

Sharing Winning Strategies Safety planning and the role of research

Round Table

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Summary

In many communities, multiple organizations often address different aspects of women's safety separately. It is important to participate on the committees of diverse local organizations in order to learn how others are responding to challenges, remain current on effective practices, identify service gaps, and discover how services can interact and complement each other. Participating in the initiatives of different network members not only helps develop local, national, and international contacts but also strengthens lobbying efforts.

It is also critical to participate in networks that may not directly address women's issues but can influence them, such as community groups that aim to address similar issues and allow residents to take control of their neighbourhoods. Likewise, it is important to diversify potential funding avenues by seeking funding from departments that may not be specifically women-oriented (ex., public transport, private security). Fundraising help from community members (ex., local artists, celebrities) creates a grassroots presence and can attract dynamic new people to the cause.

Establishing a relationship, and hopefully a partnership, with municipal government is beneficial not only for obtaining sustainable funding but for promoting and implementing women's recommendations. Participating in advisory bodies that work with local government

committees can help inject a more gender-based approach into different aspects of city operations.

Promoting the results of municipal funding through regular contact with City Council (ex., presentations, one-on-one meetings) helps convince local politicians of an organization's value to the community and keeps them fresh in their minds at budget time.

Discussion

Workshops have been offered in Ottawa (Canada) to teenagers and women to provide them with assertiveness training and safety tips as well as to introduce and explain the concept of safety audits to them. Workshops have brought youth together with other community members to discuss perceptions of risk, safety problems, and how the comfort level of vulnerable community members can be improved. These workshops have been useful in engaging and empowering youth and diverse community members who feel vulnerable.

Women's groups in Ottawa organized round table discussions to bring various leaders (chiefs and heads) of the criminal justice system together to discuss women's safety issues. The round tables provided a place for women to share their experiences and success stories with these officials, to identify "gaps" in service access or delivery for women and victims, and to discuss the formal criminal justice system's inability to adequately and efficiently meet these needs. Such round table discussions must continue as they provide an excellent venue for dialogue between women's groups and government decision-makers as well as for women to make a case for and directly propose recommendations for formal criminal justice system action.

Lobbying must be continuous so as to put constant pressure on governments to listen to women's concerns and consider their recommendations for change. Lobbying has paid off in Ottawa by pressuring for the better coordination of prosecution teams in specialized courts that

involve gender-sensitive crown, police, and social services. These changes have led to an increased number of prosecutions of violent male offenders.

Groups that help violent male offenders learn to deal with their emotion are discussed. In some communities, lobbying pressure has made participation in such “support groups” mandatory and insistent that men graduate from the program, rather than simply attend meetings, to ensure their progress and improved behaviour. However there is also the risk that forcing violent men to participate in “support” groups may create backlash or further challenges such as a mere change in the form of abuse against women.

Conclusions

- Rather than waiting for others to take the lead, women must take the initiative to introduce and educate others on the concept of safety audits and to encourage civic participation.
- It is beneficial to have a municipal government representative on women's safety committees if possible. To encourage involvement, members of government need to be given examples of how successful partnerships have been developed between government and women's groups in other cities, regions, and countries.
- Initiatives must consider the context that they are to be implemented in – for example, special considerations must be made in trying to implement groups that teach men to deal with their emotion in non-violent ways in societies that are generally violent.
- Efforts must strive to integrate cultural traditions and involve traditional leaders – for example, using healing circles for violent aboriginal men in Canadian First Nations communities.

- Women's safety is a national problem that needs national funding. Local groups and governments must better develop the means to share their experiences, practices, resources, and networks beyond their immediate communities so that other communities can benefit from them.
- A manual of resources from different organizations should be produced and distributed to women's and crime prevention groups across provinces, regions, and countries. A key challenge is obtaining the resources for production, translation, vast distribution...

Recommendations

- Women's groups should use safety audit results to inform voters and municipal government of the benefits that addressing and promoting women's safety can have on entire communities.
- Women's groups should present the IULA (International Union of Local Authorities) Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government (www.iula.org) to their local governments for ratification.
- Women's safety networks must be formalized, maintained, and expanded so that they can bring new and different sectors together to share information and work on solutions to problems shared by all, not just women. Networks could be sustained by meeting more often, perhaps every two years, and in different locations.
- Increasingly diverse community members must be involved in increasingly focussed and specialized safety audits. More must be done to consider and address the needs of marginalized, isolated, or excluded groups *within* communities such as youth, visible minorities, the disabled.

- Communities should “twin” up or form “sister city” partnerships in order to support and learn from each other’s safety efforts.
- The International Seminar on Women’s Safety web site should be used for Seminar participants to stay in touch and share the experiences, strategies, practices, challenges, and successes of their respective networks around the world.