



Partners in Prevention

A tool for community development conversation

By Gayle M. Stringer, M.A.

Once you have identified the community with which you would like to partner, select a person who might be a member of or connected to the community. It is good to have allies as you begin to think about joining with the community for the purposes of prevention.

The ally you choose might help introduce you to the leadership in the partnership community, if you are not already acquainted. Meeting with individual allies will give you the opportunity to explain what a community development prevention partnership will mean. It will be a time of advocacy for the community development model and the potential for genuine community participation in sexual assault prevention.

William Lofquist calls this important one-to-one conversation and advocacy "*personal emissary work*". It is this work that is the foundation upon which successful community development prevention initiatives are built.

Partners in Prevention is a tool to help describe the community development model to individual allies. It is designed to use in conversation with someone, not as a stand-alone information packet. The work of community development begins with these conversations. It is not time spent trying to get started, but real progress toward new and different partnerships. The time invested in this "personal emissary work" is time well spent.

Community



When we think of community we often think of our town or a neighborhood within our town or city.

Another way to think of community is to think of the smaller and more intimate membership groups to which we belong – a school, a church or faith group, a community center, or other membership group sharing common goals. These communities may exist and we may join them. Or we may gather people together to create community.

William Lofquist says that “community exists when two or more people work together to achieve mutually desirable goals that promote well-being”.

You are a part of a particular community with whom we would like to partner to create a sexual violence prevention initiative using a community development model.

This introduction packet will help explain the model we are using and the partnership we would like to create. Thank you for considering allowing us to become a partner with your community.



Changing Community Culture



Every community creates and sustains its own culture. Culture is most simply described as the patterns that exist within a community that give it its character. The shared values, expectations, attitudes, assumptions and norms that are the stuff of culture all contribute to patterns of behavior in a community that are its greatest strengths. These also contribute to its least healthful or desirable patterns of behavior.

A community development initiative is, in many ways, an invitation to consider the nature of your community culture and harness its inherent strengths to promote a sexual violence free community. Such an initiative also challenges us to attend to those values, attitudes, expectations and norms that contribute to an unhealthy or unsafe community.

In order to prevent sexual violence we must be about consciously changing those parts of our culture that contribute to sexual violence.

Selecting Stakeholders



The first important task in beginning a community development prevention initiative is to select representative members of your community. We will invite them to come together for a discussion about the community and their perception of sexual violence in their community. These selected members are stakeholders and they have a vested interest in what happens in their community. They have unique knowledge about community assets and challenges. They hold the key

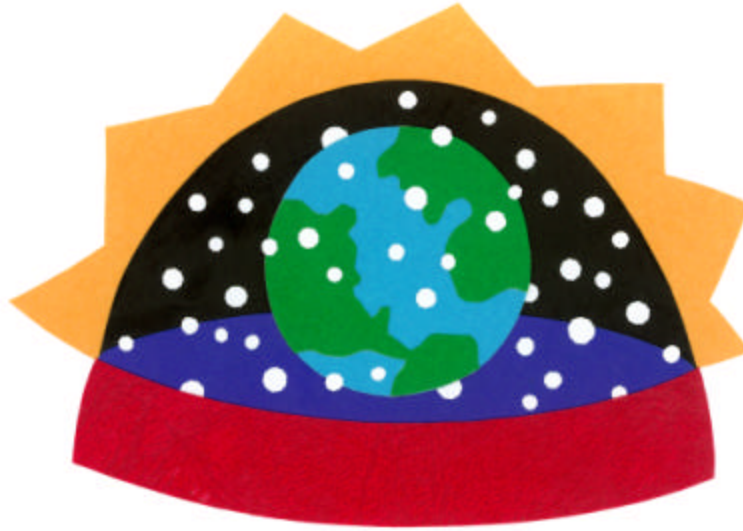
Thoughtful selection of stakeholders can ensure a broad range of experiences and points of view. Such diversity is valued for a representative view of the community at large.

5 to 7 stakeholders is an ideal size group to begin. Members will need to commit to planning and assessment time. They are critical resources to the planning and implementation process.

The community development model we are using provides a planning process that can be accomplished in a day-long retreat setting. It can also be done in several shorter sessions, depending on the availability of stakeholders.

Most important is the view that stakeholders are the experts on their own community. A facilitator can help them shape a sexual violence prevention initiative that is relevant to the community of which they are a member.

A Focus on Conditions



Communities are often galvanized to action by problems or problematic events. These are what William Lofquist would call “opportunities for action”. Many prevention programs tend to identify and focus on indicators of symptoms. (ie., fights, sexual harassment complaints, violence, etc.)

When one focuses on symptom indicators the likely strategies for change will be aimed toward individuals. The risk of focusing on individual change is that individuals may feel targeted or blamed, they may feel resentment, resistance and alienation. Even if a change in the symptom indicators occurs, the interventions have done nothing to change the underlying condition that created a climate that sustains the symptom.

In community development prevention work stakeholders continue to ask “why” of symptom indicators until the underlying condition that supports the symptom is revealed. Then activities planned by stakeholders are focused toward changing the conditions. These activities will create what no already existing curriculum can. The activities will be developed by your community members with your own community in mind. They will be consistent with the values and goals your community has set forth for itself.

Interestingly, a consistent by-product of changing conditions is change and growth in individuals.

Gauging Progress



Gauging your progress simply requires creating observable indicators of change. When one sees positive change in the indicators, progress on the prevention initiative is assured.

These indicators of change are determined during the planning process so that progress can be gauged or evaluated from the beginning. Assessment of the indicators becomes a natural and integral part of the prevention initiative.

One of the best program planning tools is an ongoing evaluation. Information from the various ways that change indicators are measured can inform planners about effectiveness of activities, need for change and future possibilities.



What Are We Proposing?

We are proposing a partnership. Stakeholders who represent the combined knowledge and wisdom about your community will partner with our community sexual assault program. Together we will create a sexual violence prevention initiative relevant to your community. Together we will work toward ending those conditions that support sexual violence and enhancing those conditions that support a sexual violence free community.

With your help we will gather 5 to 7 stakeholders.

We will meet with them over time to do the following:

- ✓ Develop a mission
- ✓ Discover underlying conditions that support sexual violence and select which conditions will be the focus of our prevention initiative
- ✓ Participate in a planning process to determine relevant action strategies that will bring about change in the conditions we have identified together
- ✓ Identify outcomes to gauge progress
- ✓ Discover the “who” and “what” resources we will need to make the activities happen
- ✓ Take action!

Only with this kind of partnership are we sure to engage in relevant change strategies. This is truly an opportunity to create meaningful social change together.

Thank you for being partners with us to end sexual violence.

Community Development & Prevention in a High School Setting



Members of a small high school became concerned about incidents of “teasing” and graffiti that were “getting out of hand”. A group of 10 school-community members (stakeholders) representing students, staff, teachers, counselors, administrators and parents met to decide what to do.

In the first meeting the facilitator encouraged them to develop a clear goal or mission so that they were all focusing on the same thing. They decided that their goal was *“To create a school environment where everyone was free to learn in safety and without intimidation or disrespect.”*

Next, they met for a 3-hour block to try to describe what the current conditions were at the school. After a free and frank discussion they listed the following:

1. Graffiti was left wherever it appeared
2. No one intervened in “teasing” incidents
3. Much of the “teasing” was really a form of harassment
4. There was no harassment policy in their student handbook
5. No one reported incidents until long after they had happened

The next time they met together for 1.5 hours. They identified conditions 3 and 4 as related. They identified number 1,2 and 5 as related. They grouped them and planned activities to address both clusters. The following activities were identified as positively addressing the identified conditions and likely to make change in the direction of their goal.

Activity 1: Do a survey to find out how much and what kinds of harassment are experienced by members of the school-community

Activity 2: Develop a policy addressing all forms of harassment at the school. (Teasing, bullying, sexual harassment)
Use data from survey

Activity 3: Develop a poster to support taking a stand against harassment

Activity 4: Create a statement to be signed by individual students that pledges to take a stand if they see “teasing”, bullying or harassment

Activity 5: Have an all-school-community Pride Day to do graffiti clean up

Community stakeholders determined in the initial planning sessions that they would know they were making progress if the following things happened:

1. School-community members responded to the survey
2. Many school-community members signed the *take a stand* pledge
3. A policy was developed, disseminated and contained a protocol for reporting and responding to incidents
4. Graffiti was cleaned up
5. Stakeholders and other community members began to take a stand whenever they saw incidents of “teasing” or harassment

When this planning was accomplished, the school-community took action. As some of these things were accomplished the group decided on next steps. They are meeting on their own and continuing to work on their goal to create a safe and respectful school environment.

Community Development In A University Community

One CSAP started a community development project in February of 1998. The community they selected was a small private university in their area. The proposed project began because of a perceived need to coordinate the university community systems which were concerned about sexual violence. There was also a perceived need for better policy and implementation of policy on campus. This reflected both the need for policy and the need for training of staff.

Though the CSAP believed this is to be a very important project, they also knew they had no additional staff to support it. The CSAP's Education Director, creatively designed an internship for a university student to staff the project. A university student applied for and was offered the internship position. At no cost to The CSAP, they had a Sexual Assault Prevention Program Coordinator.

Examples of the Prevention Program Coordinator's responsibilities were as follows:

- Work with representatives of the university campus community to develop a university Sexual Assault Prevention Task Force
- Assist the Task Force in establishing goals and determining what conditions exist on campus that foster sexual assault
- Coordinate specific prevention strategies developed by the Task Force
- Assist the CSAP Education Program staff to conduct training specific to the university faculty and staff
- Assist in training of peer educators

The Education Director also spent time with staff at the university to discuss ideas and support for the community development initiative. This initial planning and support gathering was essential to the Prevention Program Coordinator's ability to do her job once she was a part of the project. The CSAP's Education Director and the Prevention Program Coordinator met with a group of stakeholders from the university including students, teaching staff, administrative staff, support staff, and others. These stakeholders supported the development of the proposed sexual assault task force at the university. In other displays of support, the university Women's Center offered an office to house the project. The Vice President of Student Life offered to pay set up charges for the office telephone. The owner of a local carpet store donated carpet for the office.

With the help of the university Psychology Department professors, the Prevention Program coordinator developed a student survey which was approved by the human subjects review committee. She then trained 10 "researchers" to administer the survey to students. When completed, the results were delivered in various forums to faculty, staff and students. The information provided and the discussion generated on campus caused a "ripple effect" in the campus community. A group of 25 students led focus groups in the dorms on campus. There has been an invitation to provide a support group on campus. The university is setting up a crisis response on campus. The CSAP is providing the initial 30 hour training for the campus volunteers (and as a result has a free space for training their own volunteers). There has been work on the campus policy about sexual assault and about education of students and staff.

The sexual assault task force in this community has many more plans for continuing the work they have started. The Prevention Program Coordinator has graduated and will no longer be a formal part of the project. Because this is truly a community development approach, the community continues the work. Other interns will no doubt come to staff the project and new goals will develop over time. The student body contributed funds the second year to help defray costs associated with the project.

Social change is happening in this campus community. The CSAP has been a catalyst for that change. The university community members are the life- force of the continuing social change.

Community Development In One Faith Community

A stylized illustration in the background shows several hands of different colors (white, light blue, light green, light orange) reaching up to hold a large, light-colored heart. The hands are arranged in a circle around the heart, symbolizing community, support, and care.

A Central Washington CSAP initiated a project in the faith community. As a part of their planning process they determined which faith groups were located in their community in order to invite as many representatives as possible. They provided information to other community agencies about their plan and suggested the possibility that those agencies may receive referrals as a result of the information received by the faith community participants. They elicited from churches what services were being provided to victims of sexual assault in their community. And they formed a clear idea within their agency about what they wanted to pursue with the project.

Invitations were sent to all faith-based groups listed in the yellow pages of the telephone directory. Twenty-three persons participated in the initial meeting and as time went on they were joined by another six. Many different faith groups were represented. The initial meeting was planned around mealtime and food was provided.

At the first meeting this focus group brainstormed ideas and concerns around sexual violence. Participants suggested that there was a need for education in the congregations. The focus group expressed a need to be heard, for someone to listen to the concerns of the clergy. A need for accurate and complete referral resources was expressed. The group asked the sexual assault unit to share their expertise and answer questions. The group determined that they would like to meet monthly.

There are already some substantial successes in this project. Congregations are a natural network. This network is now speaking about sexual violence. This community has broken the silence around sexual violence and seems committed to continuing that trend.

There is comfort and trust within the group of stakeholders and a growing sense of trust and familiarity with the sexual assault unit. One church has invited the sexual assault unit to host a support group in their church, creating a new way to work together. Several churches are willing to advertise the services of the agency. Other groups in the community are becoming aware of the working group of stakeholders. They are interested in becoming connected, sharing with and learning from this group.

There are substantial challenges, as well. Examining disparate denominational beliefs and attitudes about the issue of sexual assault is one issue. Challenging to both the sexual assault unit and the group is the desire for biblical referencing of violence, forgiveness and related issues. It will require collaboration with stakeholders to decide what might be done to incorporate faith/scripture issues.

Here is the beginning of an exciting initiative. It brings together parts of the community that have not collaborated actively in the past. Their work is breaking silence and denial about sexual violence and encouraging dialogue. It is providing perspectives from a diverse faith community to the sexual assault community. This is a group open to possibilities yet to be discovered, It is a community in development.