Implementing Prevention Branching Out

Volume XXII
www.wcsap.org
When I began implementing prevention in communities and schools almost a decade ago, I was often supplied with great lessons and curricula, but rarely received guidance when it came to navigating the early implementation phases of prevention programming. After spending some time traveling throughout Washington and getting to know preventionists across the state, I have found that this seems to be a common experience.

For this edition of Partners in Social Change, we reached out to several preventionists in the state and asked them to share their successful experiences implementing prevention.

**Programming for Schools**
The Prevention Department of the King County Sexual Assault Resource Center shares some key strategies in their efforts to implement prevention programming in Seattle area schools.

**Programming for Middle School LGBTQ Youth**
The Oasis Youth Center in Tacoma shares their process as they launched Project 13, their first prevention program for middle school LGBTQ youth.

**Youth Summer Camp**
Alternatives to Violence of the Palouse showcases a unique and creative collaboration with the local Parks & Recreation Department, resulting in a youth summer camp centered around violence prevention.

A commonality between these programs is their responsiveness to their communities’ needs—implementing prevention is never a one-size fits all task, and will vary depending on the contexts that we find ourselves in.

We hope this issue will provide you with some new ideas to use in your prevention work. We welcome feedback at prevention@wcsap.org.

In Solidarity,
Darin Dorsey, Prevention Program Coordinator
WCSAP Prevention Resource Center
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The mission of the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs is to unite agencies engaged in the elimination of sexual violence through education, advocacy, victim services, and social change.

The Prevention Resource Center is a project of WCSAP, designed to provide support and technical assistance to individuals, communities, and agencies engaged in sexual violence prevention within Washington State.

Partners in Social Change
is published by the WCSAP Prevention Resource Center from its office in Olympia, Washington. The focus of this publication is to present information and resources for the prevention of sexual violence, with a special emphasis on social change.

For membership information, visit www.wcsap.org.

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Take a moment to think about all of the work commitments that are on your plate right now. Envision each community meeting coming up, every lesson plan waiting to be written, all the PowerPoint presentations you have yet to craft, each email that requires a response...the list goes on and on.

Now picture someone entering your office, walking up to your desk, and trying to put one more thing on your already overflowing agenda. They promise it won’t be too big, it won’t take up too much of your time—they just want to shift the entire culture of your workplace, end power-based violence, and talk with the kids in your care about a whole host of topics that sound very overwhelming.

Do you say yes?

Sometimes I fear that this is how we, as preventionists, come across to schools. Each of us know the work well, we can see the benefits it will bring to any given community so clearly, that we dive right in. Our passion for prevention has us rattling off statistics, risk factors, and the importance of community involvement. We are so prepared to reach our goal of ending sexual violence that it doesn’t sound daunting to us at all, we are eager to jump in and get to work.
Today I propose that we take a breath. I suggest that as folks in the prevention field we not only understand the community development process on an intellectual level but that we embrace the spirit of this theory as a core method of achieving our goals.

We each hold valuable knowledge about primary prevention efforts, we have outcomes we want (or need) to achieve, and we have a vast amount of experience that guides us toward historically successful approaches. Additionally, the community development process shows us that we can create lasting change by engaging stakeholders as partners in the work rather than walking into a community with an inflexible plan. When looking to establish new school partnerships, many of us may struggle with these two realities. We are likely searching for creative ways to bring our skill-set to the table in a way that respects key stakeholders as the experts of their own community.

In my experience, there have been three major factors that have helped guide my work in creating sustainable and successful school partnerships. To build lasting and unified efforts it is important to find your true partners in the work, to meet the community where they are, and to avoid reinventing the wheel.

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STEP ONE
Find Your Key Partners

Garnering the support of school principals and district-level administrators is a vital piece of establishing prevention programming. In knowing this, some may try to form key relationships at the school leadership level first. While this may be successful in some places, I have found that principals and other key administrators are highly attuned to everything school personnel are already required to do and hesitant to add to their ever-growing workloads. In my experience, folks in administrative positions are much more likely to support programming if they know their community is already invested in the work.

While these administrative folks certainly need to be on board before formal programming begins, it can be helpful to first determine who in the wider community may already have some level of interest in the work. Start by asking yourself: “Do I, or does my agency, have any existing connections to people in this community?”

As you begin to answer this question, remember to think broadly. Many community stakeholders already value key tenants of primary prevention, even if they are not formally titled as such. Helpful launching places can include the following.

1. **Educators:** Prevention concepts have a lot of natural ties to existing curriculum material. For example, many books read by youth have strong relationship components. One idea is to explore the ways language arts teachers are already addressing issues related to relationships, dating, violence, and/or trauma within their classrooms. By starting this conversation, you may uncover ways your programming can support their efforts.

2. **Student Leaders:** Many of us in the prevention field deeply value youth voices and know the strength of student-led efforts. The young people already involved in your program may also have insight into other communities you want to establish relationships with.

3. **Counseling Staff:** A lot of schools have on-campus counselors and/or student support services. One way to begin building relationships is to ensure that these staff people are aware of the direct services your agency offers. You can and work to establish a system for “warm” referrals from the school to your organization which may improve support for student survivors and begin paving the road to prevention in the community.

4. **Other Community Organizations:** Schools often have existing relationships with community partners. It can be helpful to determine if your agency has an established connection to another community organization already doing work within the school. If so, these folks likely have ideas on who may be interested in prevention programming, or who may already be doing related work.

By identifying key players who have an interest in prevention efforts, you will begin laying a foundation of support for further programming. These key partners can help you both determine what a long-term effort could look like and assist you in connecting with the appropriate administrators.
Prevention is possible when we work together.
STEP TWO
Meet the Community Where They Are

Folks who do prevention work are skilled at looking upstream. We have spent a lot of time working to understand the risk and protective factors which increase or decrease the likelihood of perpetration behavior. We have had the opportunity to explore prevention theory, to wrestle with our questions, to understand our own contributions to the perpetuation of rape culture, and to see how that culture intersects with other forms of oppression.

With risk factors memorized and a thorough understanding of why we cover the topics we do, many of us have likely had moments of frustration when we observe problematic beliefs or attitudes in the community. We may witness behavior or hear a comment that we recognize as harmful and think to ourselves: how can they not see the damage that causes?

However, it is important to remember that none of us reached our current level of understanding overnight, and none of us are done learning. The same is true for each person in any given community, we are all on our own trajectory of understanding. It is vital to gain insight into our partners’ perspectives and truly work to understand where they are. It is with this humility that I encourage folks to approach schools, and any community when looking to implement programming.

With humility in mind and true partners by your side, it is important to evaluate community readiness to find a realistic starting point. Some schools may be ready to dive in with multi-layered, long-term programming. Others might have a lot of questions and concerns about what these efforts would entail. Many schools have a lot going on already and may struggle to see how primary prevention could logistically fit. Regardless of where a specific school falls on this spectrum, there are a few factors that may be helpful to keep in mind.

1. Keep all prevention efforts community specific. Remember, what works for one school or community will likely not fit another the exact same way. It is important to remain flexible where you can while sticking closely to what we know makes prevention impactful.

2. Try to reduce concerns about the topics your program will address. When sexual violence prevention programming is proposed, the community may have concerns that the conversations will not be developmentally appropriate. Help partners to see that while consent and boundaries are a vital part of sexual relationships, we can speak about these topics in a much broader sense with younger audiences.

3. Reevaluate how you view “small” opportunities. Many of us may feel hesitant to take on one-time presentations because they do not allow us to do the long-term, in-depth work we know to be impactful. However, taking on these smaller opportunities in a strategic way can help you open doors in communities where you would like to do ongoing programming.

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STEP THREE
Avoid Reinventing the Wheel

The strongest prevention efforts do not stand alone. Rather, impactful programming is infused into as many aspects of life in a school community as possible. From formal lesson plans in the classroom to intentional modeling of healthy relationship skills, to the inclusion of prevention-related content in extracurricular activities, to supporting positive relationships between students and their caregivers—opportunities for prevention are everywhere.

Although we understand how valuable community-wide efforts are, they can also feel overwhelming. When we consider our capacity to build relationships and institute programming in each of these spheres we may worry about time, resources, and/or community interest. However, one of the great things about the community development process is a strong commitment to doing each part of the work in true partnership with stakeholders. Once you have found your partners and determined the best starting point in a school, it can be helpful to understand what prevention-related efforts are already happening and how your programming can support that work.

Again, this is a process through which I encourage preventionists to think broadly. I often fear that while we share many common goals with schools, vital opportunities can be missed because we lack a universal language.

For example, I have found it helpful to use the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s protective factors for perpetration as a framework for finding shared objectives across programs. The CDC’s protective factors include academic achievement, empathy, and emotional health and connectedness. In my experience, most schools already have established efforts to address these key protective factors in a variety of ways, they just may not be calling that work sexual violence prevention. By aligning your programming with key goals the school already has, you can help to eliminate barriers and build stronger partnerships.

Entering a new community with the goal of instituting long-term primary prevention work is no small task. These efforts can be exciting, frustrating, rewarding, and difficult. It can be easy to lose track of the large vision when we are working out the logistics of everyday programming, and there are many roadblocks that can seem insurmountable. My hope is that by identifying true partners, meeting the community where they are, and avoiding the reinvention of the wheel, preventionists will feel more connected to their target schools and find exciting new ways to implement programming.

Bio

Rachel Taylor is the Prevention Services Coordinator at King County Sexual Assault Resource Center in Renton, Washington. She is a compassionate social service professional with excellent communication skills and ability to problem solve in crises situations.
Anyone who has ever designed or implemented a program knows that once it’s all over, the million dollar question is: How do you know when you’ve achieved success? While there is an endless number of ways to measure program impact, one of the sure and steadfast indicators is when there just isn’t enough room anymore to accommodate all the people in the room. At Oasis Youth Center in Tacoma, WA, we know exactly what that looks like. In 2015, we launched our first prevention program geared toward middle-school LGBTQ youth called Project 13, and 4 years later, we have reached maximum participant capacity and are at an exciting place for program growth and replication. Getting to this point was not easy, and while we are hopeful for continued success, we know that getting there is all in the details, even in the case of replicating a previously successful program. So how exactly do you ensure flawless program implementation?

Read on as we share our lessons learned along the way.
STEP 1:
Begin with a solid foundation and rich, fertile soil!

When Oasis first started playing with the idea of creating a program for middle-school youth, it felt like an exciting yet daunting task. While we had been offering prevention programs and services for youth ages 14-24 for over 30 years in the community, serving middle-school youth was new territory. We knew we had a lot of experience to draw from, but the question was deciding what was applicable in moving forward with a new program and what we should leave behind. The first step we took was learning about normal child development for middle-school youth. We consulted several bodies of information that we felt was relevant to what we were doing, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) list of protective and risk factors, as well as adverse childhood experiences, and other prevention programs that were geared toward middle-school youth. Once we had a clear idea of what is considered healthy development for middle-school youth, we were able to build the rest of the program to frame our work. The initial process looked more like a dialogue than anything else, but eventually, we arrived at a beautiful map (also known as a logic model) that listed everything that was needed for an implementation to achieve our desired outcomes.

Our goal for the program? To provide a fun space for LGBTQ middle-schoolers to connect with peers, prepare them with the knowledge and skills to safely “hang with the older kids” when they graduated into high school, and to develop them into leaders and change-agents in our community.

Need help with creating your own logic model? The CDC’s website includes some helpful articles on how to create one for your specific program.

STEP 2:
Prototyping

Once we had a clear idea of our vision, we drafted a prototype to bring the program to life. We engaged stakeholders and used their feedback to make changes as we went along. We also used this process to create buy-in and to set off an exciting buzz within our community.

For us, this included addressing technical questions such as:

- What is the ideal number of participants for our program?
- What is the ideal number of sessions for our program?
- What kind/level of staff support is ideal for the participants in our program? For the participants’ families?
- What environmental considerations are needed for the program?
- What is the ideal way to frame the conversations/topics we want to have with participants?

Drawing from our experience in providing drop-in programming for youth ages 14-24 living with layers of marginalization, we knew that whatever information we found during our research process, we would want to provide even more support than what was recommended. Years prior, we had created a more structured program model within our drop-in hours, named Youth Council, to allow for more facilitator-led programming, as well as more time and project-based objectives. This structure allowed us to customize programming to better fit the needs of the group we were working with, which included youth who had a significant need for stability and consistency in their lives. We decided that this model would also be the best fit for meeting the developmental needs of middle-school youth and their families. To develop program content, we looked into best practices already developed in the field, including WCSAP’s “9 Principles of Prevention” and a school-age program assessment model called “Youth Program Quality Assessment”. Drawing from these materials as well as the feedback from community members, we were able to create a draft program model that was almost ready for implementation!
STEP 3: Funding and Staffing

The next step in this process was to determine how we would get the right funding and staffing to support this program. We needed funding to come from a source that was well aligned with the work so that when we hit little bumps along the way, they would be able to roll through the turbulence with us and see our learnings as successes rather than setbacks. We also needed our funding to come from a source that trusted our ability to do the work while providing us with reinforcements when needed. In a similar vein, the staff we selected for implementing this program had to have a deep connection to the work as well as the skills to iron out the details, troubleshoot when necessary, and longevity to see the program through into a stable point in its life-span. To support our staff, we engaged a core team of community members that touched upon various levels of contact, including both active and past participants, program content specialists, logistical support specialists, cheerleaders, champions, and so much more.
STEP 4:  
Program Delivery

At last, we came to the point of implementation and were ready to open our doors to the community. If you have ever known an event coordinator personally, you might know how this feels. Except instead of coordinating one event, imagine coordinating a series of events—that never really ends. That is program implementation in a nutshell. It’s a big deal because once you start a program, it is a difficult train to stop. Each programmatic detail and your ability to be responsive to the environmental changes will continue to hold significant value to the program’s overall success. Implementation is the process of doing, and often once something is done, it is difficult to undo. With that said, I am including a basic checklist for anyone to use as a defense against common implementation “don’ts”. Use at your own risk.

- Select a program assessment tool that fits your model and goals and use it regularly as a guide. 
  Make sure to incorporate both external and internal assessments for best outcomes. Use your findings to adjust your program delivery. If you can’t find the right assessment tool that fits with your needs, is there a way for you to develop one with a group of people within your field of work? It’s a lot of work, but well worth it in the end!

- Select your staff and support team carefully. 
  Do your staff embody the best fit for the job in terms of common life experience to the participants, social skills, interests/passion for the work, and concrete job skills? Similarly, is your support team diverse in skills, experience, and community reach? Do your staff and support team work together well?

- Evaluation evaluation evaluation! DO NOT leave evaluation as an afterthought. Like assessments, participant evaluations provide valuable information individually, but it is most helpful when looked at collectively over time. This feedback is crucial to long-term success.

- If you’re replicating another program, take the appropriate amount of time to see if it is a good fit for the resources you have. It is better to try to scale back the amount of work and do it well than try to do too much and do it poorly. However, there is something to be said about cutting too much out of a program so that it is essentially made ineffective. If this is the case, it might be worth creating an entirely new program. Sure, it will be more work, but by treating it as a new program, you will hopefully do your due diligence before launching it into the world.

Lastly, it is important to note that while the process is laid out in a step-by-step fashion in this article, it is very unlikely that actual implementation will look like this. Many times, program implementation is about starting where you can and working forwards or backward from that point, in whichever way makes sense for your particular situation. Time and effort towards implementation should never be rushed, but if there is a community need for your particular program, be creative! Just please do your community a favor and don’t try to create any shortcuts.

Bio

Michelle Woo is the Director of Leadership and Wellness at the Oasis Youth Center in Tacoma, Washington. Michelle is passionate about capacity building and reaching for the stars. She’s an experienced systems advocate with a demonstrated history of working in community engagement, organization, and mobilization. She is skilled in Program Directorship, Policy Analysis, Strategic Planning, Social Justice and Leadership Development for LGBTQ youth and other marginalized communities. Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Government, Politics, and Sociology and Master of Public Administration (MPA) with an emphasis in Nonprofit/Public/Organizational Management from the University of Washington.
As a sexual assault prevention educator, I am no stranger to envisioning engaging, interactive prevention sessions within a school classroom, only to find school administration or teachers not matching my enthusiasm for this endeavor. Whether it’s facing barriers of what can and cannot be discussed in the classroom due to parental concerns, or the very real challenge of teachers not having the time in their schedules to squeeze you in, it can be frustrating for advocates and prevention educators to not have their priorities shared with the local school district.

Historically, in my role as prevention educator at ATVP, I have been granted space to spend 3-4 days with a health class once a semester, or time to do presentations and visits to school club meetings. While I know that these few hours with students is not enough to strengthen their skills in fostering healthy relationships, and thus prevent future violence from occurring (Nation, Crusto, Wandersman, Kumpfer, Seybolt, Morrissey-Kane, & Davino, 2003), I tend to take what I can get.

My colleagues and I wanted more: we wanted a venue to spend more time with youth to engage in conversation, to have space that was not confined to what the school district deemed safe from parent critique. My colleague envisioned an intensive, weeklong prevention programming with youth in our community. With a basis in violence prevention principles and the goal to meet a community need for free childcare, we set out to build a violence-prevention summer camp from scratch.

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Collaboration and Partnership

Our relationship with the Parks & Rec department allows for easy collaboration and partnership. Several times a year, Parks & Rec widely distribute an activity brochure for local families to see what programming is planned in the community, which means widespread publicity and advertisement for our camps.

Parks & Rec would not only widely broadcast the details of the camp, but also collect registration information (and this is huge: Parks & Rec is an expert when it comes to collecting information for registrants, including the basics like names, emergency contact information, etc.; but they also collect information that us advocates didn’t consider, like food allergies and photo releases).

In the month leading up to the camps, Parks & Rec regularly updated us on enrollment numbers, so we could have a sense of capacity and what targeted publicity and outreach we could do.

We decided to hold two concurrent camps, separated by age group: Camp Pow! was superhero themed and geared toward those ages 8-11; while Camp ‘Ship was pirate themed and geared toward ages 12-14. The purpose of these camps was essentially the same: to foster skills and conversations related to building and maintaining healthy relationships and communication, but with more age-appropriate lessons that were loosely based on neutral, family-friendly themes: superheroes and pirates.
Theme-Based Schedule

As a huge prevention nerd, I had blast planning activities for the group. Based on research on violence prevention skill building (Basile, DeGue, Jones, Freire, Dills, Smith, & Raiford, 2016), we assigned a topic theme to each day of the week: introductions and self-esteem; communication and emotions; relationships and media; gender and other -isms; and resilience. Our goal was to make the lessons educational and engaging, utilizing varied teaching methods and opportunities for interaction and self-reflection (DeGue, Valle, Holt, Massetti, Matjasko, & Tharp, 2014). For instance, our “Communication” day took us on a walking field trip to Palouse Games, our local game shop. We had arranged for a store employee to teach us how to play a game that requires communication and teamwork. The employee (very fittingly) chose Sentinels of the Multiverse, which allowed for great discussion and debrief about considerations for your community, cooperation, and the impact of your actions on others. We then stopped for pizza and walked back to the Parks & Rec building to discuss the connection between our emotions and unmet needs (Rosenberg & Chopra, 2015). After trekking around Pullman, we cooled down while snacking and watching Inside Out, then debriefing the movie, discussing how to identify emotions and feelings. Each day looked a bit like this, with a variety of activities, including crafts, outdoor time, discussion and lessons, and lots and lots of snacks. Every day ended with some quiet time for campers to journal and reflect on the conversations of the day, and an opportunity to write notes to others at our “Affirmation Station,” a board lined with envelopes for each person at the camp.

Community Involvement

At the very end of the week, we invited parents, guardians, and family members to join us for a final gathering. We displayed projects along the walls, which included superhero capes from Camp Pow! and flags from Camp ‘Ship, a projection of videos and memes created by the campers, and our “overview of the week” posters, which were presented by the campers themselves. Through the week, they had worked to design a wall-sized piece of butcher paper to share the week’s activities with their family. Campers took turns recapping the lessons, activities, and discussions that we had over the past 5 days. It was not only really great to see the campers’ ability to recall subject matter and put it into their own words, but it was great to see that family members were brought into the conversation (if they hadn’t been already).

As is to be expected, early on in the week we had a parent express concern about the subject matter. Upon receiving our week’s schedule, she asked us, “My son is too young to be discussing relationships – what exactly will be covered?” At the time, I was nervous but remained straightforward and transparent about the fact that we were discussing healthy relationships in general, which includes friends, family, and all loved ones. She ended up keeping her son in the group, and I was happy to see her in attendance at the final presentation to see how our plans had manifested.
Wrap Up

Exhausted yet filled with accomplishment (and, admittedly, relief for the weekend), our staff said farewell to each of the campers and their families, whom we challenged to continue the conversation about relationships, communication, and non-violence. We provided each camper’s family with:

- a link to a Google Drive folder that held “conversation starters” from WCSAP’s Be the Solution Discussion Guide (Teen Edition),
- WSCADV’s “How’s Your Relationship?” cards,
- photos from the week,
- and a feedback form.

What had once seemed like a daunting impossibility of a prevention program has become an annual event for us, with community members inquiring about additional sessions and locations around our county. I realize that putting on a weeklong prevention camp while still providing advocacy services is only possible through funding, staffing and volunteers, and strong partnership in our community – not to mention resources in the form of supplies, prevention resources and curricula, and time for preventionists to fill each hour of the week with activities and lessons. If your agency is interested in brainstorming or getting further information about the logistics and planning of a prevention camp, know that we’re here to support our partners in prevention!

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References


Bio

Vanessa Corwin, MA, is the Coordinator of Sexual Assault Services at Alternatives to Violence of the Palouse (ATVP). ATVP empowers individuals affected by domestic violence, sexual assault and abuse, and stalking. They work to create a safe and equitable community through education and prevention. ATVP also has an outreach and education program that focuses on increasing understanding, awareness, and ultimately on preventing family and sexual violence.
Question Oppression

Exploring the Connections Between Sexual Violence & Oppression

The articles featured in this edition of the PISC showcase several partnerships, including with schools, parks and recreation departments, and with parents. How can preventionists prepare their partners to engage in sexual violence prevention work?

How can preventionists and their programs engage in accessibility and equity work internally?

Identifying individuals or organizations that uphold the values of access and equity is crucial in implementing prevention programs. In the early stages of implementation, what are some signs that maintaining equity and accessibility might become a challenge?

How can preventionists lower barriers that people who experience oppression may face when participating in prevention programming? How can you provide solutions to participants who have access needs such as transportation? What about people who have experienced high levels of violence – would they feel comfortable participating in the program?

Prevention Resources

WCSAP members have access to check out our library materials through the mail. Questions can be directed to library@wcsap.org.

Tools for Change
http://taasa.org/product/tools-change/
This guide developed by the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault helps you gain a basic understanding of the history, concepts and language tied up with the primary prevention of sexual violence and would make for a good primer for anyone interested in implementing primary prevention programming.

Innovations in Community-Level Prevention
This report developed by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center highlights several community-based prevention programs and identifies common characteristics that led to their success.

Engaging Communities in Sexual Violence Prevention
This is a tool developed by the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault and is intended for communities and individuals who are looking to begin implementing community-based primary prevention programs. It includes several tools related to recruiting community partners, assessing community risk and protective factors, and identifying community assets and resources.
PISC is your magazine. We'd love to hear from you!

PISC is your magazine.

We invite guest authors to submit pieces on a variety of topics, and welcome your submissions on prevention approaches, media reviews, and creative work like original art or poetry.

We would also like to feature highlights of your agency and the prevention work you are doing.

Direct submissions to prevention@wcsap.org