

Strategies for integrating prevention into organizational operations

Preventing sexual violence takes more than the energy, commitment, and time of prevention practitioners - it is a movement-wide initiative that requires thoughtful and intentional action by everyone. When prevention is integrated into an agency's vision and culture, it can be sustained and continue to grow in innovation over time. An organizational commitment to prevention will help with the movement-wide paradigm shift toward effective prevention.

Studies of established and innovative prevention programs have found that integration is a key part of sustainability and success (Townsend, 2012).

Integration means making the commitment, as an agency and leadership, to have prevention woven into the core of services and structure. It can take many forms and depends on the strengths and resources of each agency and community. This resource will offer examples of what integration could look like and outline some strategies to assist agencies interested in implementing this process.

What does integration look like?

For the purposes of this resource, integration can be understood as weaving prevention more intentionally into organizational structure and infrastructure. Integration is truly about prioritizing or refocusing prevention to the core

of agency mission and services. One study found that a common characteristic of innovative prevention programs was the emphasis on prevention and direct services being valued equally; these agencies did not see one as more important than another (Townsend, 2012). Additional characteristics included how funds are allocated, how staff is supported, and how agency mission is conceptualized. Integration can look a number of different ways, but it rests on prevention being a valued and respected contribution to the anti-sexual violence movement.

Mission & core values

The culture and focus of an agency can be tied to the mission, core values, and/or vision statement. These philosophies often serve as a motivation and guide for all activities and ways of seeing the work being done. Institutionalizing the principles of prevention by



incorporating them into mission or vision statements helps streamline and focus documenting and helps focus and monitoring of all work (Townsend, 2012). The list below outlines some points of consideration when assessing or developing mission or vision statements that support prevention integration.

- **Social change.** Prevention is truly about shifting and changing social norms that support sexual violence. Engaging in social change work, and endorsing a social justice approach, can bring a sense of hopefulness to anti-sexual violence work. Having an intentional approach to seeing all agency work within the larger picture of social change may reinvigorate or re-energize activists, prevention practitioners, counselors, and leaders.

Example: The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape's Core Values include Social Transformation, "We do transformative work of social change, with a commitment to intentional collaboration for the collective good. We seek to be a significant force in the prevention of sexual violence through education, advocacy, and collaboration that serves as a driving force in ending sexual violence."

- **Anti-oppression work.** In close connection to a social change approach, connecting anti-sexual violence work with efforts to end systems of oppression strengthens potential partnerships and community support. Sexual violence prevention is intrinsically linked with ending all forms of oppression including sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, transphobia, ableism and ageism, anti-semitism, ableism, as well as others (Guy, 2006). Making these

connections and commitments clear promotes understanding and consistency in service delivery.

Example: The YWCA's mission and vision statement connect promoting racial and gender equality with a peaceful community, "YWCA is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all."

- **Feminist philosophy.** The anti-sexual violence movement has many connections to feminist thought and feminist activism. Throughout the past few decades, emerging principles and critiques of feminism have helped create a more inclusive, respectful, and dynamic space. These principles and critiques can help agencies looking to retrieve the feminist roots of the anti-sexual violence movement and bring them more clearly into the present.

Examples: Addressing the effects of patriarchy both within the agency and the community, having a commitment to shared leadership and participation, or acknowledging the complexities and individual rights regarding choice and reproductive care for all survivors of sexual violence.

- **Information about the implementation of prevention and ending sexual violence.** Mission statements are often guiding forces for an organization's work. Explicitly referencing prevention could help strengthen integration efforts. It is important to have a firm grasp and understanding of prevention in order to create a long-lasting vision of prevention. There are a number of resources available to assist



organizations in developing language that is consistent with their work. Prevention can be included in the tagline of an organization, such as the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center: *Dedicated to healing. Advocating for change.*

Involving all staff

Prevention has typically been seen as the sole responsibility of prevention practitioners - a certain person or group of people within an agency. Prevention is most effective when all staff - counselors, medical and legal

advocates, public policy staff, board members, executive directors, and administrative staff- are knowledgeable and invested in prevention principles. This could mean regular trainings, discussions during staff meetings, or other educational opportunities for everyone to feel confident in modeling prevention.

Involving all staff does not necessarily mean everyone in the agency is implementing prevention programming, but that they are invested in the principles and the ultimate goal of social change. Direct service staff

and volunteers could take on occasionally (or regularly) presenting one-session, awareness-raising programs in the community, while preventionists work on norms change and collaborative partnerships. Organizations must be invested in making sure this balance in meeting the needs of the community and social transformation are adequately addressed while not placing all responsibility on prevention staff.

Personal actions strengthen professional efforts

In addition to involving staff in the organizational implementation of prevention, encouraging personal action is a way to practically connect prevention and social change with everyday life. For example, having a bystander empowerment training or discussion can jump-start a brainstorming session of how staff as individuals can take action in situations they come across on a daily basis. These skills and behaviors support empowered action and encourage everyone to become social change agents. It also creates a space where taking risks is valued and individuals are supported as they step outside their comfort zone.

A great exercise for this is having staff get into groups of three - one person is the speaker and the other two listen and offer feedback. The speaker has one minute to practice intervening in a situation they find difficult. Once the minute is up the other two people offer feedback and assistance in developing the response. This provides each person with a chance to practice, rather than having to act in the moment without thinking things through beforehand. This exercise could be



useful during staff meetings, team meetings, or volunteer trainings.

Funding allocation

Economics and resources can be an ongoing issue for non-profit and social service agencies. A commitment to integrating prevention into services can open up new doors for funding through outside organizations or through reallocation of existing funding. There are a number of online resources around grant-writing and fundraising and developing a prevention campaign, so here the focus will be on discussions about funding prevention with existing funds.

In the study of innovative programs, a consistency among participants was the use of discretionary or general operating funds to support prevention work - funding was not rigidly defined by funding streams (Townsend, 2012). This is a tangible example of an institutional commitment to prevention.

The benefit of using unrestricted or discretionary funds is the opportunity to explore different approaches without the boundaries of external expectations. One agency in the study of innovative programs commented, “[Relying on unrestricted funds] is a blessing because we’re not confined to grant objectives...We’re more free with what we do and with our timeline...Because there’s no prevention money specifically for this, it lets us create our own priorities” (Townsend, 2011, p. 46).

Innovative prevention programs invest in the work of changing social norms and culture. Funding structures and allocation do not have to be as daunting as they may seem. Many of the agencies in the study, as well as throughout the country, do not have large budgets. A contributing factor to success, however, was the institutional commitment to funding prevention adequately and sustainably. The majority of the agencies that participated in the study devoted between 10-29% of overall budget to prevention (Townsend, 2012). The process of funding allocation or reallocation may require

education, training, discussion, and long-term planning. Staff, board members, and volunteers can be given the information and skills necessary to best support this practical and philosophical shift in order to ensure successful implementation.

How does integration happen?

The process of integrating prevention into agency practice is just that - a process. An agency interested in making this shift or strengthening prevention efforts needs to have a long-term, wide-ranging vision. Each agency is going to have a unique approach, but this section provides information on two areas that could prove helpful.

• Self assessments

A helpful first step in any process is finding strengths, resources, and areas for growth. Assessment can be an incredibly useful strategy for figuring out where an agency can begin working toward creating and implementing an innovative prevention program that is sustainable. Assessment tools are available online and can come in many forms: surveys, focus groups, group discussion and brainstorming. When looking for tools or thinking about how to approach an assessment, the following could be very useful areas of focus:

- Agency mission, values, and goal statements
- Agency definitions and understandings of prevention (Are they consistent within the agency? Are they in line with research and best practices?)

- Budget and funding allocation
- What is currently being implemented? What are the goals of the programs? What strategies are being used? Are they in line with research and best practices?
- What relationships and collaborations could support prevention work?
- What relationship and collaborations could be developed or strengthened?

• Institutionalize self-care and burn-out prevention

Staff stability and longevity is key in creating long-term prevention programming. It is important that staff feel comfortable setting limits and reflecting on their own needs as they engage in any and all anti-sexual violence work. Examples of institutionalizing self-care could include, but are not limited to: having flex time when staff work over the required number of hours (this includes requiring staff to use this time within a set time frame, like a 2 week pay period), all new staff and volunteer orientation materials include resources and opportunities to discuss self-care, quarterly discussions to address any self-care issues, or time set aside each month/quarter/year to be together as a staff without doing required tasks (e.g. going to the movies together or visiting a park for a picnic lunch). These activities should not be voluntary and should be seen as contributing to, rather than detracting from, agency productivity.

Concluding thoughts

This resource was created with the knowledge – and hope – that the anti-sexual violence movement will grow and discover new strategies and innovations. It is important to see the “big picture” when it comes to sexual violence prevention; this work is incremental and long-term. The following are some things to keep in mind as we all move through this process collectively.

• Small changes make a big difference

It can be overwhelming when thinking about integrating prevention into an agency that may not have considered social change central to its mission. This process, even for innovative prevention programs, can be daunting. A great first step is simply saying that prevention is a priority and mapping out a plan. Having some basic goals and a timeline for each are valuable and necessary milestones. Making small changes and celebrating these victories can have a much larger impact than shooting for the stars and struggling to make things work.

• Importance of trust and respect

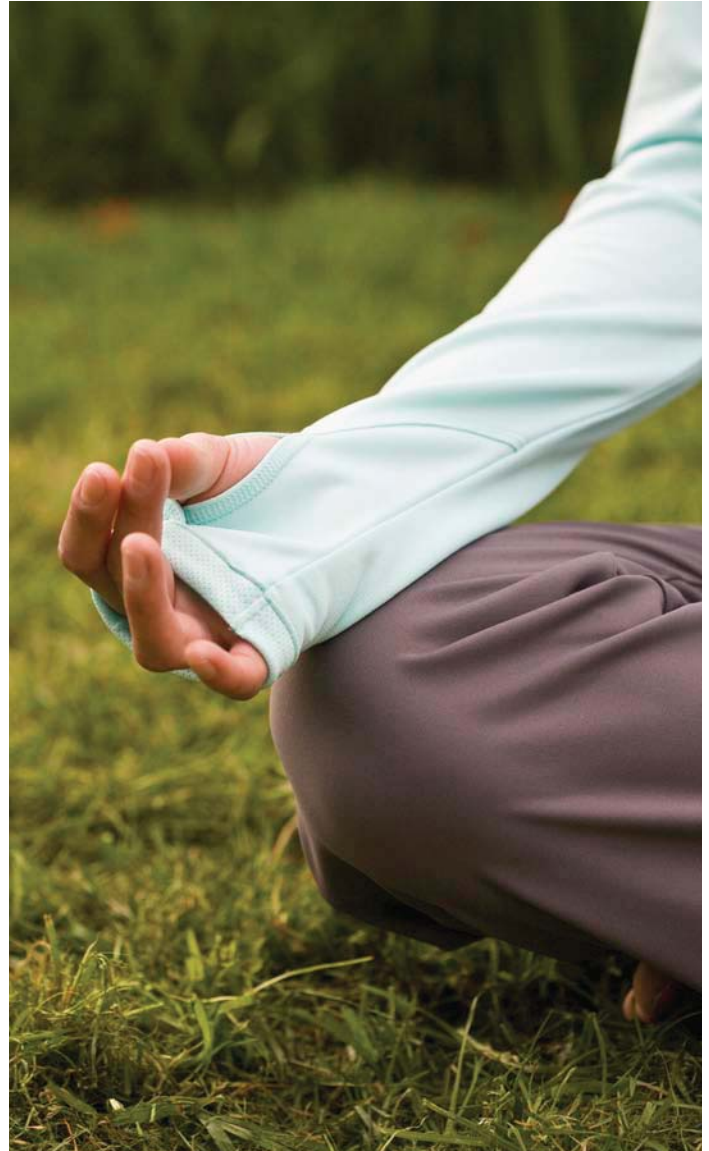
Agency leadership can take many forms: individuals in positions of authority helping staff build confidence and skills or prevention practitioners working within an organization to educate and partner with coworkers and supervisors. At the root of these dynamics are trust and respect, trust in the process for effective prevention and its long-term positive impact on communities and respect for each person’s contribution to this process.

About the Authors

Liz Zadnik is Education & Resource Coordinator at the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR), and has worked in the violence prevention and reproductive justice movements as a community educator and organizer. She has her master's in community psychology and social change from the Pennsylvania State University.

Jennifer Grove is Prevention Outreach Coordinator at the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, and has worked in the anti-sexual violence movement as an advocate, counselor, educator, and prevention specialist for over 14 years. She coordinates the prevention outreach services of the NSVRC and provides training and technical assistance to sexual assault coalitions, departments of health, and other organizations working to develop and implement comprehensive, effective sexual violence prevention strategies.

This resource was created with the insight and expertise of **Stephanie Townsend, Ph.D.** Dr. Townsend has worked in the movement to end sexual violence for 19 years as both a practitioner and researcher. She began by working for community-based rape crisis and prevention programs in Michigan, California and Texas. Additionally, she served on the boards of directors of the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault, the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and on the advisory board of the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault.



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NSVRC • 123 North Enola Drive, Enola, PA 17025
Toll free: 877-739-3895 • www.nsvrc.org • resources@nsvrc.org

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