Voices of Courage:
using on-campus activism as part of the recovery process for sexual assault survivors.

University of Wyoming
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sexual assault Support Group

- Collaborative initiative
- Importance of group dynamics
- Need for activism as part of their recovery
Support for our approach

- Institutional Betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2014)
- Stage by Dimension Model of Recovery (Lebowitz, Harvey, & Herman, 1993)
- Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997)

Important ethical implications

Potential for Retraumatization
- Slow bureaucratic processes
- Increased exposure to others’ disconcern about the topic
- Survivors feeling exposed in unsupportive environments

Our stance:
- Well-being > successful events
- Exclusive focus on events that aim to increase awareness and survivor support
- Not advertised as a group of survivors
  - Anyone passionate about the cause can join
  - Group members are not asked to disclose
ethical implications
ConT’D.

Our stance:
• Open communication, clear expectations, and willingness to give and receive feedback in a constructive manner.
• Event planning is not discussed during support group and emotional processing is reserved for support group.
• Strict expectation that gossip or venting is not allowed within either group.
• I seek frequent supervision to discuss the interactions I have with group members.

Sarah’s experience as the group’s facilitator

My dual role concerns:
• My affection for the group members.
• Time management with my other responsibilities.
• Will my personality flaws arise more frequently during event organization and damage a therapeutic relationship?
• Responsibility to mediate working relationships between group members.
ERIN Valenti: A Voices of Courage Leader

- Helped form Support group
  - Inspired to continue educating the public
- Before July 2015 Wyoming had no civil protection for survivors of sexual assault
  - Began working with a team to get a Sexual Assault Protection Order Bill passed into law
  - Bill passed, giving survivors in Wyoming an opportunity to get a civil protection order lasting six months with renewals lasting a year.

"I am proud to be a cofounder of Voices of Courage and although I am no longer in Laramie, I will always feel proud and connected. The support and love saved my life, and I am thankful for the connections and friends I have made."

Courage Formation and Structure

- Healing needs of members pushing toward advocacy
  - Small advocacy projects in support group
  - Separation from support group to becoming an RSO
- Meeting Structure
  - Hour-long weekly meetings
  - Starting small
  - Equal members
  - Open platform
  - Role delegation and implementation
Voices of Courage

Obstacles

- Misunderstandings with other organizations
- Time management
- Lack of support
  - Conquering a very serious subject
- Delegation of roles
- Group dynamics
  - Working effectively together
- Promoting on campus
- Planning
  - Easier events
  - Not overloading ourselves

Voices of Courage

- Importance of planning
- Raising money for victims emergency fund
  - Tee-Shirt Sales
  - Raffle
  - Born in a Barn fundraiser
- Raising awareness and promoting Voices of Courage on campus
  - Volunteers from other organizations
  - Speak Out
  - Coal Creek Concert
  - Hot chocolate
  - Tabeling in the Union
  - Documentary showings
Maddy’s experience as a founding member

Becoming a part of something
Challenging myself
Path to recovery
Acceptance
Push for change

Prevention Models

• Public health model of sexual assault prevention
  • STOP Violence
• Survivor-Activism model
  • Voices of Courage
  • This was previously missing from the Laramie, WY community
• Each of these methods are important
  • To be more effective, a community should have a combination of both.
Voices of Courage Successes

• Recognized by the university as a premier organization
• Attendance by students that care
• Money raised for STOP Violence Emergency Fund

Voices of Courage and Our Community

Climate of Wyoming

• Forever West
• Fiercely Independent
• Bootstraps Ideology
Voices of Courage and Our Community (con’t)

Laramie Community

• College town
• Tight-knit community
  • Community support
• More progressive city

https://vimeo.com/166422464
Dakota’s experience as a founding member

- Something was missing at UW
  - As a survivor, I found little justice. In meeting other survivors, I realized that few others found any degree of justice or support either. This motivated me to begin working to make a difference in our community in order to help survivors. I asked around in the Spring of 2015 and found that no such group existed for students.
- Voices of Courage has been both challenging and rewarding
- Difficulty aligning my passion and my duties as a student

What we learned this Year

- Campus Resources
- Advertisment
- Communication
  - Officer elections
- Planning events
  - Need to get group members on board for the same activities
  - Simplify events
- Leadership skills
Leadership gained

- NSAC Conference
- Lessons learned within the group
- Bystander Prevention training
- Build working relations with other groups - Professional communication skills
- Being detailed oriented

Future Plans

- Gain new members → Identify a goal + advisory committee
- Create stronger community involvement
  - Gain more support from other clubs and organizations on campus
  - Become more involved in the campus community decisions (i.e., student government and administrative decisions)
- Become a larger on-campus resource for people to utilize
  - Recruit more members from other clubs
- Group facilitator position is changing
  - Kendal is replacing Sarah
this year

- Week of Action in October by “Its on Us”
- SAAM - a week of events
- Talk to Greek life, athletics, and other organizations about prevention and bystander prevention training
- Reach out to other clubs and get more involved in other campus activities
- Do more within the Laramie community

Follow us

Like us on Facebook: Voices of Courage
Follow us on Instagram: @uwvoicesofcourage
Rachel’s experience as a new member

- I am a sexual assault survivor from the age of 14
  - I was nervous to come to the support group because I was scared I couldn’t connect with a collegiate survivor group
- Joined Voices of Courage in hopes of helping an on campus community that wanted to help people be a part of sexual assault prevention
- Happy to find a group of people I can connect with and who want to actively find a solution
- Made me feel like a bigger part of campus and helped me make more friends

Questions?

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