

# STRONGER TOGETHER

## Dartmouth North Strategy and Pilot Project

January 26th, 2015



**AVALON**  
SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRE

### About this Project

The ways in which we experience and cope with violence in our everyday lives has a profound affect on our capacity as neighbors to develop and nurture healthy relationships and create vibrant communities.

The Dartmouth Family Centre, Boys and Girls Club of Greater Halifax and Avalon Sexual Assault Centre came together over a year ago with the desire to collaborate to address issues of violence in the community, particularly against women and girls.

The opportunity to design and roll out a community mobilization project later presented itself with financial support from Status of Women Canada. There was a strong sense of alignment between partners that the project should be designed around empowering residents to get

involved with violence prevention measures, specifically against women and girls.

An extensive needs assessment was done within the community. Focus groups and interviews were held with women and men of all ages and backgrounds from the Dartmouth North area. Many recommendations came out of this needs assessment as well as some key areas of focus.

Since the release of the needs assessment there has been a considerable amount of work put into developing and reworking a community mobilization strategy, including consultations with community members and partners involved in this project.

# Development of the Strategy

This strategy has been 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.

The Asset based community development institute (ABCD) describes this approach as one that emphasizes “Building on the skills of local residents, the power of local associations, and the supportive functions of local institutions, asset-based community development draws upon existing community strengths to build stronger, more sustainable communities for the future.” There is power in building connections and healthy relationships within community.

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre uses a feminist lens to analyze and respond to sexualized violence/abuse and other forms of oppression. With focus on empowerment and mobilization, Avalon aspires to share responsibility in creating communities free from sexualized violence and abuse by taking a leadership role in raising awareness, supporting those who have experienced sexualized violence, holding sexual perpetrators accountable, and influencing social and systemic change.

In addition to using an appreciative foundation from a feminist lens, we will work towards incorporating a gender-based approach to this project that will recognize and draw attention to the different experiences of women and men.

This approach allows women to call into question issues around unequal power relations, and underrepresentation, and specific ways in which women are targeted for violence and misogyny etc. Using a gender based approach for this strategy provides an opportunity to focus our efforts towards making a change in community by paying attention to the perspective of women and empowering women to take the lead on ending violence against women in their neighborhood.

Developing a strategy that complemented the richness and spirit of the Dartmouth North community was very important. The process undertaken for the development of this strategy provided space for exploration and information gathering as a way to honor and recognize the various ways in which community members and community groups are already taking action on addressing the issue of violence in the community.

## Where are we now ?

Dartmouth North has a strong culture of volunteerism in the neighborhood. The needs assessment highlighted the fact that there is a need for preventative measures in the community to overcome community challenges. The needs assessment also highlighted there are a number of groups and service providers working on these issues, but the coordination and communication between these groups is limited and in some cases non-existent. The community has been heavily supported by United Way through their Action for Neighborhood Change program and commitment to providing seed funding to support the local neighborhood hub that is emerging. The feedback received during the research stage of this project has definitely indicated that the community has strongly identified violence as a community issue that needs to be addressed. They have demonstrated that there are efforts being put into combating these issues, but there are significant challenges associated with working collaboratively together.

## Where are we going?

The community has put forward a few recommendations coming out of the needs assessment. Some main themes became clear after reflecting on the recommendations. The community has identified that having a space or spaces that are safe and accessible is a priority. Access to information and the opportunity to find out about services is another main priority that came out of the report. The theme that was reoccurring from the research and conversations with service providers and community members was around better communication and collaboration. There is a desire in the community for Dartmouth North to become a stronger by increasing communication and collaboration. This has influenced the strategy to be designed around the concept: Stronger Together.

## How will we get there?

Dartmouth North is not the only community in Nova Scotia that continues to experience issues of violence, particularly towards women and girls. Fortunately there are other communities in Halifax and surrounding areas committed to mobilizing the community around these issues as well. This strategy will 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. By looking to other communities that have been successful in establishing strong networks and channels of communication, we will guide Dartmouth North through a pilot project inspired by the work done locally in Spryfield, a community facing similar challenges around poverty and violence.

# Strategy Inspiration

## CHEBUCTO CONNECTIONS

Spryfield is an area in Halifax that has experienced similar challenges as the Dartmouth North community. Extensive research has been done on the community that highlights key issues of poverty. Economic disadvantage and exposure to violence are some of the main challenges of the community. Research shows that there is a high rate of single parent families living in the area and statistics record high unemployment rates and high drop out rates for high school students.

Chebucto Connections is an organization that is committed to building a strong, healthy and vibrant community in Spryfield. In some ways, it can be described as the backbone or foundation in which many initiatives are built on given the organizations missions to “help others help themselves”. This following exert, taken from the Chebucto Connections website perfectly sums up their mission and work.



**CHEBUCTO  
CONNECTIONS**  
Strengthening Community in Spryfield and District

**“Chebucto Connections (also known as Chebucto Community Development Association (CCDA) is a charitable organization made up of local volunteers, that engages the community in making their neighborhoods vibrant healthy places to live and work. We add value to community by helping others help themselves. We have been helping people build connections to build community, with a focus on individual and community strengths and assets, since 1985.” (chebuctoconnections.ca)**

One of the key activities that the Chebucto Connections organization has taken on has been resource development. They created a community directory in 2013, which has information on all of the organizations, and services in the area.

Chebucto Connections has a priority to building relationships with and amongst residents. Beyond relationship building comes encouragement and opportunities to get involved with the community by contributing skills and lending a helping hand. This has been the organizations formula for success. Chebucto Connections has demonstrated that building connections and putting people first is the way in which communities can evoke change.

## Other inspiring strategies

Through the search for strategies that would fit well with the needs of Dartmouth North, there were a few other organizations and strategies that have inspired the development of the strategy. There was a wealth of information written in a report called, [A Community Plan Addressing Relationship and Sexual Violence in Golden, BC](#). Here is an excerpt taken from this report that has contributed to the development of the strategy for Dartmouth North.

### A Community Plan Addressing Relationship and Sexual Violence in Golden, BC

A component of the Community  
Coordination for Safety in Relationships  
Project funded by Status of Women Canada

Facilitated by the Golden Women's Resource Centre  
with contributions from community service providers,  
stakeholders, and community members  
being affected by the issue.



**“Coordination among service providers has led to improved services and safer communities through a comprehensive understanding of the different roles providers play and how they can work together. However, it will take more than a coordinated response among service providers to create legitimate change in the context of violence in relationships, including domestic violence, dating violence and sexual assault. Prevention and awareness surrounding the issue among community members and engaging them in the response is vitally important, when neighbors, friends and family members are often the first to know and especially in rural areas where there is limited access to services. Many agree we live in a community where old belief systems still exist, and violence against women is considered accepted. We still have work to do in raising awareness about the effects of violence in relationships, including domestic violence, dating violence and sexual assault among community members and youth. (Page 3)”**

The important part of this report that has inspired the Dartmouth North strategy has to do with the commitment for this project to take it one step beyond community coordination and promote and advocate for more prevention and awareness surrounding the issues of violence in relationships.

# Dartmouth North Strategy

Dartmouth North could be considered a resource rich community given its access to facilities such as the Dartmouth North Community Center and other public spaces. The main source of the community spirit is in the resilience and strength of the people and many engaged volunteers.

In Dartmouth North, the groundwork has already been laid for building a vibrant, healthy community. What was heard from the needs assessment was that coordination and communication between organizations and community members is the missing element that has a potential to tie together all of the individual pieces of work and passion aimed at reducing violence in the community.

For the pilot project that is being proposed for the Dartmouth North area, the two coordinators working on this project will work extensively on building infrastructure inspired by Chebucto Connection that will 1) allow organizations and residents to better communicate with each other and 2) promote and encourage volunteerism in the community by communicating to residents ways to get involved.

There are two existing groups that have put in a lot of work over the years towards building relationships in community. Both groups have similar mandates to help community members but both have very different approaches. The Take Action Society is focused on very grassroots level community development through community based projects and initiatives.

The Dartmouth North Association is focused on bringing together service providers and community residents to stay updated and informed on upcoming events and current issues in the community.

The work of this strategy will be to strengthen the communication between both of these organizations and to build on the work that has already been started by the Take Action Society and the Dartmouth North Association (DNA).

We will use social media tools to create a platform for engagement of residents in addition to getting out in the community to meet people face to face. There is an emphasis on meeting people where they are. One of the key advantages of having two coordinators from the area is that there is already a level of trust built and knowledge of the community that will allow for better inclusion of community members that are sometimes left out, particularly marginalized young women and men.