



Exploring Prevention Audio Library:
Series 2, Episode 2 Transcript

Exploring Creative Strategies to Engage Communities: KIDS Center, Action Months, and Navigating Prevention through COVID19 Challenges

Total time: 22min

GUEST SPEAKER

Rachel Visser
KIDS Center Prevention Education Manager

Nicole Cunningham 00:03

Thank you for listening to this short recording. I'm Nicole Cunningham Abuse Prevention Coordinator at the Sexual Assault Task Force. In this audio series, we connect each month with people across Oregon to explore creative violence and abuse prevention ideas. In this recording, we connect with KIDS Center in Deschutes County to discuss how they work to build buy-in for prevention efforts in their community every day and also specifically this April which is Child Abuse Prevention Month and Sexual Assault Action Month. In this episode, we're joined by Rachel Visser, Prevention Education Manager at KIDS center. Before we jump right in and I pass the mic to Rachel, I want to give the caveat that we're recording this episode in the midst of unprecedented change in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. We understand fully that your organization may be altering and changing your prevention efforts to respond to the needs of your clients and community at this time. We're excited to hear from you regarding how you're navigating these exceptional circumstances in your prevention work. If you have ideas and would like to share. Without further ado, Rachel, welcome. Do you want to start by introducing yourself and what you do?

Rachel Visser 01:07

Yeah, thank you guys for having me today. My name is Rachel Visser and like Nicole said, I'm the Prevention Education Manager at KIDS Center. KIDS Center is a child abuse intervention center, often called a Children's Advocacy Center and we work to, we're dedicated to the prevention, evaluation and treatment of child abuse throughout the tri counties and beyond.

So, as part of the prevention department, we start planning our April events about six months out, so August, September of this last year, we started putting together ideas and seeing the kind of the theme and the way we wanted everything to go this year. We do partner with our local family relief nursery Mountain Star. That way we can kind of cover the spectrum of childhood, they go 0-3, sometimes up to 5. And we kind of cover that end spectrum from 3-17/18. And so we want to be able to make sure that we are addressing all of our children's needs in the community. And that partnership has been really vital because we're able to see kind of the different perspectives that a family relief

This information is not offered as, not intended as, and does not constitute legal advice. It is provided for informational purposes only. None of the information provided here should be considered a substitute for professional legal advice, therefore, you should not act or rely on information without first seeking the advice of an attorney.



Exploring Prevention Audio Library: Series 2, Episode 2 Transcript

nursery has to take when they're looking at Child Abuse Prevention. So that has been great. We've been partnering with them for the last 5 years.

And a couple things that we had planned for this April: We have what are called First Fridays in our downtown area specifically within Bend and an artwalk. So stores stay open later, they have artists, they have musicians that are out and sometimes they have themes, and I have contacted our downtown association to see if we could partner with them in April to have that night specifically be geared towards Child Abuse Prevention and they were on board from the get go. I got in contact with galleries that we have to see if some of the local artists would be interested in creating pieces and several galleries absolutely signed on from the first email that I sent out. And then other organizations and businesses in our downtown area were going to decorate their storefronts in blue. They were going to have kind of a bigger presence that night with the Blue Ribbon campaign, which is what we use in order to support and bring awareness to April National Child Abuse Prevention Month.

One thing we were really excited about was we were going to have an interactive art piece that night, where we had a rather large six foot tall tree and we were going to have the general public, anyone that was interested in writing on a blue ribbon, maybe a message of hope, maybe stating they're a survivor of child abuse, a supporter, maybe a local policy or law maker and tying it on that tree as a symbol of our community gathering together and supporting Child Abuse Prevention, but also those that are survivors. And so that was kind of our going to be our kickoff for the month.

Unfortunately, as we have progressed and gotten closer to April, things have changed. And so events are no longer able to take place as such. A couple of ideas that kind of followed that Friday night event was that we wanted to get more of the general population educated. We're going to hold screenings for the documentary Paper Tigers, and we were going to have a panel of experts ranging from KIDS Center and Mountain Stars representatives to people in the school district to culture of care coaches that have been working in school districts to change at a systemic level of how schools are operating with kids that maybe have higher needs. And we just see the need to change maybe some systemic issues that we noticed. So it's going to be a rather interactive screening. And those are kind of our big things that we wanted to push. And so yeah, that's, that was our hope for April this year.

Nicole Cunningham 05:46

Yeah, before all the chaos ensued I'm sure. All those activities that you just outlined sounded absolutely amazing. Before we kind of get to talking about maybe some rerouting or some alternate ideas that you have, I'm curious if you can talk to me a little bit about what your process was in developing your approach to these activities and these particular ideas. How did you get here?

Rachel Visser

Sure. So spurred off of one of our grant funders, that kind of model. We work with the Ford Family Foundation under the Protect Our Children grant. And they always encourage us to go for the higher hanging fruit when we are doing trainings and getting training participants to the table. And so for us, that meant that we know that youth-serving organizations, we know that school districts are aware of child abuse prevention, but a lot of times it's our general public, our friends, our families, our neighbors



Exploring Prevention Audio Library: Series 2, Episode 2 Transcript

that may not be aware of best practices. And so we wanted to create events that were not only, maybe eye catching, but also, were a easy way to start a conversation about what does child abuse prevention look like. And so having a large community organizations like our downtown Association, like bakeries that we're going to create blue items throughout the month of April, and having information on their countertop about why these blue items were there, made it so that it was easily accessible for someone at the general public to understand what April is about and then giving them the opportunity to either step in and lean in and either get a little bit more information or hopefully to come and get a training, an educational training, on how to support and encourage and prevent child abuse in our community.

Nicole Cunningham 08:01

That's amazing. That's such a good idea and making it more palatable for folks in the community who may not be professionals in this role, but are obviously still very much invested in preventing child abuse in their community. So are you able to talk to me about what kind of successes your program has experienced with taking this mission and making it more accessible? What did that look like for you in terms of branching out into the community and maybe finding success in places you wouldn't have expected?

Rachel Visser 08:29

Sure. So when we first started the Blue Ribbon campaign, it was just focused in Deschutes County, and that was in 1998. And what we realized is that while that's kind of a good pilot program, because it's not as rural as the other counties that we serve, we knew that we needed to get this information out to those that are in our rural communities, because that's where it's really needed. And so it's a lot of relationship building and a lot of explaining the rationale behind hosting an event or behind hosting a training or behind even just simply having a cup of pinned blue ribbons at their countertop.

And in 2005, this blue ribbon campaign became a Tri County effort. Since then, specifically focusing on Cook County. They go wild with our blue pinwheels, they plant gardens in front of the police department. They put the pinwheels up and down Main Street, almost every business in Cook County gets some form of Blue Ribbon material, whether that's pins, whether that's our newsletters, posters, because our program manager that is representing per county has been so good at creating the relationship to understand why it's so important that as a community, we need to come together. And not just in April, but beyond, in order to make sure that kids are protected year round. And that we know how to respond to maybe a red flag or gut feeling that we have.

And so it takes time. It takes a lot of time. But having those constant points of contact, whether it's starting in August saying, "Hey, thank you so much for participating in last years, we are in the planning stages. If you are interested in continuing this partnership, please let us know," and just being very grateful, because genuinely we are when businesses are able to stay with us year after year and say that this is something that they look forward to or this is something that they find very important. And so it's that buy-in of understanding that we're not just asking to ask or to make our center more visible, but we're asking for the kids in our community.



Exploring Prevention Audio Library: Series 2, Episode 2 Transcript

Nicole Cunningham

Absolutely. That's such a good approach. And it's so vital to really lift up your messaging beyond just your center. Obviously, you're doing amazing work at your center. But you're hitting it right on the head. And having people buy in to the idea of child abuse prevention at the whole, not just specifically the services that you and the center offer. That's amazing. Rachel, what kind of struggles have you had along the way with getting people to buy into this idea of prevention? And if you have run into struggles, what's made you think differently about your approach?

Rachel Visser 11:41

So the struggle can kind of come in twofold. Time is a big barrier that we see for, especially adults to either come in, get more information, come and be trained, because a lot of training does just take hours out of their day hours out of their work week. And so that's just kind of a natural barrier. It's another thing on someone's plate. It's another thing that they're adding into their schedule. And as a culture, as a society, we're already super busy as it is.

But the other portion is maybe the, the way Child Abuse Prevention is viewed. And it just comes down to our messaging and how we present it, there are things that are so very simple to do that provide prevention and are a protective factor. From simply engaging in a conversation with a child, whether it's biologically yours or not, or just one that you care for or care about, to being willing to be creative when situations arise, where you are put in a one-on-one situation with a kid and you want to make sure that they're taken care of and you're also taken care of.

So it's still fighting the stigma around child abuse and how difficult it is to be preventable. And so the biggest struggles that we face, if we want to get kind of down into the nitty gritty, we always are trying to be conscientious of our different cultures that we have within our communities. We have a tribal nation that we have within Jefferson County that we always want to make sure that we are approaching it in a way that is culturally appropriate. And so there's always that learning curve and that building of trust that continually just shifts and changes. And so that's not necessarily a huge roadblock, but it's always something that is a living and breathing thing that kind of grows and shifts, that we just always need to be aware of.

Nicole Cunningham 14:01

Sure, absolutely. Wow. Yeah that's key, in building those relationships and actually getting people to understand that we're really looking for input and how their view can alter the way that we respond in the community. I think that's a fantastic approach to take.

Rachel Visser 14:26

I was just gonna say we can always learn from them. They are the experts in their culture and to assume otherwise can really be off putting and can really be damaging. And so it's just always being willing to put out an idea, but being okay with saying, oh, that would have no help in your community at that point and being okay with that and seeing what they would need and what they would like in assistance.



Exploring Prevention Audio Library: Series 2, Episode 2 Transcript

Nicole Cunningham 14:55

Yeah, absolutely. So with that being said, I'm sure you're getting, or at least seeking feedback from your community about how you can maybe alter some of your approach to Child Abuse Prevention Month specifically, but also your prevention programming in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. I feel like maybe this is a good segue, if you have any updates or ideas about how to move forward with your prevention work now that we're all kind of confined to our houses and having to navigate this really exceptional set of circumstances.

Rachel Visser 15:29

Very exceptional set of circumstances. That is correct. We, as an organization, we wanted to make sure that we are setting an example for the community in everything that we do. And so if we are given an order to not gather, to stay home, we want to make sure that we're modeling that if we're able, specifically within the prevention department, because I'm not dealing with direct clients at that point, and there's no urgent or necessary need for us to meet. And so we did end up canceling all events and all training, and even all of our distribution, even though that would have been a one-on-one contact, the more we are able to support the health of our community by following these orders. It's a different type of prevention, but it still has kind of that golden rule behind it of being willing to make sacrifices for the betterment of others and to be willing to educate.

So yes, we've taken down all of our plans. But what we're doing instead is we are trying to push our online presence, specifically by way of our social media, what we have available on our website, and then our blog. We started a series of blogs that will be released over the course of April that kind of talked about tips for different groups in our community. What can businesses do? What can faith communities do? parents? What can youth do in order to bring prevention outside of the training venue or classroom and into their home and practice it as a lifestyle and not just a one time event? How do you talk to kids and teens during this time? You have somewhat of a captive audience in your house at this point. Yeah, so it's just reframing and still giving information still allowing people to have access to all the best practices, but just in a different format.

Nicole Cunningham 17:43

Absolutely. It's a really unique opportunity that we have kind of disguised here maybe as a silver lining with this chaos that's happening in the world, but you're right, we do have I'll use your phrase captive audience. I like that. It's a really unique opportunity for us to look hard at prevention and figure out how we move it into people's homes and exactly like you said, and to incorporate it as part of someone's lifestyle, instead of just being a training that you attend or something that you do. When you're out in the community, it's amazing that you're working to put materials into people's hands still, and be sure that they're getting the information they need so that they can start figuring out how to navigate some of these trying circumstances because I'm sure this is not easy for families. It's really important to say thank you for working so hard to be sure that you're still getting that information to the people in your



Exploring Prevention Audio Library: Series 2, Episode 2 Transcript

community in the best way you can and really leading by example. That's huge. And I really appreciate that approach that you're taking.

Rachel Visser 18:50

Yeah, it was kind of an easier decision to make, even though we're kind of wondering, Is this the right decision? Do we need to push forward? But knowing that if we are known in our community, and we're well known enough, that if people were to see what actions we're taking, we want to make sure that we are doing the best for our community that we can. And we are looking at doing short videos for not only for parents, but for kids, like how can we help kids handle this stressful time? And our family advocates and possibly our therapists are going to be able to get on and provide more information. And so we want this to move beyond just a prevention viewpoint, but also to mental health, but also in resources and how do you handle it not only as an adult, but as a kid since they're the ones that are going to be maybe somewhat more affected in the long run.

Nicole Cunningham 19:56

Absolutely. I cannot agree with you more and we'll be very excited to keep an eye out for those resources as you and your program continue pushing them forward. That sounds like you've got some really amazing work laid out in front of you. And I'll be excited to see what comes of it as you continue with your online presence and your approach to navigating this crisis.

Rachel Visser 20:20

Oh well thank you, Nicole.

Nicole Cunningham 20:23

Thank you so so much, Rachel, do you have anything else that you want to add about your program or about the work that you were planning before? All of this kind of started? Anything else you want to add at all to the conversation?

Rachel Visser 20:36

Just that every person that was involved from creating all the print material, my bilingual preventionist coworker that helped with translation and just all of our staff that are just handling this with such grace. It makes it a lot easier to handle crisis situations like this when you know that you are supported, when you know that you are working with people that their viewpoint and their endgame is the same, especially within the realm of prevention, that it gets out to people so that they learn and that they're able to feel comfortable in the role of being their own preventionist. So I'm very, very blessed and happy to be working with the people that I am.

Nicole Cunningham 21:28

That is fantastic. That's really the backbone of all the important work that we do is the people that we get to work with and all of the group effort that combined really gives us the driving force to do this



Exploring Prevention Audio Library: Series 2, Episode 2 Transcript

important work. So thank you to your team, to you for joining us today. And I look forward to seeing what more you put out in the coming months. Hopefully, hopefully not much longer than that but excited to see how things go for you in your program.

Rachel Visser 21:57

Well, thank you for having me today.

Contact Us

Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force
3625 River Road North, Suite 275
Keizer, Oregon 97303
taskforce@oregonsatf.org
Phone: 503.990.6541
Fax: 503.990.6547