

UPROOT!

A Primary Prevention Newsletter from the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault

Preventioneer
|pri-'ven(t)-shə-nir|

n. One who, through innovative and pioneering means, seeks to create lasting social change with the intent of ending sexual violence

Spring 2009

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PRIMARY PREVENTION WORK WITH YOUTH NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Tim Love, Primary Prevention Specialist

Engaging youth around issues of sexual violence has been a major focus in our rape crisis centers and state agencies for much of recent history. TAASA has our Students Taking Action for Respect (STAR) program and many of you reading this article work for rape crisis centers that target much of their community education efforts to youth. I came to my position as a Primary Prevention Specialist through my efforts as a rape prevention educator working with youth at a local rape crisis center, and then with TAASA as Youth Program Coordinator. A primary prevention approach to sexual violence opens up exciting new options for working with youth.

Engaging youth in primary prevention of sexual violence allows us – even requires us – to think about working with youth in new places. Most of our efforts to work with youth have been focused on working in schools for a number of reasons. When staff members of rape crisis centers are able to get into schools, they reach large numbers of youth in a controlled environment, allowing them to meet grant requirements and providing a sense of accomplishment in a society, and funding environment, that teaches us that more is better. We can expand our efforts by reaching out to youth in many of the other spaces, both formal and infor-

mal, where they live their lives – churches, families, organizations, skate parks, malls, youth centers, etc. This can lead to more authentic and effective relationships with the youth we want to work with. Adultism – the belief that confers power and status on adulthood and silences, ignores or punishes youth – also plays a role in our focus on working in schools. A result of adultism is that we as a society have a whole list of places where youth are not allowed or where we don't give youth any agency or power.

There are only a few places, such as schools, where we think of them as active contributors – and even fewer of those spaces are thought of in a positive light. As with other marginalized communities, we often think about engaging youth as a group and separately from other groups. We do this by creating youth advisory boards or youth groups. While these youth-focused spaces can be an important part of our efforts, we can also expand our work with youth by including them in meaningful ways in all of our agency and community efforts, including our community primary prevention workgroups and organizational boards.

We can further reinforce the messages and skills we are
(continued on page 3)

AROUND THE STATE: ENGAGING YOUTH IN TEXAS

Emiliano Diaz de Leon, Primary Prevention Specialist

For many rape crisis centers around the state, prevention work with young people is conducted in a school setting. Now that the school year is coming to a close, does this mean that our work is too? Have we finished until next school year, or is this an opportunity to work with this same group of youth in a different setting? By reaching out to young people during the summer months, we can engage them in ways that are less restrictive. Time restraints, topic censorship, classroom size and setting are no longer challenges when we think about all the possibilities that summer sessions can bring. So, as we begin to look to the summer months ahead, here is an example of how one community is engaging young people around the issues they face on a daily basis.

The East Texas Prevention Coalition of Longview, organized by the Women's Center of East Texas decided to organize a boys and men conference to begin a dialogue between boys and the

men in their lives, be it their fathers, grandfathers, uncles, coaches or mentors. The conference will focus on the issues of masculinity, violence, sexuality and healthy relationships. In addition, the East Texas Prevention Coalition hopes to develop a campaign that involves local schools, colleges and universities in a contest to design a violence prevention message. To learn more about these efforts contact Carol Ibarra, Primary Prevention Coordinator with the Women's Center of East Texas at 903-247-0009 or carol@wc-et.org.

If you need any assistance in developing ideas or projects for youth in your community, please contact any member of TAASA's prevention team (see pages 2 & 4).



Morgan J Curtis, LMSW
Director of Prevention Programs
mcurtis@taasa.org, x 31

About Morgan

Morgan is an aspiring locavore who totally geeks out over the Austin farmers' markets. She bakes her own bread, makes her own granola and is that strange person in the office who brings her own (homemade) chai and heats it in the water bath because she refuses to use a microwave. Years ago she turned down a scholarship to culinary school but thinks she'll go someday.



Emiliano Diaz de Leon
Primary Prevention Specialist
ediazdeleon@taasa.org, x 35

About Emiliano

Emiliano is a longtime fan of all types of food, from the kind that is made at home to the great food at Mr. Natural, Magnolia Café, and the wondrous desserts from Amy's Ice Cream. Each has its own taste, sound, and ambiance that have made it easy for him to fall in love with the city of Austin all over again!



Tim Love
Primary Prevention Specialist
tlove@taasa.org, x 16

About Tim

Tim loves food and food loves Tim. He loves to cook, when he can make the time, and he can throw together a mean vegetarian chili. His greatest food challenge is to expand the list of foods his youngest daughter will eat beyond fake chicken nuggets and Lucky Charms. Tim can also settle the debate regarding the world's best eggplant parm sandwich - Savage Pizza in Little Five Points in Atlanta, GA.

PRIMARY PREVENTION RED FLAGS YOU MIGHT NOT BE DOING PRIMARY PREVENTION IF...

Tim Love & Morgan J Curtis

The following red flags are meant to serve as indicators that you may be moving away from primary prevention (into risk reduction or awareness, for example). They are not absolute indicators, but rather issues to look out for when designing and implementing prevention efforts. For more information or help in determining if your efforts are primary prevention-based or not, contact one of TAASA's talented preventioneers.

All of your prevention efforts include the word "education."

While education is a critical component of engaging community, primary prevention also requires other tactics, such as changing organizational practices, public policy work and leadership development efforts.

All of your education efforts are targeted to youth.

While youth must be part of our prevention efforts, both as recipients of education and leaders of social change efforts, our focus must be more universal to be effective. Even if we center our efforts around youth, we must recognize that we need to impact the folks and institutions that interact with and influence youth.

You're working with all the same folks you've been working with to improve service provision.

We have a tendency to partner with the folks we're already working with. It's human nature when we're doing something new, especially if we don't feel total comfort and confident with our efforts, to work in a familiar and comfortable environment with the folks we know. However, primary prevention work is not necessarily a natural fit for many of the first responders we work with to improve services. Primary prevention opens up the opportunity to collaborate and partner with new folks in our community, such as community health agencies, community activists and neighborhood and tenant associations.

Your prevention efforts focus on providing individual skills.

A primary prevention approach means recognizing the multiple influencers that impact individuals, relationships and communities. It means working with individuals to shift attitudes, and embracing a big picture view and developing an analysis of community and societal level risk factors for sexual violence. By creating prevention programming that impacts individuals, relationships, communities and the society at large, attitude changes are reinforced and lasting social change is possible.

You are the central figure in every prevention program.

Primary prevention requires a shift in community attitudes. That means that the community must not only support your efforts, but buy into the overall plan to end sexual violence and take leadership roles in prevention efforts. A key component to any primary prevention plan must be leadership development in order to create sustainable efforts to create the type of long-term, lasting change prevention requires.

You're talking a lot about root causes and actually using the term "root causes."

Just as raising awareness about sexual violence doesn't prevent sexual violence, neither does raising awareness about prevention. Helping people to understand the root causes of sexual violence might help motivate them to be involved in prevention work, but it won't create changes in those root causes. It is possible to just make people aware of prevention without building skills or challenging systems that perpetuate sexual violence. To reiterate, helping people understand these root causes can be an important part of community mobilization, but it can't be the cornerstone of your efforts to create change.

“When numerous settings and layers of a child’s social environment are mobilized to support healthy relationships and healthy sexuality, the child will receive these lessons earlier and in a manner that is constantly reinforced. Such an approach creates a buffer against subsequent negative influences and makes the child more likely to thrive.”

-Scales & Leffert, Search Institute

PRIMARY PREVENTION WORK WITH YOUTH (CONT'D)

working with youth to develop by engaging the many different folks who are involved in and influence their lives. As a rape prevention educator, I often witnessed a significant shift in behavior or attitude after working with a group of youth for several weeks, only to have it wiped away by one bad week or experience. In one group I worked with, a young woman told me that she tried some of the healthy communication skills my co-facilitator and I taught her with her family, only to be laughed at and asked if she thought she was better than them.

This is the experience that I try to recall every time I think about working with youth and it is my reminder that we must engage the people youth interact with in our efforts. We can work with our communities so that they support and strengthen the skills we work with youth to develop – skills for creating a just and peaceful community. We can work to change the messages youth receive from their families and peer groups, from the communities and institutions (work, school, etc.) they interact with and from society in general. In order to tear down adultism, we can start our efforts by asking youth how they’d like to be supported in all of these places and then working with them to create that support.

A primary prevention approach to ending sexual violence provides us with unique opportunities to expand our ideas about which youth we can work with and support. As a rape prevention educator, I struggled to figure out how to talk about sexual violence in an age-appropriate way to elementary school students. As Brad Perry puts it, “Not surprisingly local school systems, perhaps already predisposed to limit access by any non-school personnel to younger populations of students, only connected SV/IPV prevention work to populations of students who were of a dating age, which typically meant high school students” (Moving Upstream, Winter 2008, p. 1).

I remember struggling through the script of a puppet show about inappropriate and appropriate touch to make sure the wording wasn’t going to upset any students, parents or administrators. A primary pre-

vention approach means that we can work with youth to end sexual violence without ever having to talk about sexual harassment or sexual assault (I know, awesome, huh?!). We can work with youth as young as two years old by taking a promotion approach to ending sexual violence. We can promote the skills, beliefs and attitudes that folks need to negotiate healthy interactions with their peers, families and communities. This is exciting stuff. Imagine the type of long-term change we can make in our communities and societies by engaging youth in our messaging from a young age, and working with those who influence youth regarding the same messaging.

We have a great opportunity to look at the ways we work with youth to end sexual violence in a new way. We can take advantage of this great opportunity

“Our adultism makes it easy to forget that youth can be partners in all of our work. We can refute adultism and work as allies with youth – recognizing their expertise, challenging people when they put youth down or dismiss them and getting out of the way to let youth take leadership – to end sexual violence.”

by challenging some of our own assumptions about youth and by challenging adultism. Have you ever heard this statement, or spoken it, “you’ll understand when you’re older”? Or maybe you’ve heard this statement, “we need to figure out how to speak their language, to speak in a way that youth can relate to,”

when you’re in a room full of adults. Adultism often leads to assumptions about what youth can handle, paternalistic behavior that is silencing and denies opportunities to youth and conveys a sense of responsibility for and authority over them. As the coordinator of the STAR program, I remember intending to give the Youth Advisory Board complete control over the STAR Conference. Instead, I only gave them control of the dance theme, the conference opening and the closing ceremonies. All of the other decisions had already been made by the adult planning committee. I was telling the youth that this conference was theirs, and yet it clearly wasn’t. Our adultism makes it easy to forget that youth can be partners in all of our work. We can refute adultism and work as allies with youth – recognizing their expertise, challenging people when they put youth down or dismiss them and getting out of the way to let youth take leadership to end sexual violence.

2009 TAASA CONFERENCE



Acatzin Orta facilitating a discussion at the Mobilizing Men Task Force workshop.



IMPACT Church in Houston was presented with the Partner in Prevention Award.



Emiliano, Morgan and Tim had a busy four days of facilitating workshops and networking with all of their favorite people from around Texas.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY MOBILIZING MEN TASK FORCE

Next month the TAASA Mobilizing Men Task Force turns one year old. In just a year, the task force has made tremendous strides at supporting both individuals and organizations working to redefine masculinity and prevent boys and men's violence in Texas! One hundred men and women from around the state have gathered to learn from and share resources and best practices with each other. Some highlights:

2008

August: Attendees decided to distribute a copy of *The Macho Paradox* by Jackson Katz to each rape crisis center in Texas.

September: Jesus Sanchez, Jr., Program Director, Southwest Key Responsible Fatherhood Program, presented on best practices of engaging teen fathers.

October: We changed the name of the task force from Men's Task Force to Mobilizing Men Task Force to emphasize our desire to "mobilize" men to prevent violence in their personal lives and in their community. Paula X. Rojas, INCITE! Women of Color AGAINST Violence, provided a training: From Survival to Collective Self-Determination (Community Organizing and Direct Action Strategies to Confront Violence).

December: Cristina Tzintzun, Director of Workers Defense Project, facilitated a workshop: Creating Justice in Our Movements: Confronting Interpersonal Abuse in Social Justice Communities.

2009

January: Robert Jensen, UT Austin Journalism Professor, facilitated a screening/discussion of "The Price of Pleasure: Pornography, Sexuality and Relationships."

February: Participants helped develop the content and format of the "Engaging Boys and Men in Primary Prevention" workshop.

March: The first issue of "THE LINK," a monthly online resource, was distributed to 1,240 individuals around the state and country. Members of the task force presented "Engaging Boys and Men in Primary Prevention" workshop at the TAASA state conference.

April: Performer/activist Zell Miller and members of hip hop group P.U.B.L.I.C. O.F.F.E.N.D.E.R.S. led a discussion on hip hop and men's violence.

Please join us for the next TAASA Mobilizing Men Task Force on Saturday, May 23, 2009 from 9a.m. - 3 p.m. at the TAASA office. If you're not receiving the email flyer for the monthly gatherings or "THE LINK" please contact Emiliano Diaz de Leon, Primary Prevention Specialist at phone 512-474-7190 x35 or ediazdeleon@taasa.org.

As we continue to develop prevention initiatives, programs and campaigns, the TAASA Mobilizing Men Task Force will continue to have a significant role in the efforts to end men's violence in Texas.

We Want to Hear from YOU!

Do you have any prevention success stories or any interesting prevention-related events or initiatives coming up? We would love to hear about your efforts and be able to share them with other prevention folks around the state in our e-newsletter, so please let us know about them!

Questions about Engaging Youth?

Have more questions about engaging youth in primary prevention work? Feel free to contact two of TAASA's other preventioners who work on the STAR program and other youth engagement initiatives:

Tamara Williams, Youth Program Coordinator
twilliams@taasa.org; 512-474-7190 x28

Ted Rutherford, Youth Outreach Specialist
trutherford@taasa.org, 512-474-7190 x34



6200 La Calma ♦ Suite 110
Austin, TX 78752
www.taasa.org