



Prevention through Relationships with SEI

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This episode features Jessica Beatty - Rape Prevention Education Advocate at SEI and Megan Foster - Prevention Program Coordinator at SATF.

Meg: Thank you for listening to this short recording, I'm Meg Foster, Prevention Program Coordinator at the Sexual Assault Task Force. In this series of SATF's Exploring Prevention Audio Library, we connect with people across Oregon to learn more about creative violence and abuse prevention ideas. Today we are joined by Jessica Beatty from Self Enhancement Inc. Welcome, Jessica.

Jessica: Hi, glad to be here.

Meg: Do you want to start by introducing yourself and telling us a little bit about SEI and your role?

Jessica: Absolutely. As you said, my name is Jessica and my title at SEI is the Rape Prevention Education Advocate. This is a new role at SEI but my job here is really just to work with youth, and help do everything I can to foster positive relationships.

Meg: Awesome. Do you want to talk a little bit more about the work you do? I know SEI does so much community-centered work and your efforts in the Anti-Domestic and Sexual Violence Program at SEI are just one part of these much broader efforts. Can you tell us a little bit more about the prevention work you do?

Jessica: Absolutely. There's a few different components to it, so primarily what I do is working with youth, and that looks like both holding classes in school. Classes can be a little bit formalized. We've done more curriculum based stuff over the summer and then we've also done a lot of really informal drop-in classes that are kind of also like group sessions where people just come in and talk about whatever is on their mind and we kind of workshop relationships together. On top of that, I also build relationships with students outside of the classroom as well. So, there's many students that I meet with one-on-one, or in small groups of themselves and their friends and that's all really self-selected, which I think is very important. Nobody's coming to me because they're assigned to come to me but they're choosing to have an adult in their life who can, who they can talk to you about issues that they might not be able to talk to parents or teachers about. And the really great thing about that is as you and I know, but maybe your listeners don't, is that as a community advocate, I have advocacy privilege, so students can talk to me and know that whatever we talked about stays between us so that way the youth are a little bit more willing to be forthcoming about things that, like I said, might not be super comfortable to talk to about with a parent.

On top of that, I also do some work in our staff, so I'm putting together right now some staff trainings to just make sure that all of our 150 or so staff members at SEI are up-to-date on anti-domestic and sexual violence; what that means, how to respond to it when it pops up in other areas of our work since we do



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provide wraparound services, and just the resources that are available both through SEI and in the larger Multnomah County community.

Meg: That is such a like big scope of things that you're doing and I think probably one of the biggest organizations we've talked to with 150 staff doing that training and excited to hear more about how that how that goes.

In thinking about your school based work that you were talking about, I don't know of a lot of programs in the state that have kind of this flexible model of like here's our set like curriculum or educational programming that we do but then also having like those drop in groups and some of those pieces. I'm curious if you could share a little bit more about what kind of led you to that model, like what was your process in developing kind of all of these different strategies that you just named?

Jessica: There are a few different things - definitely some trial and error. I am the first person at SEI to have this role so we're really figuring it out as we go and just sort of collaborating with our students and kind of figuring out what works for them. We, Sahaan, my boss, is still very embarrassed about the fact that I was hired and, like, I think, three weeks later was in the classroom. As a trauma informed agency he feels like that was super super fast but I personally feel like I was very prepared and very well supported by the staff so our kids got a good program.

But we really like jumped in head first, and kicked it off with that summer programming class, and we were shocked by how many students showed up. I asked him the week before we started, what's our goal here, like, what is a good turnout of students that we're expecting, and he said I'd be happy if they were 10 to 15 people who showed up. We ended up with 40 students coming to our classes. So, we absolutely were not expecting that many. It was the day of that was like literally as students are walking into the building realizing okay we need a bigger classroom actually we're going to split this into two classes and really pivoting in the moment and trying to figure out how are we going to get these kids classes today and for the rest of the week over the summer. But then also recognizing during the classes that okay this is, you know, we're checking our boxes we're delivering the content we're breaking them into small groups to try to work through this, but I'm not really able to build relationships with the kids or the other coordinators who are in the classroom, are not really able to, like, connect effectively with the kids in that big of a group, it's just like this type of material needs to be a little bit more intimate and a little bit more guided.

So we were able to have some discussions and agree that when we reconvene during the school year, during our after school programming, we wanted to focus on a lot smaller groups. And then we had the same kind of very good problem when we had people sign up for my caseload. I'm supposed to carry a caseload of 10 to 15 students and I currently have I think 23 students on my caseload. Because once again I was just way more popular than I expected when I went out to recruit. I had 17 people sign up the first day and that was a lot more than we were anticipating, but rather than turning anyone away we just kind of reconfigured what that looks like being on my caseload so instead of necessarily spending an hour a week in the community with every single student - I do still do that with the students who request that and feel like they need that one on one confidential time. But I also sometimes, you know,



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organize a group of friends who all go to the same school and hang out together and say hey can I bring you pizza lunch and we can sit and chat about what's going on in your life, and that works for them. And there are other students who really really don't want that level of communication, they do not want to text me no matter what, but they're very happy to like come in when I have my drop in sessions during the ASP window and we'll sit and play Uno and they'll tell me about the girl that they're dating during that time. And so it's just kind of like opening a lot of different doors and seeing who walks in and what's working for them and what feedback we're getting from them and kind of learning on the ground but I really appreciate that that's offered us a lot of flexibility to really tailor our program to the needs of our students.

Meg: You highlighted, so many really great pieces there and I think right that that piece knowing your background a little bit that there's so much benefit of having folks that are well trained to be able to step into a role if you didn't have the like background and the experience that you did have coming into this that three week turnaround of starting to implement classes might have been a lot harder. And there might have been a lot more growing pains right.

Jessica: Absolutely.

Meg: And I also appreciate, I feel like that flexibility and the real focus on relationships really speaks to how SEI does all of the work that you all do that this is rooted in those relationships and rooted in those communities and so that flexibility, has to be a big part of that. And I know that in a lot of places when you again are like so rooted in a set curriculum, it makes that flexibility harder, like this is the only model that we're implementing makes it really hard and really makes it hard to meet the needs of so many different students as those relationships develop and those needs grow and change. That's really cool. So thinking about like those lessons that you've learned, and the pieces that have worked really well and really helped you adapt with flexibility, what are some successes so far that you want to highlight about the work you've done?

Jessica: I've had a few moments that have just made me feel really really grateful to be a part of what we do, and those moments are usually when a kid opens up to me in a way that they haven't previously done. Um, so, one thing that I was really challenged with when I first started here at SEI is historically, when they've addressed this type of subject, they've separated by gender, so there's been girls groups that have existed or there have been leadership programs that are a boys version and the girls version and so I think when I come in and introduce myself to students, I don't silo it by gender at all, but students have this kind of preconception that I'm there to talk to the girls, and most of my caseload is still girls. But when I started doing the drop in classes. I was really surprised by how much boys were willing to come and hang out and not just there to talk about, board games but there to specifically say, hey, so I've been dating this girl and I feel weird about this, what do you guys think.

And, um, it's, there's definitely been a learning curve. I absolutely should have known, but on the first day, 10 minutes into the first drop in session realized I needed to have an anonymity claim and tell everybody - Hey guys, this isn't a gossip class that you all go to school together, please let's not use first and last names and we're talking about anybody in this group. But it felt like a big success to have young



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men coming into my classes and being really vulnerable with their emotions and just being willing to share. I've also felt like it's been a great success to just be, get more creative in being able to address student's needs. I'm very lucky that SEI is super flexible with its funding and I don't have to work very hard to justify expenses when I say hey, this kid asked for this or this kid needs this, we get it done. An example of that is one of my students has a history of exposure to domestic violence where she has not directly experienced it at all but she's witnessed it in her parental relationships quite a bit. And she's 15 years old and so she's carrying a lot for that age, and she told me off hand once that she's like I really wish that I could go to a rage room like sometimes I just really want to smash some things that you have to be 18 to do it so we're waiting until my boyfriend turns 18 so we can go and smash some things. And I was able to, I didn't promise anything on the bat, but I went and talked to my boss and pretty quickly was able to get justification to take her to a rage room so that's something that is coming up later this month, and I'm really excited to see her show up and start smashing things and really like working through and processing her very valid frustrations with life, and hoping that it will be cathartic for her but it feels great, like, to be able to tell her that and to see that she recognizes that SEI is an agency that like cares about her and is willing to think outside the box and, you know, not just check those boxes of she's fed, she's supervised, she has somebody to talk to you if she needs to, but also see her has a whole person and like recognize that she knows the best way to process what she's working through.

Meg: That's amazing. And again, I think speaks to how SEI is there to serve the community and work with and within the community and I feel like, well one - I had never heard of the rage room so I'm going to definitely Google after.

Jessica: It's exactly what it sounds like.

Meg: And it just that piece of like what, what do, especially young people, want and need to feel healthy and whole and, you know, have support in the ways that are meaningful for them and I think so often, we have a bunch of adults that are making policies and decisions and all of these pieces even in our homes about like what young people get to utilize to feel support and, you know, navigate their own health, and sometimes right, it's like, oh, I just need to go smash something which is a really like a healthy way to navigate things. I remember working with a young person one time, who we're like, you know what, you can't hit other kids, but you can go like beat the crap out of that stuffed broccoli in the corner if you want and they would just go for like three minutes and they would just like beat up this stuffed broccoli, and then they'd be like, cool. I'm chill, I'm ready to reengage and happy. And it was like, okay, let's talk about like navigating safe, healthy ways for all of us, and also you to get what you need and what makes you feel better and so, in a safe way right. So I really appreciate that approach to like, how do we help people, not just get their needs met, but also like have a voice in sharing what their needs are.

Jessica: Yeah, I think since I started working in this field, that's something that I've been really impressed with in Oregon specifically is how much we're willing to just like meet survivors where they're at. There's, I don't know if this came from the OCADSV training or what, but we have a saying among the DV advocates at SEI where we just say 'the survivor is the expert in their own life,' and that's kind of our mantra that is absolutely the most repeated phrase in my staff trainings that are coming up is just, you



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know, like we are there to support, but like the people that we're supporting know what's best for them. And our job is to help them reach that.

Meg: And I appreciate, I think there are a lot of folks that really honestly struggle to apply that to young people as well and I appreciate that you all are doing that and obviously having some really positive results like young people being able to access folks to talk about right, like their healthy relationships, or the anger that they're feeling, whether that is, you know, because of experiences in their lives, their raging hormones, or like whatever it is right, that that's not dismissed or belittled; that they get to have a voice in that as well, and that their voice is probably the best voice to guide those pieces. I love that. Building on the things that were successful, where are the places that you learned along the way? What made you think differently? What are some of the lessons that you learned that have helped you make this program better?

Jessica: Um, well the class size issue that I mentioned before is something that I definitely learned from, I would not recommend walking into a room full of 40 teenagers and just coming in and saying okay who wants to talk about sex and relationships. But I do think that the most important lesson that I've learned is actually something that you helped me with Meg. It's just recognizing that prevention education really goes beyond what you find in the textbook. I have a background in teaching English for speakers of other languages, and we always viewed it as it's not so much the grammar, the vocabulary list, that we need to stick to in class. I'll throw my lesson plan out the window if I can keep my students talking for an hour, an hour and a half, however long the class is, because ultimately it's using that language that's important.

And so rather than sitting down and doing activities and role plays to practice healthy relationships, I learned that just building healthy relationships and therefore modeling healthy relationships with students is really important and I think I confessed to you that I was like sometimes, you know I like I love my job. Part of my job is getting to take teenagers for pizza and ice cream and just chat with them for an hour, but sometimes I feel guilty, I feel like that's, that's not real work like, what have I done if we haven't ended up, if we just talked about, you know, their mom and their baby sister and they showed me pictures of their prom dress like, have we really done any prevention education during that time? And you're like yeah because sometimes what you need to show them is that it's okay to take an hour off of whatever they're doing and go enjoy pizza, and have a pleasant conversation like that type of self-care and that's type of solid relationship, especially when we know that a relationship with a trusted adult is one of the best ways to prevent sexual violence among youth. All of that counts as doing the work.

Meg: Absolutely. I love that so much and you know I think you're also touching on this piece where I've read a lot of curricula. Violence Prevention, healthy relationship, sex ed curricula, Child Abuse Prevention, just like the full gamut of curricula, and a lot of them do knowledge-building really well but they do skill-building really terribly. And the skills are the parts right like especially when it comes to the skills to navigate healthy relationships, communication, consent, our own bodies, our own mental health, physical health, emotional health, all the things right, like that those are skills and I think as an adult, a lot of my friends and I will talk about how like, I don't have a lot of like competence in like



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what's happening to my body as I get older. Like, why does this thing hurt, is this hurt? I don't know what this is right like there's so much missing in terms of those skills and so I love that piece of like really leaning into skill-building and the modeling skills as well, that it's not just like we could report back every definition of every word. And if we don't know how to apply that to our lives and like actually put that into practice, we're not actually going to be successful at it right?

Jessica: Absolutely. I think you did such a good way of turning, taking what I said and putting the academic language behind it, um, ironically, because I was not expressing myself, except through example so thank you for explaining exactly what I meant which is that yeah we we've had the flexibility to really focus on the skill building, and I feel like that is something that our students like, I've been able to watch the success of them growing from that and see them be more confident with asserting boundaries, first with me and saying, No, I don't want to go back to Starbucks again, I want to go somewhere else. But then also beyond that in a broader sense with other relationships in their lives.

Meg: I think you've already touched on this a little bit throughout your answers thus far but knowing that SEI is a culturally and community specific organization in Oregon, what makes the ways in which you do this work, unique, and meaningful for the communities you serve?

Jessica: Yeah we're culturally specific we are I mean I was in the holiday party last, I mean a couple weeks ago, and it was a room of around 150 people and there were fewer than 10 white people in that room and like, I don't think I can ever say I've been in a room like that before. So like, it was really cool to see the space where - and, like, our CEO and founder, Mr. Hopson always gives a really like inspirational speech, always gets the room fired up at the beginning of every all staff meeting like that, and the one, what he focused on the topic that he focused on at the Christmas party was, 'this is by us and for us' like most people in this room have been in a position where we've had the hand out, but this is the time where we get to give and talked about what it means for him to be able to build the center that is a monument to the work that he's been doing. It was just like, great for me to be able to witness that and I feel very like humbled and grateful to be included in that space.

But it is more than just the staff, like, it has to do with like the activities that we choose that are trauma informed support groups, we like they'll sometimes integrate African foot washing ceremonies to communicate like the idea of like caring for yourself, caring for others, building positive communities. It's the food that we bring, like SEI is really really good at reaching out to SEI graduates or former SEI employees and supporting them so we'll bring in, like, some of them own food carts and those are the food carts that will have, have cater student accounts or things like that. And then just things like being able to open a center that has, you know, work by black artists and music playing from black artists and a library that I believe is entirely black authors in the library and, where else does something like that exist, especially in Portland, Oregon. It just, it's great to see what we have accomplished and what it means to our students. And then, like, I don't mean to ramble when this is kind of not the podcast recording specifically but our relationship model too is something that like I've yet to master but is really really amazing to see in action.

Meg: Is there anything else you would want to share about that relationship model.



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Jessica: I had the privilege, a couple weeks ago of going into Jefferson High School here in Portland and shadowing Miss Trish, who's famous as one of the best in-school coordinators that SEI has to offer. And I had heard very good things but it was really really incredible to spend a day with her and learn about what she does and all of the different ways that she advocates for her students. The SEI Relationship Model is something that's really intrinsic to our workplace culture and the idea is that, as staff members, as direct service or youth service members, we should all be able to serve as a teacher, as a parent, and as a mentor to our students and it's kind of a step thing you aren't meeting with a kid on day one and immediately trying to play all three of those roles but trying to first gain their trust as a teacher and then start model parental relationships and care and concern, and eventually playing that role as a mentor. And I've seen it played out in a lot of different ways but, I watched Miss Trish play all three of those one after another, where she went from, you know, helping a student who was struggling with anxiety and going to bat for them and sitting through a meeting with the guidance counselor to get her schedule moved around in ways that would mitigate her anxiety and, you know, working as a mentor in that role and showing this is how you advocate for yourself and get your needs met. And then, walking around going from classroom to classroom checking in on her students as they were in their classes and chasing students down the hall and saying, what are you doing doing Tick Tock dances in the hallway get back to class and she knew where every single one of her students was supposed to be at, you know, at like 11:27 on a Tuesday, like I was very impressed by her memory but definitely pulled out her mom voice in those moments and was playing that parental role and then popping into the classroom and having a kid say, Miss Trish I don't know how to do this and suddenly she's sitting down and teaching geometry and like, quite literally playing the role of a teacher, and being an extra support staff in that way.

And it's really important the thing that's impressed on me over and over again is that those roles are important not just because they're all positive roles that we can play for students but because specifically within the black community, these kids are, our students, are used to people giving up on them, are used to not necessarily having all of those roles available to them at any point in their life. So, the like benefit of SEI is that not only do we provide these wraparound services where we try to meet our clients as whole people and handle as much as we can for them, but also that we're not going to go away there's no like qualification that they need to do, where we're going to stand by them and whatever way we can for as long as they need us.

Meg: I love that so much. I think so much of our, our, you know, mainstream programs and services that exist are so limited in focus and scope that folks are not able to do that kind of wrap around piece, they're not able, because they don't have the capacity right like they don't have the model and the tools to be like, beyond this, this thing or this set of things that I'm going to be supportive on or I'm going to do here, um, can I like offer all these other things. And I think about that you know just the ways that like teachers are under-resourced generally and a lot of our like violence and abuse response communities are under resourced right and so there's like a very limited scope, and I appreciate that you all have kind of like flipped that and said like, this is all like we're not going to let people go, like this is a part of how we support people on going and everything that you've said today really just comes back to that relationship piece, like you said, and I love that I've just like what does it really mean to



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meaningfully lead prevention and lead community change through relationships, and I think that's incredible thank you for sharing about all of this.

Jessica: Thank you for having me on. I feel really really privileged to be a part of something like SEI and also to be able to come and share it with lovely people at SATF.

Meg: Thanks so much, Jessica.