

Circles of Safety for Higher Education: Creating the Foundation for Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

Authors

Deborah Donovan Rice
Program Director, Circles of Safety for Higher Education

Victoria Sanders, Ph.D.
Assistant Vice Chancellor/Chief EEO Compliance Officer & State System Title IX Coordinator
Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education

Jane G. Stapleton
Co-Director, Prevention Innovations Research Center

Valerie Mercado
Compliance Officer/Title IX Coordinator
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Jennifer Coleman, Director, Stop It Now!

Abstract

Stop It Now! and the Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education collaborated for a 23-month pilot program to customize the Circles of Safety curriculum for the higher education setting. The program relied on a tiered approach that involved system leadership, 14 individual campus leadership teams, faculty, students, and summer camp directors, as well as representatives from residence life, athletics, student affairs, counseling offices, legal counsel, human resources, communication, health clinics, Greek life, women's centers, and internship placement. The program's aim is to empower adults to take responsibility for creating safe conditions on college and university campuses through preventive action. Third-party evaluation has shown its effectiveness in increasing knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Through the Circles of Safety for Higher Education program, Stop It Now! assisted universities in building their capacity to create a culture of prevention on their campuses.

Introduction

High-profile sexual abuse cases have brought attention to the need for robust policies and procedures to protect campus constituents, including visiting minors. The Circles of Safety for Higher Education (COSHE) program, developed by Stop It Now! (Now!), combines stakeholder engagement with high-dosage training to prepare cross-disciplinary campus teams to use key prevention strategies and tools needed to create systemic change. University administrators, faculty, and staff are stewards of thousands of college students, including those attending on-campus residential experiences for minors (e.g., summer camps) and other programs and events in which university personnel supervise or participate (e.g., on- or off-campus internships). They are in a unique position to start the necessary conversation about preventing the sexual victimization of children. “Educating employees about awareness, intervention, and prevention fosters an environment where the sexual abuse of children is never ignored or tolerated, and where a culture of prevention helps to eliminate child victimization. It also becomes clear that it is everyone’s responsibility to report inappropriate behaviors, and there is organizational trust created in knowing that all reports will be addressed appropriately without fear of retaliation,” noted Dr. Victoria Sanders, Assistant Vice Chancellor/Chief EEO Compliance Officer and State System Title IX Coordinator.

Now! collaborated with Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education to implement a bystander mobilization curriculum for the prevention of sexual victimization of children in higher education settings across 14 campuses. The reasons for focusing on higher education are many. First and foremost is the protection of minors within the institutions themselves. In addition, colleges and universities are more than institutions for higher learning, with influence that extends far beyond their campus borders. They are workforce development centers; generators of volunteers for the surrounding neighborhoods; and cultural and entertainment destinations.

Their faculty and employees contribute to their communities, and this training establishes them as guardians of the principles of protection for the children who visit their campuses. Since many college graduates enter the workforce as front-line providers of education, healthcare, and social services to children and

families, this training empowers them to identify risks for abuse in these settings and to create safer environments to prevent it.

The adaptation and customization of Now!’s Circles of Safety training to the higher education setting was supported by the Paterno Foundation. Full implementation of the project was carried out through collaboration with Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education and its 14 universities.

Partnering

Partnerships played a critical role in the program’s development. Financial support, implementation collaboration, and third-party evaluation, combined with the long history of Stop It Now! as a training and technical assistance provider, set the stage for potential success. Now! had already been piloting Circles of Safety with child abuse prevention and youth-serving organizations (Saul, 2007)¹ through on-site and online training. When Now! was contacted by the Paterno family about how sexual abuse of children could be prevented on college and university campuses, a discussion ensued. It was agreed that adapting and customizing Circles of Safety for campus settings could be done. After further discussion, Now! was invited to submit a proposal to bring child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention training to higher education settings. This proposal resulted in full support for Circles of Safety to be adapted and implemented.

A fortuitous situation led to the identification of a potential implementation partner. Marie Conley, advisor to the Paterno Foundation and member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, was involved in the discussions leading up to the funding of the proposal. As she understood the goals of the project, she suggested approaching the leadership of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education with the prospect of partnering with Now! to create a pilot program germane to the state system, its stakeholders, and its needs.

Now! was invited to present the project opportunity to Provosts, Vice Presidents of Academic and Student Affairs, and others in leadership roles within PASSHE. The June 2013 presentation was well received, and within a few weeks, all 14 universities in the system had committed to the project. With this momentum, Now! staff and PASSHE representatives moved quickly and entered into

a joint agreement to implement the program. Planning meetings with PASSHE representatives Kathleen Howley and Peter Garland were held, and an implementation plan was agreed upon.

One additional partnership was needed. The pilot project plan called for outside evaluation. A team of researchers from the Prevention Innovations Research Center (PIRC) at the University of New Hampshire was chosen based on its expertise in bystander mobilization and previous involvement with Now! in evaluating an earlier version of Circles of Safety delivered to prevention advocates. Now! and PIRC collaborated on curriculum development and all aspects of evaluation.

Program Development

Program development was informed by bystander mobilization research, including research on empowering a college community of bystanders (Moynihan, M. M., Potter, S. J., Banyard, V. L., Stapleton, J. G., & Mayhew, M. R., 2010;² and Christy, C. A. & Voigt, H., 1994³) and on bystander responses to public episodes of child abuse.⁴

Previous research conducted by Now! was reviewed and informed the adaptation of the curriculum for the higher education setting.⁵ To guide the process, key strategies chosen were: customization of the existing Circles' training modules; program participant engagement enhancement; attention to adult learning pedagogy; dosage of training; and sustainability of programming post-training. The logic model provided a blueprint for implementation and guided both implementation and evaluation.

Through lecture, discussion, and engagement, training participants were presented with key prevention steps. The curriculum was designed to guide participants to greater understanding of child sexual abuse facts⁶ and the risks for abuse in higher education settings. To build confidence, participants learned and practiced communication skills using prevention messages and how to leverage their influence to implement changes on their campus. The curriculum was framed in the socio-ecological model and addresses prevention at the individual, relationship, intersecting communities, and societal levels. This comprehensive approach lays the foundation for system-wide change and effective prevention programming.

Based on research conducted into bystander mobilization and community development,^{7,8} plus the many years of prevention training Now! has delivered, program adaptation and customization was undertaken and included the following mix of components:

- A needs assessment survey of cross-disciplinary representatives from PASSHE.
- On-site focus groups with cross-disciplinary representatives from demographically diverse PASSHE campuses.
- Revision of training modules with an increased number of interactive exercises to build the knowledge and communication skills of adult learners. Examples of situations presenting risk for sexual abuse of minors from higher education representatives were integrated.
- An action planning module with revised content to allow prevention team members time for team-building and planning for post-training implementation.
- A flexible training agenda to allow adjustments in pacing and style of content delivery based on group dynamics and knowledge base.
- A dosage of two days for the training.
- Enhanced prevention team concept through guidelines for selecting and organizing the team, boilerplate language for engagement with team members, and templates for tracking team progress.
- Ongoing support through monthly teleconference meetings with team leaders to support integration of prevention strategies and address challenges in implementation of the action plan(s).
- A customized slide presentation with key take-aways and core prevention messages for teams to embed into ongoing sexual violence prevention trainings for students, faculty, and staff; and templates for co-branded slides to communicate details regarding campus resources and participants' prevention role(s).
- Emphasis on sustainability by engaging stakeholders at the Chancellor's level and university leadership level prior to roll-out of regional trainings. Sustainability was directly addressed in the context of team planning, with team members identifying ways to leverage their influence and contribute to the near- and long-term implementation of their respective action plans.

Now! staff members began the revision of the existing training modules, and in a parallel process consulted with Prevention Innovations Research Center (PIRC) researchers Jane Stapleton and Mary Moynihan to ensure systematic research evaluation practices were integrated into the time line. These included: developing a needs assessment survey tool and focus group questions; creating pre- and post- training surveys; and planning for a six-month follow-up survey to be developed later.

Program Components and Implementation

The COSHE program is designed to provide cross-disciplinary campus teams the confidence and comfort to lead prevention and awareness efforts at their institutions. Program activities include team organization and training preparation, a two-day training, and post-training consultation. Each team leaves the training with an action plan to guide its work, a handbook, and a slide presentation for use in training others. Four regional trainings were conducted with teams from Pennsylvania's State System, with a total of 144 university representatives trained.

Evaluation

PIRC researchers Victoria Banyard, Mary Moynihan, and Jane Stapleton collaborated with Now! to develop a comprehensive evaluation plan for the pilot project. The research team worked with Now! staff from the earliest stages of the pilot, providing review of the training curriculum and developing the needs assessment survey, the focus group questions, pre- and post-training surveys, and the six month follow-up survey.

The desired outcome for the project was for team members to have the confidence to overcome barriers to taking action while simultaneously feeling comfortable enough to have the conversations necessary regarding this difficult subject. Changes in respondents' pre-test to post-test scores showed:

- Increased knowledge about statistics such as those describing the percent of individuals in the United States who experience sexual abuse as children by someone they know, and the number of students in the U.S. who enter college every year who have disclosed that they were sexually abused as children.
- More comprehensive recognition about who can be a perpetrator of child sexual abuse, such as another child or adolescent individual, as well

as a stable, employed, and respectable member of the community.

- Higher overall confidence, comfort, and knowledge about recognizing the warning signs of adults' behavior that may point to sexual interest in children or to the presence of inappropriate boundaries with children.
- Greater certainty of and comfort in their abilities to take actions to prevent or intervene in situations of child sexual abuse on campus.

A summary of evaluation results can be found on the Now! website (www.stopitnow.org/sites/default/files/documents/files/pirc_briefing_sheet_for_now.pdf), and the full report is available upon request (contact Deborah Donovan Rice at drice@stopitnow.org).

Additional evaluation information was gathered through post-training interviews with team leaders during May and June of 2015. Five team leaders from Slippery Rock, Bloomsburg, Indiana, Clarion, and East Stroudsburg Universities participated in the surveys.

Successful implementation was tempered by the challenge to comply with a myriad of new laws passed by the Pennsylvania State Legislature in response to calls for greater protection of minors from sexual abuse following the events at Pennsylvania State University (not a PASSHE university). These laws focused on requiring mandatory reporter training and employee background checks, and have been subject to many revisions. This changing landscape has kept PASSHE universities busy with compliance issues. Where COSHE has been implemented, however, there has been a ripple effect in creating greater safety on campuses across the system.

Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education, like most universities across the country, has been actively engaged in changing the campus climate and addressing compliance issues related to Title IX. COSHE has been a natural partner to the Title IX work being done relative to prevention, education, and response to issues of sexual misconduct. In addition to having a Title IX Coordinator, each of the 14 institutions in the system now has a Protection of Minors Liaison, who is the primary contact for addressing child victimization issues including sexual abuse, bullying, and domestic abuse. The Protection of Minors Liaison is a member of the

university Title IX Team and works closely with the Title IX Coordinator.

By the end of day two of the training for campus teams, each university team had developed an action plan to guide the integration of key prevention strategies tailored to their settings. The team from Indiana University of Pennsylvania decided to integrate prevention content into its existing trainings of employees and students within a month of completing the training. One of its first trainings was with the President's cabinet and resulted in support for full implementation. Having completed the COSHE training, endorsement and support from university leadership enabled the team to create and facilitate the new content as part of the annual employee training and campuswide training schedule, which primarily focused on Title IX.

Indiana University of Pennsylvania was the first school in the system to fully embed the COSHE program into its student and campus safety framework. IUP and Now! collaborated to customize a training module suitable for integration. This became the takeaways training module available in the COSHE program. Valerie Mercado, Lead Trainer and IUP's Compliance Officer/Title IX Coordinator, identified the various intersections the COSHE program has with Title IX and general campus safety initiatives. Based on those intersections, she developed programming for her campus, achieving 100 percent employee participation within the first year. All 1,500 employees and 3,500 students were trained by the end of the first year. The training is mandatory for new hires.

In addition to annual employee training, registered student organizations, classes that would participate in community-based programs, and other non-employment related groups were trained as well. Students who participated in the training were actively engaged in the "stoplight" method of behavior identification and found the continuum concept useful and easy to apply.

The training is seen as a critical component of instituting a holistic plan for campus safety. COSHE content, and especially the continuum of behavior with practice scenarios customized to higher education settings, clarifies for participants how to take action(s) before there is abuse to report, Mercado noted.

Conclusion

With some training participants, there was the need to create understanding of how COSHE fit into the higher education environment. Midway through the first day's training session, however, participants were sharing insights resulting from their exposure to facts about child sexual abuse and the risks that exist within higher education settings. Hearing that the Pennsylvania State System's universities host more than 350,000 minors a year in a variety of on-campus programs and events was surprising information for many of the program attendees, and the numbers alone helped to illuminate the importance of this effort. By day two, the enthusiasm for planning next steps was palpable, and conversations were lively, with teams working independently to plot their respective courses forward.

Through the evaluation process, participants reported having greater confidence in their ability to intervene to prevent and stop child sexual abuse and being more prepared to integrate this new information within their sphere of influence both on and off their campuses.

Endnotes

1. Saul J., Audage, N. C. *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth-Serving Organizations: Getting Started on Policies and Procedures*. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2007.
2. Moynihan, M. M., Potter, S. J., Banyard, V. L., Stapleton, J. G., & Mayhew, M. R. (2010). Empowering a College Community of Bystanders. In M. Paludi and F. L. Denmark (Eds.). *Victims of Sexual Assault and Abuse: Resources and Responses for Individuals and Families*, Volume 2 (pp. 187–210). New York: Praeger.
3. Christy, C. A. & Voigt, H. (1994). Bystander Responses to Public Episodes of Child Abuse. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 24, 824–847.
4. Wurtele, S. *Preventing the Sexual Exploitation of Minors in Youth-Serving Organizations*. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 2012; 34: 2,442–2,453.
5. Stop It Now! Research. Retrieved Aug. 9, 2016 from www.stopitnow.org/our-work/research.

6. Finklehor, D., et al. (2013). *The Lifetime Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse and Sexual Assault Assessed in Late Adolescence*. Retrieved from www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/9248.pdf.
7. McKnight J. & Block P. *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*, 2010, Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
8. Hopes K., McKnight J., Lawrence H. *Asset Based Neighborhood Organizing: The Method of the Abundant Community Initiative in Edmonton, Canada*, 2015.