



Evaluation Report Summary

Stronger Together

Dartmouth North Violence against Women and Girls Prevention Project

Prepared for

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre, December 2015

This is a summary of the evaluation report for the *Dartmouth North Violence Against Women and Girls Prevention Project* undertaken from March 2013 to December 2015. The project was sponsored by Avalon Sexual Assault Centre (Avalon Centre) and funded by Status of Women Canada. The project partners were Avalon Centre, Dartmouth Family Resource Centre and the Dartmouth North Boys and Girls Club. Alice Housing, John Martin Junior High School, Bicentennial School and Dartmouth High School agreed to be community partners.

The original project goal was as follows: *To support women and community partners in working together to develop and implement community strategies to address the issue of violence against women and girls.* The specific population intended to ultimately benefit from this project are girls and young women aged 12 to 25 who are living in Dartmouth North.

The project involved 52 different community organizations, agencies and government representatives; and, 1,554 individuals: 179 youth and 1,375 adults. Key project activities included:

- 1) Engaging and establishing working relationships with girls/young women and women, boys/young men and men, community organizations, community leaders, service providers, and other potential allies;
- 2) Developing and implementing a needs assessment process that provided an opportunity for youth and community members to talk about key issues, identify priorities and recommendations; and
- 3) Designing and piloting a strategy to address the key priorities and recommendations.

Community Needs Assessment

The needs assessment was carried out with 52 participants, 30 adults and 22 youth. The adults included community members and service providers. The needs assessment process engaged both adults and youth to talk openly about the violence they experience in a safe, confidential environment. The adults also raised the issue of the normalization of violence in the community. The process identified three priorities, sexualized violence being the first priority. The needs assessment also made four recommendations to improve safety for women, young women and girls in the community.

Everyone was welcomed to give input. Very useful in recognizing violence in the community from the perspective of the community.

Community Member

In evaluation interviews, community members said this process enabled both youth and adults to talk about their lived experience. As a result, the Needs Assessment Report reflected the way violence is experienced in the community and had an impact on those who read it.

The Prevention Strategy

The prevention strategy was designed to use an asset-based community development (ABCD) approach to build on community assets and to address key recommendations from the needs assessment. The goal of the broad prevention strategy, *Stronger Together*, was as follows:

To be a catalyst in the Dartmouth North area for communication and collaboration with emphasis put on connecting services, people and places, as well as helping to coordinate all the actions taking place in the community.

Strategy implementation provided more opportunities for both formal and informal conversations at various tables and in various venues. Three Community Meetings brought together twenty-six (26) different organizations to identify community assets, strengthen collaboration and develop a communication strategy. In partnership with Take Action Society, the project brought eight (8) services into the Community Hub to make services more accessible for community members. On Wednesdays each week the Coordinator acted as a community navigator representing Avalon Centre at the Community Hub. Youth had opportunities for more discussion and to develop an understanding and awareness about violence in their communities. This was through community arts-based sessions, a school-based session at the junior high school, and a Youth Conference for high school students.

Other opportunities to engage community members were through information tables at community events. This was part of several activities to promote public awareness and community education about violence against women and girls. Eight (8) fun family events were co-hosted by the project and Take Action Society, with about 40 families at each event, for a total participation of 320 families.

Project Outcomes

The developmental process throughout the project opened up dialogue, named the violence, brought the issue to the forefront, and put it on the community agenda. The open dialogue

continued to raise awareness about real issues that girls, young women and women were dealing with. By the end of the project, people were starting to be more open to voice their concerns and opinions, including youth. Youth were noticing unacceptable behaviours and were more comfortable talking about it and naming the behaviour.

The face-to-face Community Meetings enabled connections among agencies and groups, strengthened relationships and improved communication. Service providers and community groups who participated said they increased understanding of the supports and resources available in the community. They reported changes in how they saw their work as being part of a bigger picture or part of a team. They were feeling less isolated and more motivated. These connections enabled them to do their

Actually sitting down at the table once a month and seeing and getting to know individuals face to face and getting an update.... it allowed us to do our jobs better in terms of supporting the clients that we have.

Service Provider

work better and to be able to connect people better to services and supports. They told stories of how this had benefited their organization and the women, young women and girls they worked with. Ultimately, this resulted in improving coordination among services and supports. Some described this as breaking down silos and having opportunities to talk about what their clients need and to strengthen current services to meet those needs.

The arts-based sessions

enabled youth to learn about the potential of using art as a way to engage in discussion about themselves, their community, and violence prevention. The anti-violence messages they created, and then wearing those messages as buttons, enabled them to have the language and the ability to talk about these things more with others.

Another project outcome was increased opportunities for community members to access supports, services and programs in safe, accessible spaces. The partnership with the MacPhee Centre for the youth arts-based sessions introduced youth to the MacPhee Centre as a safe, accessible space to engage in creative learning. Furthermore, a number of young women have continued to go to the centre since the sessions were held. The partnership with Take Action Society resulted in nine more services being more accessible for community members, including the navigation support provided by the Coordinator each week. Related to broader community safety, a partnership with the

People are voicing their concerns more and voicing their opinions more. And it is even the youth. A lot of youth are noticing the unacceptable behaviours.... It's great to hear them getting their voices heard.

Coordinator & Community Member

-  *Being you, is being real*
-  *Stay up princess*
-  *Keep your head up and stay strong*
-  *No enemies*
-  *Show Respect*
-  *Love yourself*
-  *Be Love*
-  *Don't Give up on your dream*
-  *No Violence*

Youth anti-violence messages

Dartmouth North Association established a Safety Sub-committee to address safety and violence prevention.

The project increased communication of services, supports and programs available through the following: distribution of Avalon Centre resources; talking individually with almost 1,200 community members; the development of a Facebook page and Twitter account; and, development of a Community Assets booklet for distribution throughout the community.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The evaluation concludes that this project has achieved the two goals it intended to accomplish – the original project goal and the prevention strategy goal. It is evident that the ABCD approach has built on and strengthened community assets to respond to and prevent sexualized violence.

The project was successful in partnering with community organizations, service providers and government agencies. The prevention strategy was successful in helping to strengthen the initiatives and the work of those organizations, as well communication and coordination among them. It has increased knowledge and understanding of sexualized violence among participating youth and adults.

We all came away with something from it and that will hopefully add to the big picture for Dartmouth North.

Service Provider

Community members and service providers made recommendations for continuing and strengthening youth mobilization activities and the important communication and coordination activities.

- That, the mobilization of youth begun in this project should continue in partnership with youth-serving groups and schools.
- That the meetings of groups and service providers should continue either on a monthly or quarterly basis as an opportunity for people to connect specifically around the issue of violence against women, young women and girls. This would continue to strengthen the response to and prevention of sexualized violence and inspire additional partnerships and community initiatives.
- That the navigator position focusing on individual advocacy related to violence against women, young women and girls at the Community Hub was an important asset to the community and should be continued at least one day a week.
- That the asset map/directory will need to be updated to keep it current and relevant for use by women, youth, community groups and service providers.
- That, while everyone can post on the Facebook page, an organization will need to take the lead to continue to monitor it and keep it relevant.

The full evaluation report is available on the Avalon Centre website: avaloncentre.ca