives in La Jolla with her husband, Tom, and has been leading the Center for Community Solutions since 1998. She took some time to talk about her work, her vision for the organization, and specific ways people can be supportive of survivors.

**Q.** Tell us about the Center for Community Solutions.

**A.** CCS is a 50-year-old nonprofit with a mission to end relationship and sexual violence by being a catalyst for caring communities and social justice. We started on the campus of San Diego State University by a student and a young professor. They were seeing so much oppression through sexism, racism and homophobia, and they wanted the university to take a stand and take action. They also wanted to form a women's studies program. In 1969, they started the Center for Women's Studies and Services (CWSS) on campus. The following year, they helped start one of the first women's studies programs in the country at SDSU. At the same time, they moved CWSS off campus, and in 1995, we changed our name from CWSS to the Center for Community Solutions.

**Q.** What's been your vision for CCS during your time as CEO?

**A.** I always wanted to ensure that we were providing state-of-the-art best practices for individuals and families in their healing process, as well as in our prevention work.

**Q.** What has kept you in this field of work over the years?

**A.** The strength and courage I see in the faces of the individuals I serve. Also, witnessing how resilient the human spirit is, and it is so encouraging. Many survivors say the trauma will not define them.

**Q.** On your organization's website, it says that you're "committed to the prevention of violence and abuse by changing the social conditions that breed and tolerate their existence." Can you talk about what some of those social conditions are?

**A.** Racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, poverty in any marginalized community — all are social conditions that allow some to discount others. Once someone has been viewed as "less than," it can create a sense of entitlement for some, and that can lay the foundation for harm to take place.

**Q.** And have there been any ways over the years that CCS has been successful in changing any of those conditions?

**A.** Our prevention services are offered in many different venues such as college campuses, schools, probation camps and many community venues. Over and over, we

have seen lives changed and new pathways created. Recently, when we completed a training for the baseball team at SDSU, several of the athletes who completed an anonymous evaluation questioned why they had not received any training like this earlier in their lives, such as junior high. Students responded very well ... and shared reflections after the trainings were complete, saying that they learned how to communicate with others and how to be-

have in certain situations, the importance of consent and how to intervene to help someone, and that they'd use the information they received in their own relationships.

**Q.** You have education and outreach programs, including workshops, on things like promoting healthy relationships and conflict resolution, and engaging boys and men in promoting healthy relationships and consent. What would be an example of healthy conflict resolution?

**A.** Setting boundaries on personal space. Speaking up and telling someone specifically, directly how someone has hurt their feelings or touched them inappropriately. In approaching a conflict, being able to listen to the other person's perspective. Sometimes we may be too quick to assume or judge a situation harshly when harm may not have been intended.

**Q.** Why is it important to focus on engaging boys and men, specifically, in promoting healthy relationships and consent?

**A.** It will take a whole community to end sexual and intimate partner violence. Initially in the movement, women attempted to do this work alone. We need men and women to work together to promote healthy relationships and consent. In addition, men can also be victims of sexual and inti-

mate partner violence.

**Q.** What are some basic ways that people close to victims of relationship violence and abuse can be supportive of and help the victims they know?

**A.** You start with believing the survivor. You do not have to be an expert, but it is helpful to listen with compassion. Ask what help might look like for them. You can ask if talking with someone on a hotline about options would be helpful (our hotline is (888) 385-4657 or 888-DVLINKS). You can also share our website at [www.ccssd.org](http://www.ccssd.org). It is important to trust that they know best what they need.

**Q.** What are some things that are unsupportive, that friends and family should avoid doing?

**A.** Questioning someone, such as asking about what they were wearing or drinking or why they don't just leave, will instantly shut someone down and increase their shame and self-doubt for harm they endured but did not cause. Questions like that focus on the person who has been harmed, instead of the person who has caused harm. It is important to listen and not insist that they should take any next steps, including calling law enforcement if they do not see that as an option.

**Q.** What's been rewarding about this work?

**A.** Seeing the strength and courage of the survivors we serve.

**Q.** What has this work taught you about yourself?

**A.** What is really important in this world is not things, but relationships. With support and belief, the human spirit is so very strong and resilient. When someone trusts you enough to share whatever challenges they may face, you both have an opportunity to learn and grow.

**Q.** What is the best advice you've ever received?

**A.** The key to success is very simple: perseverance is the key. Stay with a problem and try different approaches until you can unlock the challenge.

**Q.** What is one thing people would be surprised to find out about you?

**A.** I marched in anti-war demonstrations with John Lennon and Yoko Ono.

**Q.** Please describe your ideal San Diego weekend.

**A.** Working out, riding bikes, and spending time with family and friends. And a sunset picnic on the bluffs of La Jolla.

### What I love about La Jolla ...

Seeing and knowing our friends and family in our beautiful community. I feel very fortunate to live and work in a community like San Diego. I moved here 30 years ago and never looked back!



## PEOPLE

### It's official: Sheeran, girlfriend married

**Ed Sheeran** has confirmed for the first time that he and longtime girlfriend **Cherry Seaborn** are married.

British media reported the pair wed before Christmas in front of about 40 friends and family.

In an interview with

broadcaster **Charlamagne Tha God** to promote his album "No. 6 Collaborations Project," Sheeran talked about how he wrote the song "Remember the Name," which refers to "my wife."

The 28-year-old British singer-songwriter said, "I knew that we'd be married by the point that the song came out."

The album, released Friday, includes collaborations with **Justin Bieber**,

### Stormzy, Eminem, 50 Cent and Bruno Mars

Sheeran and Seaborn, 26, met at primary school in eastern England and announced their engagement in 2018.

### Congressman joins in push to free rapper

Following an outcry from celebrities and a Change.org petition with half a million signatures, U.S. Rep. **Adriano Espaillat** is pushing for

the release of **A\$AP Rocky**, who has been behind bars in Sweden while police investigate a fight involving the rapper.

Last week a Swedish court ordered Rocky to spend two weeks in pre-trial detention while police investigate the June 30 fight in downtown Stockholm. Quickly after the news broke, the movement #JusticeForRocky pushing for the rapper's release trended on social media. On Friday,

**Espaillat**, a New York Democrat, said he was pushing to help Rocky come home.

"I will continue fighting until A\$AP Rocky is released from Swedish prison and brought back. Everyone deserves to be treated equally and A\$AP Rocky's rights continue to be violated. It is not a fair process," the congressman said.

Rocky, whose real name is **Rakim Mayers**, was born in the Harlem borough of New York City.

The 30-year-old was allegedly involved in a fight before appearing at a music festival in Sweden. It was not clear who else was involved, but videos on social media appear to show a person being violently thrown onto the ground by Rocky. A defense lawyer has said it was self-defense.

**Diddy, Justin Bieber, Shawn Mendes, Jada Pinkett Smith, Kris Jenner, Nicki Minaj, Post Malone and 2 Chainz** are among the celebrities who have publicly expressed support for Rocky. The platinum-selling, Grammy-nominated artist has collaborated with **Kendrick Lamar, Cardi B, Drake and Selena Gomez**.

Rapper **Tyga** said he would not perform a scheduled show Sunday in Sweden as a result of Rocky's arrest.

U-T NEWS SERVICES

## CORRECTIONS

• A story on A1 Wednesday about tuna fishing boats incorrectly reported a fine. The correct fine, said J. Douglas Hines, executive director of South Pacific Tuna, was \$336,000 for a coconut that ended up in one of its nets.

• A story on C1 of Wednesday's Business Section about a potential transit center being built at the old SPAWAR site said in the first paragraph that the site was in Point Loma. It is actually near Pacific Highway just north of the Marine Corps Recruit Depot.

It is the policy of the Union-Tribune to correct all errors.

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