IMPACT CASE STUDY

Men Can Stop Rape’s Impact Supporting the Establishment of Men of Strength Clubs in South Carolina

Interview with James Morrall, Director, Prevention & Outreach, Hopeful Horizons

Before Working with Men Can Stop Rape

Hopeful Horizons, based in Beaufort, South Carolina, is a children's advocacy, domestic violence and rape crisis center that works to create safer communities by changing the culture of violence and offering a path to healing. Child Abuse Prevention Association (CAPA), also based in Beaufort, breaks the destructive cycle of child abuse by equipping parents and caregivers with necessary skills, knowledge, and values. In 2009, the two organizations collaborated to form the Abuse Prevention Coalition (APC), which oversees administration and direction of the Violence Prevention Specialists (VPS) who have facilitated MOST Club. Hopeful Horizons’ Director of Prevention & Outreach operates as the direct supervisor for VPS. Both Hopeful Horizons and CAPA serve Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton and Jasper counties – an area along the coast that is called the Lowcountry. APC Hopeful Horizons has been running multiple Men of Strength (MOST) Clubs since 2009; each Club has 10 to 15 students. The MOST Club’s weekly 24-session curriculum provides middle and high school age males with a structured and supportive space to learn about healthy masculinity and translate learning into community leadership. Establishing the MOST Club and the focus on prevention in the Lowcountry of South Carolina in 2009 “was pretty revolutionary,” according to Mr. Morrall. Nothing like it existed in the area’s schools. Shortly after starting the MOST Club, APC Hopeful Horizons also started running Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) in the schools, a bystander intervention program consisting of five to ten sessions initially facilitated with mixed gender groups and later groups split by gender. The organization runs MOST Club during the school year and MVP during the summer.

How Men Can Stop Rape Supported the APC Hopeful Horizons

The initial APC Hopeful Horizons’ facilitator went through the standard MOST Club two-day training in 2009. The training prepares facilitators to understand the theoretical frameworks central to the 24-session MOST Club curriculum, especially dominant and counter stories of masculinity as they relate to unhealthy and healthy masculinity, and to facilitate the essential curriculum sessions. Facilitators are also taught to use the evaluation tools and to follow the evaluation protocols. Mr. Morrall was hired in 2014 and traveled to Washington, DC, where MCSR is based, to go through the same two-day training.
MCSR has also made available regular technical assistance for the APC Hopeful Horizons MOST Club facilitators, troubleshooting issues and generally offering support through phone calls. MOST Club gear – hoodies, T-shirts, and wristbands with the MOST Club logo – has been provided by MCSR for the Lowcountry Club members to wear. Throughout the years, MCSR has supported APC Hopeful Horizons’ implementation of Community Strength Projects which translate curriculum lessons into public action and peer education. For example, MCSR staff helped facilitators and MOST Club members think through the process for making effective posters as public service announcements representing healthy masculinity and healthy behavior towards female classmates.

**How APC Hopeful Horizons has Used Men Can Stop Rape’s Support**

From 2009 to 2014, the initial facilitator ran MOST Clubs, and Mr. Morrall ran them from 2014 to 2016. Once he became Director of Prevention & Outreach for Hopeful Horizons, Mr. Morrall stopped running Clubs; he now oversees two violence prevention specialists on staff who during the 2019-2020 school year are facilitating 14 clubs – six public middle schools and eight public high schools – in the four counties. “Most of the counties are pretty rural,” according to Mr. Morrall. The largest school has more than 1600 students, while the smallest has less than 370. Starting in 2011-2012, the APC Hopeful Horizons had to differentiate the MOST Club as a violence prevention group from another young men’s and boy’s group that is something like a gentleman’s club, teaching young men and boys how to dress and behave.

The initial MOST Club facilitator attended the first four or five sessions facilitated by Mr. Morrall at each Club site as part of his training. Both of the current violence prevention specialists have been trained by Mr. Morrall by immersing them in professional materials and conversations related to engaging men and boys in prevention, and by going over the curriculum with them. All the facilitators have run the Club for the entirety of the school year, and over the course of time, they have supplemented the sessions with some of their own content or content from other curriculums that they want to try – “outside the box ways to teach different lessons.” Mr. Morrall identifies the MOST Club session exploring the root causes of sexual and dating violence as one of the most important, especially because it connects with the services provided by Hopeful Horizons as well as the prevention of domestic and sexual violence. The APC Hopeful Horizons follows MCSR’s MOST YouTube channel and social media to see if they spark any ideas.

**Impact of Men of Strength Clubs in the Lowcountry**

Mr. Morrall says that the focus on dominant and counter stories as they relate to unhealthy and healthy masculinity are “catching on” in the four counties that make up the Lowcountry. The Club has become institutionalized in that schools expect they will be run each year by the APC Hopeful Horizons. The MOST Club members are not only building their own awareness of healthy masculinity, they are building awareness of
other non-Club members through Community Strength Projects in the schools and in the larger communities. A story suggesting lasting impact on individual Club members involves Mr. Morrall’s daughter, now in high school. She overheard a group of male students at her school who had been in a middle school MOST Club facilitated by Mr. Morrall talk amongst themselves about “Mr. J.” in a positive way and how he taught them about “being a man and what a man should be.”

Some results from pre- and post-evaluations that the APC Hopeful Horizons conducted with MOST members from the 2018-2019 school year include:

- At pre-survey, only 22% of participants reported they believed anger can be controlled, and that percentage increased to 80% at post-survey.
- At pre-survey approximately 37% disagreed with the belief that consent can be given regardless of the amount of alcohol/drug use. At post-survey no members disagreed with that idea.
- At pre-survey, 44% of participants identified as false the belief that ignorance of abuse is a solution to its occurrence. The number identifying the belief as false increased to 78% at post-survey.

The Abuse Prevention Coalition Hopeful Horizons concludes that at “the end of the 2018 - 2019 school year, not only did the MOST Club members positively change their attitudes around violence against women, they also developed a healthier view of masculinity by supporting one another through difficult times....Most importantly, at the end of MOST Club, members identified that they took action to end the violence that they see in their schools and community. This indicates that their change of knowledge and attitude are transferrable into real action.”