



Addressing Community Challenges

Total time: 19min 46sec

Meg Foster 00:00

Thank you for listening to this short recording. This series on common prevention challenges is part of a larger audio series to help explore creative prevention ideas and developing and expanding our prevention efforts. In this recording, we discuss common challenges with the broader community that we may experience while facilitating prevention work and brainstorm some strategies to navigate these challenges. Today we are joined by Sexual Assault Task Force Staff.

Kate Hildebrandt 00:23

I'm Kate Hildebrandt. I'm the Campus Coordinator here.

Carli Rohner 00:26

I'm Carli Rohner. I'm the Campus Advocacy Coordinator.

Meg Foster 00:28

And I'm Meg Foster, the Prevention Program Coordinator here at the Task Force. The challenges we are going to discuss were identified by participants in the statewide comprehensive prevention trainings. To get us started, one of the common challenges that we got a lot of questions about was navigating and dealing with challenges with a closed-minded community.

Carli Rohner 00:48

Yeah, this is really interesting because communities might be closed off to engaging in prevention efforts or meeting with us or having conversations for a really wide variety of reasons. And so it's really important to understand the history of that community. We've talked about this in other audio projects before, but everybody's not going to be resistant for the same reason. Maybe they've had a really bad interaction with folks who have done prevention work in the past, maybe they don't understand what you're trying to accomplish. Maybe they feel like they're too over-tapped as it is, they have little bandwidth to add anything else to their workload, and they see you trying to collaborate or you coming into the community as a way to add more work.

We also see communities, and this is really common when we're talking about difficult topics, that don't want to start or open that metaphorical can of worms because then they might not be sure what comes out of that and what benefit there can be to the community. So understanding why a community might be resistant to what you're doing, is really important. You need to be genuine in how you show up to understand both what some of their concerns are but also the culture of that community as a whole.

So maybe their challenge could be, and one of the common challenges that I see with folks, is that they don't want somebody who's not a part of the community coming in and acting as the expert,



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telling them what to do when they don't really understand the dynamics of what's happening within that population or community. And so being able to work together and identify like, what is going on in your community? What are some of those points of resistance that you're having? Is there a particular reason for that? Are there ways as a preventionist, that you can help address that? Being able to communicate some of the benefits to the community of coming in and being able to do prevention work in a way that aligns with best practice, but also incorporates values from the community also incorporates cultural dynamics of the community is really important. And then being able to help folks tie that into -- especially if you have faith based organizations or groups that have a defined set of values or things that they want to be doing within their work -- how can you tie that prevention effort that you're wanting to come in and due to their current values to their current work so that there's some alignment there. And being able to talk with folks and have meaningful conversations around all of that can be really helpful in reducing some of that resistance.

And one of the things that we also see folks, I think it's similar and slightly different in talking about resistance within a community, is when folks just feel very set in their ways. You've already talked to them, you've explained maybe some of the benefits and they still don't really want to engage with your prevention efforts or prevention work. How might we handle that?

Meg Foster 03:39

This happens for a lot of different reasons. A lot of times, people don't know how to make change. We've all heard some variation of like, well, that's the way it is. So that's the way it is. I also think that a lot of times people have a lot of anxiety around change and what would something different than what is currently here look like. Making space and providing opportunity to really navigate those challenges and kind of what folks are experiencing, and giving space to hear that can be really valuable.

It can also be really valuable to cite or highlight some examples of change. One of the ones I commonly hear is people talking about smoking or like seatbelts, that at one point, wearing seatbelts every time you were in a car was not really a thing or like smoking rates. And so people implemented really intentional long term campaigns and we have seen shifts in those things.

Another thing I often think about is language and I hear a lot of resistance about language and people being like, "I can't keep up with all the new terms," and all those things. One of the things I find fascinating about the English language particularly is that we are adding new words all the time. In my lifetime words like laptop and cell phone and Google, in its current usage, are all things that are part of our common vernacular now that were not the case for me growing up. And so we have demonstrated ways of growing and changing and adapting, and reminding people that can be really helpful.

It's always important to remember that we all play a role in preventing violence and abuse. That being said, sometimes that can feel like a really daunting thing to think about. And so helping people find their role in this work, making that step easier for people can be really valuable. Giving people ideas, opportunities, thinking about the different roles we all play, whether it is professional, a friend, a colleague, a peer, a parent, a kid, whatever that looks like and thinking about what those little things or those bigger things are that we can do in those different roles can be really valuable. But also dismantling problematic values, beliefs, attitudes, takes time, it's not going to happen through one

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conversation. And so making space and time to have those conversations and make those changes and highlight the ways we can come together and what those common values are to move us forward on the values we don't share are really important tools.

Carli Rohner 06:34

So the next area that folks have brought up for us is that people often bring in their own history, or beliefs, or value systems and that sometimes those conflict with prevention messages or the information that we're trying to present to a community or for skills that we're trying to help the community build.

Kate Hildebrandt 06:55

Yeah, so one of the first things that I always think of with this and that I've seen in my own prevention work and heard from others is that sometimes with that history comes, people who have their own experiences with violence or harassment or oppression and who are bringing in, "This is what I experienced, this is what worked for me. So this is what is gonna work for everyone else," or "These are my beliefs about it because of those previous experiences," which to me really just highlights the need for prevention and advocacy to work really well together and to have those good strong partnerships so that folks do have a place to process and to get the support, advocacy, resources that they need to process through any trauma that they might still be dealing with. The reality is that most of us deal with some form of trauma at some point in our lives, whether or not it's related to violence, and so having a supportive place and be willing to connect folks with resources addresses some of that.

We're all bringing our own personal histories with prevention, most of us are here because we care about this and something in our lives has impacted the way that we feel or think about our own prevention work. So remembering that kind of grounding that for ourselves and supporting people in place to process, What are their beliefs? Why are those so valuable and affirming? Those values and those experiences can also just go a long way. Sometimes people bring things up because they haven't been affirmed in the past, or they've been told that their experiences don't matter, their experiences aren't valid. So bringing some of those advocacy skills into the space of prevention work. And doesn't have to be a history of again, violence, it could just be that they weren't told that their opinions mattered, or they were disregarded in a previous workplace when they brought forward ideas. Just reframing and bringing back community mindset, to disrupt systems of power and oppression can also be helpful.

Carli Rohner 08:51

In a practical context, if you're up in front of a room and you're seeing this come up for folks, like Kate's saying, doing some of that validation and saying things really specifically, like, "I'm glad that worked really well for you. Do other folks have ideas of how that might show up in our community?" and being able to open that conversation up so folks can see that there's a broader range of responses and validating those to the degree that you're able to, or the degree that it aligns with your prevention work,



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can be really just an easy way to kind of incorporate/validate those folks, but then also bring folks into seeing that there's more opportunities, are there more ways to approach these issues.

Meg Foster 09:30

I also think it's important to acknowledge that the messenger matters, and sometimes it matters more than other times. And so who is imparting that information can have an impact on how people receive that information. Just being cognizant of that and doing some of that work around allyship and who your community allies are and who your partners are in this work, who might be able to move a message forward with certain people in a way that you're not the best messenger of that. So sometimes it goes back to that building community connection in order to support the messages in the work.

Kate Hildebrandt 10:18

Alright, so another question we got was around when people are expressing interest in your prevention work, but then aren't actually showing up.

Carli Rohner 10:26

Oh, my gosh, that's so hard when you think that folks have a lot of enthusiasm. And I just think of like the trainings and the other programs that we've done, or the meetings that we've had scheduled, were then half of the audience that I anticipated showed up or maybe a quarter. So one of the things that I know we have done in our work as a result of that in different times and in past professional roles was to think about, what were the barriers between that person saying yes to participating with me and then actually being able to show up and how can I better anticipate those for folks?

So in the past, I've actually gone back to those folks and said, "I'm so sorry, that you weren't able to attend. Can you tell me a little bit about why you weren't able to be here?" Maybe for a community event, that won't be something that you're able to do, so being able to address what are some of the barriers for folks sitting there? Was it simple things like maybe transportation or there was a cost to your event or training that was cumbersome to folks? Was there not an access to childcare if you have folks that need that? Were there other big events that you didn't anticipate that were happening in your community that were competing with that same day for your events? Looking at some of those logistical and practical barriers for folks can be really important.

The other thing to do with folks too, ahead of time, is when you are coordinating with folks or you're trying to invite folks to either an event or a training or meeting, really trying to chat with folks about what the benefit to them is. What is the benefit to their community, what is the benefit to their work? What is the benefit to them as an individual? How can they see themselves in this work and in their role in prevention more clearly? How can you spell that out for folks at the beginning?

Kate Hildebrandt 12:14

It's important to be honest and upfront about what participating entails. This may not necessarily be the case if you're just hosting, you know, a community event on a Sunday afternoon or something like that. But sometimes we're not clear with ourselves or with our partners about what it will mean to fully

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participate or what kind of time what kind of resources etc, are involved in participating, or sometimes, I know, sometimes I get caught up in my own thoughts and work and so I think I'm being clear and transparent, but then when I ask others I'm not. So, also auditing yourself and asking yourself if you're being clear or again talking to -- maybe you do know somebody who said that they were interested wasn't able to show up -- and you can ask them if there was anything that would have been more helpful for them in advance to know.

Carli Rohner 13:10

Yeah, when you're being honest too, being honest about the emotional cost for somebody showing up, we talk about really hard topics. And so if somebody is like, "I really care about this, and I'm excited," and they have a trauma history, or maybe this is just a topic that feels really hard and heavy for them, one of the tools that I've used in the past is to talk with folks about, "We are absolutely going to be talking about these topics. And we're only going to be spending" -- let's say it's a six hour training -- "we're only going to be spending maybe 30 minutes to an hour talking about some of the specific dynamics or things like that, that are really difficult and the rest of the time we're going to be focusing on opportunities of how we can make our community healthier, better, safer." And sometimes being able to spell out the emotional landscape for folks about what your program or training offers helps them to feel more emotionally prepared. So then when they come to show up to your training, they're less likely to back out last minute or less likely to feel like that's an overwhelming thing to do.

Kate Hildebrandt 14:13

All right, another question we got was around being younger than people you are trying to work with who are your community members. I think this is really common because a lot of prevention work tends to be concentrated in entry level employee jobs, or it's maybe spurred by young folks and activism. So this is a very common dynamic that a lot of us face at some point in our lives.

Meg Foster 14:37

Yeah and one thing that's really valuable is finding what common maladies we have with different people. We have a lot of assumptions regardless of who we are, whether we're younger, whether we're older, whether we're somewhere in the middle, whether we're something else. We have a lot of assumptions about what different populations of people know, can contribute, and will contribute regardless of like how much work we've done to recognize our biases, and unpack our biases, and not bring those biases into the different work that we do, which is all foundational and a part of prevention work. But we all still have those pieces. And so being able to find commonalities with, and those might be common experiences, common values, common ideas, maybe even down to like, which grocery store in our community if there more than one do we like better? Or like what is it, right? Like there are lots of things that we can connect with people about.

Navigating those assumptions is a part of our prevention work, but it's also really important to take the time to take care of ourselves because being on the receiving end of people's biases, people's oppressive values is really challenging at times. And this isn't just whether or not you're younger this

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could be whether or not you identify as gender non-conforming, whether or not you are a person of color; all of these these pieces there are power dynamics in play and it's important for us to find opportunities to promote our sustainability. There's a really great tool on our website, a sustainability plan for preventionists, that we highly recommend you checking out and exploring whether you are one person or an organization.

But this dynamic of being younger than the people you were trying to change the minds of. This also goes back to a piece of sometimes the messenger really matters for both our own sustainability and our own experiences of privilege and oppression. But also sometimes the best way to make change is to have those right gatekeepers and the right people doing the work as opposed to having the same people do all the work and run up against different walls. So a lot of times the messenger matters, think about promoting sustainability, and try to find some commonality. Those are some initial thoughts on that.

Kate Hildebrandt 17:23

Yeah, this echoes to me that adultism and ageism are sometimes dynamics of privilege and oppression and those 'isms that we gloss over. And that happens so much, especially in the way that our society is structured, the structures of capitalism and promotions and corporations, especially when we're trying to get into traditional systems. Sometimes that stuff really matters, like Meg was talking about. So there's a really hard balance to walk of, When do I need to address it and stand up for this, and, When is it maybe just more effective in the moment to leverage, use my allies, have the director of my organization who these people will respect a little bit more because of reasons that are not great, but just are what they are. And that balance is different for different people in different organizations, there isn't necessarily a right or wrong answer to any of that. The more you acknowledge it, build that support with your allies, if you can, if you have those allies, and then leveraging that when it makes sense.

Meg Foster 18:29

I also think that it's not our job to do everything with everyone. As the coordinator and facilitator of our statewide Men's Engagement Committee, I don't see it as my job to engage every man in the state and walk them all through, like whatever journey we each have to go on. But I have allies in that committee in this work that can do that work as well. And so finding those allies who can be those more impactful messengers sometimes it's really valuable.

So thank you all so much for tuning into this recording on challenges with kind of our broader community with magical air quotes around "broader community;" that was a vague topic area. Please feel free to check in on several of our other recordings, where we explore other challenges that come up in our prevention work. Also, please feel free to reach out to us if you have additional thoughts. I'm sure there's stuff that we forgot to mention or highlight some strengths that we can build on in this work. So please feel free to reach out to us and hopefully we can incorporate that in future recordings. Thank you so much.

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