

Building Bridges Creating Partnerships



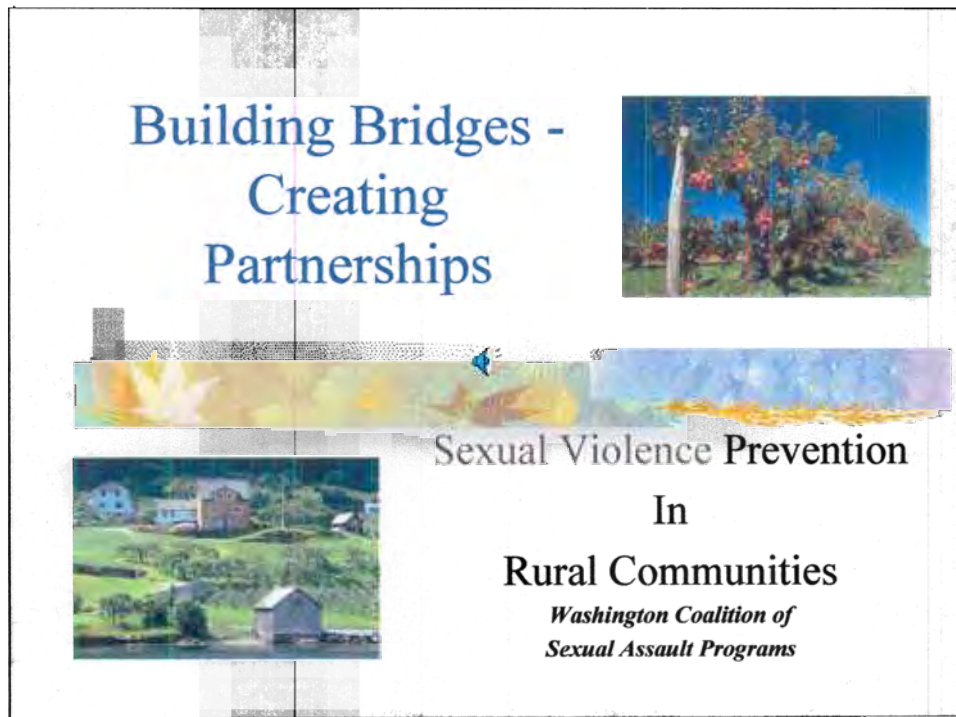
Sexual Violence Prevention

In

Rural Communities

*Washington Coalition of
Sexual Assault Programs*





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Changing public perceptions of sexual assault is not simple and it is not easy. The solutions are complicated and time consuming for everyone. Rural communities, though, face very real and specific challenges when doing sexual assault work.

The ideas in this presentation are meant to energize and support current efforts of staff and volunteers working in rural community sexual assault programs.

Real Community Involvement

- Building and sustaining... involvement is one of the least understood, and toughest aspects of community building, yet it is the foundation of all else.

William Traynor (1995)



Betty Royce, in a symposium presentation in Denver, Colorado, suggested that there is a “hidden epidemic” of sexual assault in rural communities. Though some prevalence data suggests rural communities have less sexual violence than urban communities, some interpretations of the data suggest that there is a serious problem with sexual violence in rural America. Rural Community Sexual Assault Programs have long struggled with the reality that sexual assault is often unrecognized, hushed or ignored in the communities they serve.

They speak eloquently about the challenges to service they experience; of geographic isolation, limited resources, community attitudes, among other factors.

With the Community Development model of prevention, rural programs have the opportunity to engage in the kind of work that builds community, creates partnerships and develops strong allies. Though the challenges are considerable, the rewards are measured in community safety.

Building on Assets of Rural Communities

- Long term commitment to the land and to the community
- A connected sense of place
- Investment in livable communities
- Know and connected to neighbors
- Extended families often part of same community



The closeness of a rural community can be a strength for your community sexual assault program. People in power are often accessible to your staff. The school board supervisor may use the same mechanic, or the pastor of the local church may buy groceries at the same store as the CSAP staff. In a close-knit community, as many rural areas are, having daily interactions and positive personal relationships with powerful community members can lead to the development of a real commitment in the community to act on an issue like sexual assault.

Recognizing the Challenges of Rural Communities



- Geographical distance
- Isolation
- Everyone knows everyone else
- Newcomers have trouble “breaking in” to the community
- Individuals are really visible if they take a stand on something

Rural areas are often small towns where people know each other well. Sometimes that's a good thing. Sometimes it can be a problem. Residents of rural communities often know a great deal about each other's family histories, personal problems, and activities. Anonymity in rural areas can be almost nonexistent. Since many people in rural communities know each other, it is difficult for anyone to believe that friends and neighbors are capable of committing a violent crime. As rural communities are close-knit, they can become polarized over a reported sexual assault, especially when the alleged perpetrator is someone they know.

Add to these factors the common experience that rural communities tend to have fewer economic resources among their governments, residents and communities. With limited resources, it is challenging to engage in the kind of education and outreach necessary to change public opinion about sexual violence.

Building Relationships

- When you trace the history of successful efforts, they usually started by listening to what the neighborhood had to say, and by door to door, group by group organizing, even before a formal assessment and a plan of action were developed.

Institute for Democratic Renewal and Project Change (2000)



Building community relationships is really the beginning of successful social change work. It is important to look to the relationship building process as the beginning of the social change initiative, rather than just doing preparation for an initiative. The beginning of the work happens before we traditionally mark the beginning.

Looking for Partnerships

- The search for answers about how to reach people became part of the solution itself. In the process of building a network, they realized that two of the most important factors in this networking process are time and effort.

Trail, K. (2000)

The quality of the relationships you develop, and the commitment of participants to the work you want to do, are directly connected to the time and effort you expend in creating those relationships.

Knowing a Community

- Getting to know a community happens slowly. Someone from outside a community has to work to make connections with people beyond the surface level. Many people need to be invited to meetings by someone they know and trust who can lend credibility to the process.

Trail, K. (2000)

The influence of community insiders can be tapped to support your process.

How have others done it?

- Finding those people who are known and trusted can be a labor intensive process... Going through the networking process has given insight into the value of the process and the necessity of going through several layers of people to make sure you've made a connection with as many groups as possible.

Trail, K (2000)

We're talking time again. Once you have found a few interested and committed people, you are ready for the next step.

Keys to Partnership



- Plan *with* people, not for them

Listen, listen, listen, and listen some more. Legitimate action planning and commitment must come from the community-based imperatives.

These keys to successful partnership are tried and true. They are represented in nearly every model of community development. Successful social change comes about because of some very fundamental principles.

Keys to Partnership



■ Goal clarity

Be sure others can understand and express the goals. To make things happen, people need to be able to simply state the goals in just a few sentences.

Clearly voiced “sound bites” can be the difference between a successful change initiative and one that flounders for lack of a cohesive message.

Keys to Partnership



■ Strategies for change

Realize there may be only one or two main goals and multiple strategies – choose all that work.

It is best to keep your goals focused. You can develop more goals as you accomplish your first ones. Good processes evolve and grow.

Keys to Partnership



■ Leadership

Find ways to build leadership capacity with training and hands-on experiences. And build a leadership team so no one person can take over or burn out.

Share, share, share. And sometimes sharing is hard, because you need to put in the work to develop broad opportunities for leadership. Sometimes it seems easier to try to do (and control) everything yourself. In reality, if you put in the time and effort to help develop broad leadership, the initiative thrives because there is diverse energy sharing the work load.

Keys to Partnership



5

■ Governance

Model the equity you seek to create in structures, decision-making, participation, and work assignments. It's all about authority, power and representation.

Think about power and decision making. If only a select few can make decisions, the rest of the initiative partners can become disenfranchised.

Keys to Partnership



- Tackle racism and oppression first

Address subtle and obvious forms of injustice from the beginning. Create justice by addressing this underlying condition and learning from everyone's perspective.

These are strong words describing people's attitudes, behaviors and experiences. We must be conscious in our interactions. Even if unintentional, these attitudes and behaviors create a climate in which it is impossible to vision and achieve safe and just communities.

Keys to Partnership



- Draw strength from multi-cultural identities

Be knowledgeable about cultural differences in the community and seek to build on the assets each group offers. Explore the elements of community, family and neighborhood and how they are coming together to work for positive change for all concerned.

Many small groups inhabit our rural communities. Various faith congregations represent small communities within the larger one. Many rural communities are experiencing the expansion of new immigrant communities. Rural communities with growing diversity have an advantage in collaborating with new immigrant communities because they are small and have a greater chance to interact with newcomers. Gaining awareness and building partnerships with leaders within these communities will enrich the staff and services of a rural community sexual assault program.

Keys to Partnership



- Bridge language barriers
- Be aware of the needs in advance and provide interpreters or other technology to include all in the conversations.

Consider meeting announcements and printed material in languages commonly spoken in your community. Be sure to utilize the services of professional interpreters rather than having a child or other family member interpret.

Keys to Partnership



■ Money matters

Take care to anticipate expenses and identify sources of financial support, and ways to distribute money appropriately.

If you are partnering with other non-profits, consider sharing special funds raised for your project. Pay for their staff time, a stipend, or mileage. Clearly resources for this work are few. If you work together to raise money for the initiative, be sure that no single group or person shoulders the burden of financial support for the project. Share both the risks and the benefits.

Keys to Partnership



- Action and analysis go hand in hand

Apply continuous evaluation, self-reflection, retraining and adjustments as needed. This will aid in maintaining momentum and a sense of direction.

Constantly gauge progress to know what needs to come next in your work.

Keys to Partnership



- Stay grounded in community
Remain close and connected to the people and organizations that are at the center of the community building project. Local people and neighborhoods are at the heart of change.

Once folk are working with the initiative, continue the people to people connection. This may be accomplished with telephone calls, personal visits, e-mails or notes. This is time consuming, but will likely result in continued connection of participants, stakeholders and partners to the initiative.

Keys to Partnership



- Constructive partnerships
Work hard to build helpful partnerships without losing sight of the overall interests. Some of the partnerships may be formal and public. Some may be informal and behind the scenes. All need to work toward the mission of the community.

Don't overlook allies in the community who can help to advance your initiative. These allies will not necessarily attend your stakeholder meetings, but they will be available to lend their expertise to elements of your initiative when needed.

Keys to Partnership



13

- Cultivate media relationships – both formal and informal

Assign a person to keep open lines of communication with local media. Provide reliable, honest, and relevant information. And do not hesitate to challenge inaccurate reports of your efforts.

Local mainstream and cultural media providers can be powerful allies in a rural community. Many towns have local newspapers, cable channels, and radio stations, which share community news and events. Finding pro-bono or donated space from local media to advertise special events or information about sexual violence will reach a wide audience. Having media sources as allies will help community sexual assault programs bring their message to the community in a positive manner. Don't forget church newsletters, school newsletters and newsletters by and for diverse communities in your area.

Keys to Partnership



■ Keep the motor running
Continuously ask how things are going. Check progress against plans and reflect on what's working, what's not, why not, what adjustments need to be made, and what is next.

Evaluate and fine-tune your efforts. Is each element working as you thought it would? Do you need to consider changing some part of what you are doing? Is something working so well that you should do more of it? There are questions to ask constantly and that helps keep things going.

Keys to Partnership



15



- Be committed to the long haul

Be aware that it can be slow going. Challenging the status quo threatens everyone who benefits from it. You may encounter resistance where you least expect it.

This is not a weekly, or even annual process. It is ongoing, and to be done well, it takes time. The rewards may be long in coming, but the changes will be real and lasting.



Creative Beginnings for Building Partnerships

- There are many ways to turn relationship-building into action when getting individuals and groups involved in community development and community building.

There are many unique ways that people have created a concerned community to address issues of sexual violence. We will explore just a few beginning points. These are creative ways to connect with people. After connection, an exploration of concern over the issue of sexual violence can be undertaken.

Many residents of rural communities believe that their town is substantially safer than an urban community. Often people move to rural areas for the very reason that they hope their families will be safe from violence. This sincere hope can be an asset in rural communities. Because residents are personally invested in the safety of their community, they may come together more quickly and effectively once they acknowledge that sexual violence actually occurs in their community.

Social, community building activities are a way to begin some of those important conversations.



Some people have tried game nights. A time to gather, and to have individual and group conversations.

To advertise, put notices in laundry's, ice cream shops, groceries, community newspapers. Keep advertising, even after you have started! Start with a wide variety of games. Serve soft drinks, chips, pretzels, popcorn. Meet at most monthly. As members get to know you and each others, you can begin conversations about creating safe communities. Not everyone will be interested. It is likely that some will.... They will be the nucleus of the initiative and can help you invite others to join you.



Another way to gather people is to enjoy movies!

Find a couple friends who enjoy videos/ movies. Plan an 8 week series.

Advertise and invite other community members to join you. Consider limiting the first round of 8 weeks to a group of 10 people or so.

When it comes to selecting videos for your 8 week series, you could select commercial videos (be careful about ratings) that exemplify some of the underlying conditions of sexual violence. Be prepared for post viewing discussion. Be prepared for widely varying points of view! Be prepared to stand your ground!

All the while you are building relationships, you are having important discussions about sexual violence and its prevention.

Study Circles



- Use child sexual abuse prevention materials in study circles
 - With PTA Moms, Dads, parents together
 - In church groups for parents
 - With groups of 4H, FFA, kids groups advisors

Some groups are naturally occurring groups who are already concerned about protecting their communities and their children. Take advantage of these concerns and help people focus their concern into action.

Book Groups

- Start a book group at your local library

- For kids
- For teen girls
- For teen boys
- For women



Partner with community librarians or school librarians. There are lots of wonderful books to read and discuss. Many of these books are relevant to discussions of healthy relationships, personal safety, bullying, dating violence, sexual assault. The discussions after these books are read can lead to the formation of a group to develop a sexual violence prevention initiative. Your leadership is key.

Share A Meal

- Invite people to a pot-luck dinner in
 - Social groups
 - Neighborhoods
 - The grange hall
 - Churches



There is nothing like sharing a meal together..

Maybe you have an “Opening Day of Fishing Season” pot luck. Or a “County Fair’s Coming” pot luck... Or any other excuse to get to know one another and learn what you all care about.

Once you’ve gathered people, invite them to future pot-lucks to talk about safe communities for youth, or support for elders, or many possible conversation topics that will lead a group to discuss creating positive communities. Meet each person face to face. Let everyone introduce themselves, tell about who they are, how long they’ve lived in the community, about their children, parents, hobbies... or any of the other ways people learn that they have things in common.

Partner with Communities of Faith

Churches, synagogues, mosques and other centers of worship play important roles in most communities.



- Work with church school teachers and other leaders to involve the whole congregation in the work of keeping children safe from sexual abuse
- Talk about community safety, and the environment people want to create for their members

Faith communities are the places where people socialize and reinforce their notions of right and wrong. They are places where people find solace and hope, and where many people find solutions to problems in their lives.

Working with the faith community can also help to end the silence surrounding sexual assault in a community. Leaders in the faith community can play a valuable role in bringing about action to address the issue of sexual violence in a community.

Work With Existing Organizations for Kids

■ Partner with

- 4H
- Girl Scouts
- Boy Scouts
- Campfire Kids
- FFA



Many of these existing organizations for kids offer opportunities for youth to take leadership in their communities. Partner with these youth to create a prevention initiative. Working with young members to build relationship. Work with older members to create social change.

Combine partnerships with youth groups and businesses. Young people may frequent certain businesses like comic book sellers, fast food restaurants, convenience stores, and pizza parlors. Locating the businesses where young people gather is a good way to reach youth and to find businesses that might support your work with donations of money, food, merchandise, passes or coupons.

Health & Wellness Care Practitioners

- Rural Health Clinics
- Yoga Practitioners
- Chiropractors



- All sorts of health and wellness professionals have a concern about the well-being of their clients. Often, these people are faced with reactivity or other effects of child sexual abuse, or sexual assault.

Gather health and wellness care practitioners for training and/or discussion. They may be willing to work together on an initiative that builds awareness and directs people to services. These practitioners often have an overarching concern for the well-being of their clients, and the well-being of their communities.



Profound conversations are often had when people are focused on a craft project and are free to talk and share without being the center of attention. One group decided that they would hold a craft fair to sell some of their crafts to raise money for child sexual abuse prevention. It was a way they believed they could contribute to the safety of children in their community. Many of the crafters had no children of their own, but did have a deep concern for the children living in their communities.

Communities care. Individuals in communities are often looking for ways to help. We need to learn how to mobilize that help in the ways people offer it.

What if people can't hear us talk about sexual assault?

- Many topics are of interest – and acceptable – without too much challenge. These can be the beginning conversations that help build trust and confidence in the way you work. Some beginning conversations might be about:

- Bullying
- Safe dating
- Healthy Relationships
- Drug facilitated sexual assault
- Violence in schools and communities



Many community sexual assault programs combine work on sexual violence with domestic violence and youth violence prevention. Showing the connections between sexual violence and issues of education, health, and public safety prove to be beneficial in gathering support for their programs. In some communities it may be necessary to introduce the subject of sexual violence by talking about personal safety.

When working with schools, in particular, the challenge for rural CSAP's is to make their message appealing to parents, school board members, administrators, and teachers while maintaining the integrity of their message. Focusing on prevention strategies like awareness, assertiveness, personal safety, healthy relationships, and respectful communication may help to bridge the gaps.

A real problem occurs when there are language barriers. In some languages and cultures, there is no word for "rape". As we consider bridging to these populations, we need to adapt our approach and language as needed.

Changing Social Messages

- Changing social messages is particularly important if your community has trouble talking about sexual assault. Determining what your community thinks or believes about sexual assault, and what messages children, teens, and adults regularly get about being appropriately male and appropriately female.

- Partner with:

- Youth leaders
- Childcare workers
- Coaches
- Sunday school teachers
- Schools



Share with these leaders, with the school board members, with teachers and administrators, that your work promotes tolerance and mutual respect among their youth. Discussing sexism and sexual violence can help youth to better understand the dynamics of oppression and discrimination. They will learn more about each other as young men and women. They will also learn how to treat each other with respect and understanding. It will improve interactions that, left unaddressed, can create interpersonal violence between youth.

Connecting With Other Community Initiatives

- Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention
- Domestic Violence Prevention
- Youth Violence Prevention
- HIV Prevention



Communities are often concerned with a wide array of social issues. Partner with some of those community initiatives to address the underlying conditions that sexual assault and those issues have in common. A change in those underlying conditions should make a change in all connected issues of concern. There are places that our work intersects with others. Combining our efforts can increase the effectiveness of our social change initiatives.

Recognizing Opportunities to Create Partnerships

- Acknowledge and work at undoing racism and privilege
- Build a sense of community
- Do the true work of democracy



The opportunities for learning are continuous and ever present. Finding allies to expand and support this kind of learning leads to confidence in reaching and working with people to develop nurturing places for people to live in safety, to work and the thrive.

Policy Work

- City Council
- County Council
- Church / Parish Council/Interfaith
- School Board



Every community has a diverse set of morals, values, and beliefs. There are both conservative and liberal social attitudes about sexual violence in rural communities. For every group of people, there are some who will dismiss sexual violence as an unimportant issue in their community. There are also those who believe and will act on the the belief that sexual violence should not be perpetrated on anyone... and they will work to see that it is not.

Working With Business



- Improving safety in the workplace
- Working with local bars and restaurants



Natural connections can be made with business leaders. Gather managers and owners and discuss the issues of safety in the workplace. Discuss concerns about safety for customers. You may be able to create partnerships that yield active initiatives to end sexual violence.



Connect

- Connect with your community... Promote the connection of the community to you.
- Real connection takes time and effort. In the end, it is that time and effort that will create safe and just communities.

Social change doesn't happen overnight. It takes a lot of time and effort. The result of the time spent is often a connection to your program and to the issue of sexual violence that is only possible with true partnership. And it is true partnership that will bring an end to sexual violence, that will make our communities safe for us to live together without fear of sexual assault. The challenges in rural communities are great. The rewards are captured by the people who work together to create rural communities that match their vision, their dream, of a safe place to live.



Resources

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