

Building Communities of Trust

Overview



This project started in response to sexual violence and the need for an approach to teaching healthy relationships that is non-threatening, empowering, and builds local capacity while equipping youth to challenge the social norms that allow sexual violence to continue.

We Aim To

1. Build relational skills to help people engage in mutually fulfilling relationships where obtaining consent is not only considered essential, but attractive!;
2. Challenge the culture that allows sexual violence to thrive;
3. Equip people with tools and mentoring so they can take action in their schools, organizations, workplaces and communities.

Our Approach

Focused on Culture and Relationship Building

Typically programs focus on the delivery of information. While we do share important information **we focus on building relationships and trust within groups** so people can turn to each other for support, information and guidance. To do this we **focus on building a culture that is encouraging, inclusive and safe**. We use **activities** to give participants opportunity to engage and learn together and use those as a springboard for conversation. With our elementary school program examples include mask making, team challenges (like getting everyone through a giant life sized spiders web), and drama exercises to explore consent and personal boundaries. In our “Upstanders” program (secondary and post secondary) this is done through a combination of collaborative scene creation, drama activities and discussions. Each of the activities are very enjoyable and serve as a metaphor for a larger topic we want to explore. When we talk, we do so in a sharing circle as a reminder that we are all equal and have something to contribute. Information is shared through conversation and story, and participants are both learners and teachers.

Positive and Affirmative

Instead of only telling people what they *cannot* do, **we explore what they *can* do to increase the likelihood that their romantic encounters will be met with enthusiasm and appreciation**. This equips Peer Leaders with strategies for shaping the behaviours of their peers, offering an alternative to sexually exploitative approaches. The activities and discussions address the nuances of healthy relationship building including:

- verbal and non-verbal communication
- how to set healthy boundaries and respect other people’s boundaries
- the differences between love, attraction, attachment and abuse
- how our needs for acceptance, power, recognition, safety and meaning influence how we approach relationships
- societal norms that promote unhealthy gender stereotypes and norms
- how to help ourselves and others when unhealthy or unsafe situations arise
- how to stand up for equality and influence change within our school, peer and community cultures.

What We Have To Offer

- 15-20 experiential sessions that are relevant, enjoyable and adaptable for youth, teens and adults.
- An intensive two day peer helper workshop equipping secondary and post-secondary students to be *Upstanders* to prevent, intervene and respond to sexual violence
- A training/mentoring program for those schools and communities who want to build a local team. We are equipped to train both adults and students.
- A professional development workshop for adults which, at times, includes youth as co-facilitators.

- Autumn Springs (2017), a film that was written in Northwestern Ontario to be a conversation starter that explores the issue of sexual violence from the perspective of men and the choices they make in how they treat women. This film was recently awarded a People's Choice Award at the Bay Street Film Festival and was awarded film of the year 2017 in the Walleye Art and Culture Magazine.
- Skilled team and supports coming together to support this work (see below)
- Collaborating organizations including New Vision Unlimited, Safeteen (www.safeteen.ca), Menoyawin Assault Care and Treatment Program, Northwestern Health Unit, Dilico Anishnawbek Family Care, and the Nishnawbe-Gamik Friendship Centre. The White Ribbon Campaign (www.whiteribbon.ca), an international organization of men working to end violence against women, has also indicated a willingness to offer support.

What People are Saying

I felt very encouraged by both the content and the delivery of this program and I was relieved that some of the difficult and potentially sensitive subject matters were dealt with in such a healthy and inclusive way. Themes such as gender identification, sexuality, appropriate boundaries, and generating healthy relationships were delved into in a very accessible way. Hopefully, I will get the opportunity to participate further with this program as I believe an open and honest discourse on these perennial subjects is vital for the well-being of the young people in our community.

-Sean Tudor, Grade 6/7/8 teacher, Lac Seul First Nation

I learned about self worth and respect. It helped me feel like I am worth something. -Student,, Cat Lake

Thank you for helping me feel safer and more wise in my decisions. -Student, Cat Lake

Core Team

Erin Horvath is an experiential educator, social entrepreneur, participatory research and collaborative artist. She is the Executive Director of New Vision Unlimited, a not-for-profit organization committed to community building, and the guiding force behind Building Communities of Trust. She has worked at the grassroots within Northwestern Ontario for over twenty years, and brings with her formal training in mental health/trauma, community development, and education (currently completing her Ph.D in Education). She is also a dancer, writer, drama enthusiast and adventure course facilitator, skills that allow her to be a fun, spontaneous and engaging facilitator/trainer.

Eric Bortlis is Metis educator and certified teacher with a Masters in Educational Leadership. He is currently the Education Director of Lac Seul First Nation where he is looking to support students as they learn to walk in both worlds. He is a co-facilitator and trainer with Building Communities of Trust.

Bill Pozzobon (<http://www.vtsl.com/people/bill-pozzobon/>) is not only a professional actor and comedian but also the Director of the Boys program for Safeteen (www.safeteen.ca), an educational organization that promotes skills that reduce sexual violence in relationships. We are thrilled he came from Vancouver to play the leading role in our film, Autumn Springs (2017) and that he is willing to contribute his knowledge and engaging personality as a co-facilitator and trainer with Building Communities of Trust. The following is a link to his Ted Talk called, "Breaking the Code of Masculinity". <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDpuJXgD7Rs>

Jackie Rae is from Sandy Lake First Nation. With over 30 years of service within social services and child welfare he is well respected for his ability to support people through difficult situations while addressing the complex set of challenges they face. He has co-facilitated workshops with New Vision Unlimited in the past and is eager to collaborate once again in Building Communities of Trust with a focus on promoting community discussion within First Nations.

In addition there are teams of people in the five schools we are currently operating in.

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