



The Dartmouth North Project

Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls
in Dartmouth North



AVALON
SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRE

Final Report
November 2015



Status of Women
Canada

Condition féminine
Canada

Background of the Project



The Dartmouth North Project grew out of a need to address institutional barriers and other factors that limit community efforts to prevent and reduce violence against women and girls in identified high-risk neighbourhoods. With a focus on female youth between the ages of 12-25 living in Dartmouth North, the project provided an opportunity for community residents to work together to mobilize the community around issues pertaining to addressing violence against women and girls. With consultation from the neighborhood, a needs

assessment was conducted and provided an in-depth look at the climate of the community around issues related to sexual violence. The needs assessment provided an opportunity for community residents to participate first hand in being apart of the solution towards addressing the issues in the community. The community was involved in identifying strategies to address violence against women and girls. The coordinators were responsible for working with the community to implement the strategies. This project, funded by Status of Women Canada provided the opportunity for Avalon Sexual Assault Centre to work with organizations and community members in Dartmouth North to address systemic barriers that lead to violence against women and girls. Robyne Gorman and LaMeia Reddick, both life-long residents of Dartmouth North were hired as the coordinators of the Dartmouth North Project. Both LaMeia and Robyne brought a lot of knowledge and passion to the project.



LaMeia Reddick is from North Preston, raised in Dartmouth North. She has fond memories of attending Notting Park and Bicentennial and working HRM summer camp in the Dartmouth area. These experiences provided the foundation of her career.

Robyne Gorman has lived in Dartmouth North her entire life. She has raised her Family there and continues to work in Dartmouth North and advocate for the residents and the Community.



Partners

The key ingredients for effective community mobilization are centered around a focus on relationship building, collaboration and communication. One of the things that makes Dartmouth North so unique is the strong commitment and willingness on behalf of residents and service providers to work together on a grass roots level. Through this project, we were able to witness these community leaders share information and ideas on how we can implement practices that will allow for better communication and better service for the community, specifically for women and girls around the issue of sexual violence. To get the project off the ground there were a number of different people and organizations involved. The three community partners that provided support in the initial phase of the project was the Boys and Girls Club, Avalon Sexual Assault Centre and the Dartmouth Family Resource Centre. There were also early partnerships established with Alice Housing, Dartmouth High School, Bicentennial Junior High School, and John Martin Junior High School. The collaboration with the Take Action Society developed as we worked extensively with them on bringing programs and services into the Community Hub over the past year. The Macphee Centre for Creative Learning was also a key partner in the work carried out with the youth during the project.

We developed even more partnerships with other organizations that attended the community meetings. Some of these new partners joining the collaborations were: Dartmouth Learning Network, NS Legal Aid, Dartmouth North Community Centre, HRM Councillor, Adsum House/ Adsum Court, First Baptist Church, Demetrious Lane, Bryony House, Dartmouth Community Health Team, United Way Halifax, Farrell Benevolent Society, Schools Plus, MLA Dartmouth North, Between the Bridges, Family SOS, Community Constable HRP, Dartmouth Echo, CeaseFire, Capital District Health Association. This community mobilization project set a goal to increase communication among all of the partners involved, in hopes that these organizations will continue to build strong relationships and partnerships as they work towards building solutions to the issues facing the Dartmouth North Community.



Findings from the Needs Assessment

There is no shortage of literature and discourse on the influence of violence and its vicious cycle. However, finding information and research specific to Nova Scotian communities, specifically Dartmouth North is more difficult to find. The needs assessment was created to address this gap in the literature and provide the community with an opportunity to take a deeper look at some of the root causes and underlying issues in the community dealing with the issue of sexualized violence.

Key Priorities and themes from the research as determined by the community

1. Sexual Assault and Sexualized Violence:

Participants deemed sexualized violence as the most critical issue in the community. A high concern among participants was young girls working illegally as sex workers. It was consistently stated how easy it was for young girls to participate in sex work and how much violence they experience in the industry. Sex work was a difficult topic to discuss and approach with youth. There is often isolation and with family members or friends who may be involved in the sex industry. One of the main themes that was pulled out of the research articulated, sex work as a necessary survival strategy.

2. Violence as a means of Survival: Many community members spoke about the high rate of poverty in Dartmouth North and made the link between lower income and the communities experiences with increased violence. The first issue most participants discussed was the low socio-economic status of many people in Dartmouth North and the various social deterrents of health that can affect the rates of violence in the community. Lack of stable housing, inability to access transportation, low education and unemployment of residents were all stated to

contribute to violence in Dartmouth North. There was recognition by participants that much of the highly violent crimes in the community were not related to random acts of violence. Therefore, many people felt safe in the community as they framed crime occurring among those groups who do use violence as a means of survival. Highly violent crimes were often related to those involved in drug or gang violence and thus, community members often felt safe from highly violent acts of crime if they were not in proximity to this type of criminal activity.

3. Verbal and Physical Abuse: The final priority addressed by participants in this Needs Assessment was the amount of verbal and physical violence prevalent in Dartmouth North. Community members expressed how visible of violence in the community negatively impacts their sense of safety in the community. The report articulated that some of the violence is instigated on a personal level or it can often be a wrong place, wrong time situation or random act of violence. There was also talk about girls being followed home from school and approached by men for sexual acts. Youth and adults also commented on verbal and physical abuse in relationships.

Recommendations

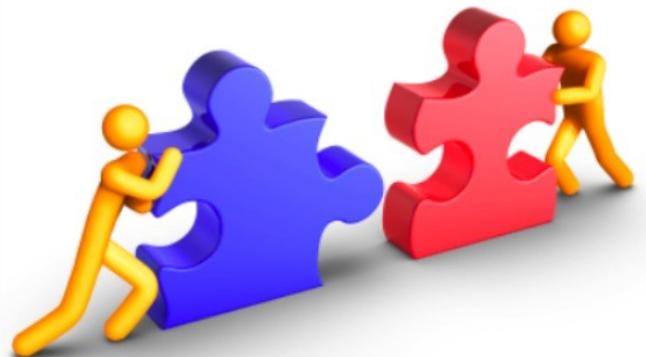
The Community came up with recommendations to help prevent these violence situations from occurring and to provide direction when situations do happen.

- More involvement with the schools in the area. The schools are key components and facilitate many community programs and activities.
- Community collaboration between service providers and community members should be strengthened. Many service providers do not know the full capabilities of other organizations in their community meaning that they cannot pass on this knowledge to community members who may require services as such.
- Increased access to services. Service providers need to look at how easy they are to be accessed. Services that are provided often do not meet the needs of the community due to accessibility.
- More trauma-informed and specialized services. To meet the needs of the community, service providers should move towards a trauma-informed model of care.

Designing and Implementing the Strategy

The strategy was developed and designed from an asset based, community development approach in order to positively reflect and build on the strengths and merits of the Dartmouth North Community. Developing a strategy that complemented the richness and spirit of the community was very important. We looked at other communities that had been successful in establishing strong networking connections and were committed to community mobilization. There were already some strong, existing resources in the community that had been building relationships for many years. We wanted to work with these leaders to build on the work they were already doing in community. The goal for the strategy was to mobilize activities with a focus on building a stronger and safer community.

Designing and implementing the strategy came with some obstacles and challenges the coordinators were able to overcome. A lot of care and consideration was put into this phase of the project because the coordinators had to find the right balance between the desires of the partners in the project and the community. There was a need to design something all partners could get behind and support, as well as being something that the community wanted and needed.



Work with Service Providers and the Community

Communication. Relationship Building. Asset Mapping. Coordinated Response.

Focusing on the recommendation that stated a need to encourage more communication among Service Providers, there were Community meetings held at the new Community Hub. Schools, Organizations, Community Groups and Government were invited to these meetings. Throughout these meetings there was a lot of communication and collaboration. We lead an Asset Mapping activity which allowed people to get to know each other and to know what services are being offered in the community. Everyone was able to share information about specific programs they offered and who the programs were available to. Contact information was shared and the relationship building started. A booklet was developed of these community assets which could be distributed to the community. We discussed what programs and services were available in the new Community Hub and what other services could be brought into the Hub. The focus of one of the meetings was on developing a Communication Strategy. Everyone agreed that Facebook and Twitter were great ideas that allowed everyone to post to, but it meant that organizations had to check the page often. The hope is that there can now be more of a coordinated response when issues regarding around sexual violence happen because of the relationships made from these meetings. There can be more of a personal referral process now because the Service Providers know each other better and know where to direct people depending on what services they need.

There were many partnerships made from the meetings. There were 8 new services/programs brought into the Hub. There was a coordinator at the Hub 1 day a week to help residents navigate the services available as well as refer them to Avalon or other places depending on the need. The coordinator also attended many community meetings, such as the Dartmouth North Association. Throughout these meetings it was brought up how there was a real issue around safety in the community. A safety committee was established and continues to address the issue. There were many family events that were held such as movie nights and potlucks. The community continues to support each other and the relationships built from the meetings continue to grow.

One of the coordinators also spoke at a conference titled "Promising Practices and Innovative Approaches: Women and Men Stopping Gendered Violence". This was a great experience. It allowed us to make people aware of our project and to develop partnerships with people and organizations that may not have been possible.

Work with Youth in the Community

Creative Expression. Discussion. Violence Awareness. Healthy Relationships

One of the key recommendations that came out of the Needs Assessment was to increase involvement with schools in the area. The community educator from Avalon presented to 2 classes in a Jr High School in the community. The youth were very engaged during the presentation. There has also been another request to speak at an elementary school. Every month the school has an assembly where they talk about a specific value or expectation. We were asked to speak about appropriate friendships and what is personal space. The thought is to teach children as young as we can about values and expectations in life.

We wanted to develop a plan for engaging and mobilizing youth in Dartmouth North. Knowing the needs in the community, we felt it was important to think outside of the box when it came to designing a strategy for the youth. The decision was made to extend beyond the walls of the schools to empower youth in the community. We know that youth who are supported and empowered in the community, become strong leaders in the schools. The goal of the work with the youth was to use an arts based approach to have conversations about violence against women and girls. There were art sessions facilitated with community organizations where there was work done on developing relationships with the youth groups and connecting them to places and spaces they were unaware of in the community. There were two sessions at the MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning. The youth had a very positive experience with their participation in the project because it provided an opportunity for youth to see themselves as part of the solution. One of the activities focused on developing positive messages that promote anti-violence and encouragement to those who be experiencing violence. The goal for this particular activity was to raise the issue with youth and help equip them with the language to become advocates. The activities lead the group through button making. A creative art form that is fun and tangible. The youth made buttons that they can wear at school and in the community. Some of the messages included sayings like, "Keep Your Head Up", "Be Yourself" and "No Violence". There was a lot of learning that took place for both the youth and the leaders. Some youth leaders involved have been inspired by the creative process of using the arts to engage with youth and want to continue to pursue other creative projects as a way to better serve youth in Dartmouth North.

Both coordinators were involved with a youth conference hosted by Ceasefire Halifax during victim awareness week. One coordinator was on the planning committee for the conference and the other was a presenter. There were 80 youth in attendance from High Schools in the HRM area. Topics that were presented on were Gender and Violence, The Criminal Justice System, Ceasefire and what they do, Youth identity and culture. There was a young adult that presented some original spoken word during the lunch hour which was very powerful for the youth. It was a day appreciated by all involved.

Next Steps

The Dartmouth North Project was a community led project that prioritized the hiring of highly skilled coordinators who were residents in the community. Hiring community residents ensures the wisdom and knowledge of the work stays in the community after the project ends. Robyne and LaMeia are committed to telling the story about this project and are able to connect the work to ongoing initiatives in the community.

Service providers are accessing and using the Facebook page to keep in touch and provide real-time promotion of their events, services and special request and opportunities

Youth are continuing to access creative safe spaces in the community and the MacPhee Centre is further developing their services to provide more programs tailored to address social issues in the community. They are looking into partnering with community groups to offer summer programs for girls.

Between the Bridges is an ongoing initiative that has a focus on using a collective impact model to address issues pertaining to poverty in the neighborhood

Ongoing connection with Avalon and other community partners. Continued work and support with finding opportunities to continue capacity building within the community and modeling a collaborative approach.

Don't forget to follow us on **Twitter**: @DARTMOUTH_NORTH
Facebook: DartmouthNorthCommunity
or you can call **Avalon** at **902-422-4240**