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Imagining a Non-Violent World "The Be the Peace, Make a Change Project": A Rural Community Peacebuilding Initiative to End Gender-Based Violence

Abstract

This article will profile the innovative community engagement process initiated by the "Be the Peace, Make a Change" project to end gender-based violence in Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia, and conclude with lessons learned. These lessons were summarized as "headlines" to imagine a future with new narratives for interpersonal relationships. This project was a three-year grassroots initiative of Second Story Women's Centre, funded by Status of Women Canada. It engaged the rural communities of Lunenburg County to develop a coordinated response to violence against women and girls. It focused on the engagement of all genders, youth, and adults in exploring and implementing the visions, hopes and actions identified as priorities by the community within a peacebuilding framework. Community was broadly defined to include: survivors of relationship violence; professional service providers in healthcare, community services, policing and justice; municipal and provincial government; community-based services; educators and schools; clergy; and any interested citizens. The need to alter the cultural and social roots that sustain violence was recognized. A focus on building trusting partnerships both locally and provincially, inclusion of men and boys, engaging schools and youth and the justice systems, as well as survivors were hallmarks of the project.

Keywords: *violence against women, community responses/peacebuilding/voice/grassroots/critical appreciative inquiry/open space technology*

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Imagining a Non-Violent World
**“The Be the Peace, Make a Change Project”:
A Rural Community Peacebuilding Initiative to End Gender-Based Violence**

Nancy M. Ross

Flaherty (2010) uses the term “global peacelessness” to depict a world in which girls and women frequently feel unsafe as more than 35 percent have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence (World Health Organization, 2012). This term implies that violence impacts not only victims of violence but also families, communities, and countries. Theoretical perspectives from peace studies and feminist theory offer an analysis from which violence against women can be seen in the larger context of societal violence that points to deep structural and cultural changes necessary to make the world a safer place for girls and women and boys and men (Boulding, 1977; Confortini, 2006; Duvvury, 2009; Beever, 2010; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2011; Schirch, 2008; Woodhouse & Santiago, 2012; Woroniuk, 2001). This article will profile the steps taken by the “Be the Peace, Make a Change” project (abbreviated to “Be the Peace” project) to engage the community in defining what they believed to be necessary to end gender-based violence and lessons learned from this community engagement. The project was a three-year grassroots initiative of Second Story Women’s Centre in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, funded by Status of Women Canada. It aimed to engage the communities of Lunenburg County in developing a coordinated response to violence against women and girls. This project focused on the engagement of all genders, youth and adults, in exploring and implementing the visions, hopes, and actions identified as priorities by the community within a peacebuilding framework. Inclusion in the community was broadly defined as: survivors of relationship violence; professional service providers in healthcare, community services, policing, and justice; municipal and provincial government; community-based services; educators and schools; clergy; and any interested citizens. Each were invited to add their “voice” and define necessary action needed to reduce gender-based violence at large public forums and in various working groups, using community engagement processes to harness local wisdom. A focus on building trusting partnerships both locally and provincially, inclusion of men and boys, engaging schools and youth, as well as survivors, were the hallmarks of the project.

The project began in 2012 with a community public forum focused on the theme: “From violence and fear to peace and safety for women and girls in Lunenburg County” and concluded with a final public forum that reported to the community on April 18, 2015. This article provides a brief description of the issue of gender-based violence and frames it within a peace, feminist, and systems theoretical framework that positions the violence as a political and social

issue meriting a community peacebuilding response. It profiles the lessons learned by the project's engagement of community members during community forums and workshops that provided opportunities for open and inclusive discussions on this issue, which are challenging to discuss and often hidden (World Health Organization, 2012). When asked to explore new narratives for relationships in Lunenburg County community members imagined new peaceful possibilities for their future in their relationships and in communities (Boulding, 2002).

Violence Against Women: Global Peacelessness

According to Duvvury (2009), gender-based violence is a phenomenon of epidemic proportions found in many families, communities, societies, and cultures across the globe. It is a pervasive violation of human rights whether perpetrated by the State and its agents or by family members or strangers, in the public or private sphere, in peacetime or in times of conflict. It constitutes a major impediment to achieving gender equality and global peace. According to the World Health Organization (2012), the term "violence against women" encompasses many forms of violence that includes violence by an intimate partner (intimate partner violence) and rape/sexual assault and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated by someone other than a partner (non-partner sexual violence), as well as female genital mutilation, honour killings, and the trafficking of women. The United Nations (1994) defines violence against women as:

Acts of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (p. 3)

An expansion of this definition includes physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring within the family and/or community including battering; sexual abuse of female children in the household; dowry-related violence; marital rape; female genital mutilation rape; sexual abuse; sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions, and elsewhere; trafficking in women and forced prostitution; and the physical, sexual, and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs (United Nations, 1994). When a girl and woman-centered lens is applied to measures of peace, a story emerges that depicts a world in which no girl or woman is free from potential harm at some point in her life (Johnson 2005; Kristof & WuDunn, 2009; Seager, 2009). Violence against women is the most frequent cause of injury in Canada (Greaves, Chabot, Jategaonkar, Poole, & McCullough, 2006). The province of Nova Scotia was noted to have the highest rates of sexual assault in the country of Canada in addition to high rates of other forms of interpersonal violence that includes the second highest rate of stalking in Canada at twelve percent (McFadyen, 2009). In Nova Scotia

in 2009, sexual assault occurred at a rate of forty per 1,000 in the population aged fifteen and over (compared to an average of twenty-one per 1000 for all of Canada), with females comprising approximately eighty-five percent of all sexual assaults (McFadyen, 2009). Canada's General Social Survey (2010) indicated that in 2009 there were 31,000 victims in Nova Scotia who self-reported that they had experiences of spousal violence in the past five years.

Harbour House, the local transition house offering crisis and transitional services to women and children experiencing violence and abuse in Lunenburg and Queens County, noted in their 2009-2010 fiscal report that they received 372 distress calls, offered 923 counseling sessions, and had eighty-six new admissions to their home (Lunenburg County Community Fund, 2010). A researcher, contracted by Second Story Women's Center located in the town of Lunenburg to conduct a report on the extent of violence experienced by women in Lunenburg County, conservatively estimated that the total number of women experiencing spousal abuse during the 2009/2010 fiscal year was 1300 or six percent of the total population of women over the age of fifteen (Atkinson, 2009).

The persistent and pervasive violence committed against women and girls merits a grassroots community peacebuilding approach that addresses the structural and cultural influences of this violence.

Literature Review

As described above, violence against women and girls is pervasive throughout the world while at the same time often described as invisible (Kristof & Wudunn, 2009; Renzetti, Edleson, & Bergen, 2011; Mann, 2012; World Health Organization, 2012; Carter, 2014). Feminists have been instrumental in calling attention to the need for better responses to interpersonal violence and in the recognition of differences within "gender" and sex that include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer people (Sauer & Podhora, 2013).

In 1980 the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) was initiated in Duluth, Minnesota, and became known internationally as a prominent model for a coordinated community response to violence (Shepard & Pence, 1999; Hague & Bridge, 2008; Carlson & Jones, 2010; Barner & Carney, 2011; Herman, Rotunda, Williamson, & Vodanovich, 2014). Shepard and Pence (2014) described hallmarks of the "Duluth Model" as contributing to the initiation of mandatory arrest policies and the creation of educational curriculum for perpetrators of violence that focused on power and control as the purpose and function of violence. This was especially useful for individuals who normalized their experiences of violence in relationships due to recurrent experiences. It was also seen as useful in helping

individuals who perpetuated violence to accept responsibility for their violent acts. However, evaluations of this model indicate it has had limited success in lowering rates of interpersonal violence (Carlson & Jones, 2010; Herman et al., 2014). I argue it fails to incorporate an analysis of structural and cultural factors that contribute to direct violence and is therefore ineffective in promoting environments that encourage peace. Community responses to violence against girls and women have been critiqued as narrow in scope, reactive, and lacking in coordination (Flaherty, 2010; Wells, Claussen, & Sandham, 2012). Recently, many coordinated community responses have moved away from a coordinated agency response to a coordinated community response that includes agencies and organizations that traditionally have not been associated with this issue (e.g., schools, faith communities, and businesses) and some have included the addition of primary prevention efforts (Klevens & Cox, 2009). According to Kelly and Lovett (2005) an integrated approach, which is the aim of community coordinated responses to all forms of interpersonal violence, should promote gender equity, social justice, and deliver human rights. This approach is in line with recommendations through a United Nations report focused on measures necessary to end widespread violence against women—recommendations explicitly stating that prevention is a key element of coordinated community response to violence (United Nations Population Fund, 2005).

Klevens and Cox (2009) noted there is no definitive evidence in coordinated community response effectiveness, but they have taken steps to summarize the best available evidence in primary prevention to address the needs of victims and offender accountability. These recommendations include parent training programs and family-based interventions that target children with antisocial behavior. They also recommend community-wide activities that may include structured curricula combined with activities for teens. Their research infers that community-wide measures to end interpersonal violence need to target everyone, not just victims and offenders. In pointing out that the aim of primary prevention is to avert the initial occurrence of violence, they infer that community interventions need to target and modify factors that increase the risk of violence occurring (Klevens & Cox, 2009). The “Be the Peace, Make a Change” project sought to engage community in exercises that invited all members to imagine steps that were necessary in their communities to prevent the occurrence of violence. This process was loosely modeled on work conducted by Boulding (2002) that involved developing a workshop format that asked people to imagine a world at peace in ten years.

The inherent attributes of this exercise are in the valuing of local wisdom and in trusting that imaginative exploration of a world at peace—specifically, a world without interpersonal violence—will yield concrete directions. The results of this exercise are portrayed below. The

literature regarding coordinated community responses to interpersonal violence is inconclusive regarding what is most effective, as noted above. However, the results of this project align with directions supported by Klevens and Cox (2009) that suggest community-wide measures are essential.

The need for further surveillance, data collection, research, and evaluation is noted in much of the literature about effective community planning to reduce interpersonal violence (World Health Organization, 2010; Wells et al., 2012). The advantages of positioning gender-based violence within a peacebuilding framework is further described in the next section.

Theories and Frameworks for Community Engagement

The merit of positioning gender-based violence within a grassroots community peacebuilding framework is its ability to offer theorists and practitioners a perspective from which violence against women can be seen in the larger context of societal violence (Confortini, 2006). Galtung (1976; 1990), a peace theorist, pointed to the need to recognize that direct violence does not occur in a vacuum and is linked to cultural and structural factors that impact men and women's choices and behaviour. Galtung's (1976; 1996; 2010) analytic triangle of violence conceptualized direct acts of violence, that is, violence that harms a person individually, as inseparable from cultural and structural forms of violence. Cultural violence is defined as "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence- exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science —that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (Galtung, 1990, p. 291). Structural violence describes social patterns, political structures, and economic systems that limit the potential to live a full and healthy life (Ramsbotham et al., 2011). Many forms of structural inequality intersect with sex and gender to influence violence against women. For example, economic factors and a history of colonization, combined with a cultural legacy of mistreatment and abuses, increases the vulnerability of First Nations, Inuit, and African Nova Scotian women. Poverty, a form of structural violence, is experienced by many women in Lunenburg County who have less access to income (Morris & Gonsalves, 2005). The number of children raised in lone-parent homes is greater than in married and common-law families, and most lone-parents are women who have less money and greater childrearing responsibilities (National Household Survey of Statistics Canada, 2013). Having access to less resources while having greater caregiving responsibilities is a form of structural violence that is experienced by many women in Lunenburg County.

The intersections of structural and cultural violence are sometimes subtle, but also pervasive. For example, in her fourth edition of her film titled *Still Killing Us Softly*, Jean

Kilbourne (2010) described the ways in which the mainstream media relentlessly objectifies and silences women in advertising, and she challenged her viewers to think critically about popular culture and its relationship to sexism, eating disorders, and gender violence. All men and women are exposed to the mass media in ways never experienced before. Young women are especially vulnerable to the impact of the media (Johnston, 2011). Two recent films titled *Sext-
Up-Kids* (CBC Doc Zone, 2012), and *Miss Representation* (Missrepresentation.org, 2011) depict sexism in popular culture by exploring the emphasis on youth and sexuality as the measure of girls' and women's value in popular media.

Dines (2010), in writing about the intersections of pornography and violence against women said:

We are so steeped in the pornographic mindset that it is difficult to imagine a world without porn....it is affecting our girls and boys, as both are growing up with porn encoded into their gender and sexual identities. What is the impact? What we do know is that we are surrounded by images that degrade and debase women and that for this the entire culture pays a price. (p.163)

Gilligan (2009), a Harvard professor and a leading violence expert, also wrote about the ways in which men and women are portrayed in popular culture and linked this to the interpersonal violence women experience. His work acknowledged the ways assigned gender roles can be limiting for both sexes in patriarchal societies, as a form of cultural violence. For example, he suggested that social and psychological effects of contrasting gender roles, into which men and women are differentially socialized in patriarchal cultures, are more powerful than biological differences in their ability to predispose men toward violence and women away from it (p. 249). Gilligan further noted the role of shame as a form of both internal and external surveillance in maintaining adherence to assigned gender roles (p. 251). For men, he described the ways in which they are honored for violence (even given Medals of Honor), and shamed if they are unwilling to fight. Alternatively, a peacebuilding approach helps a community highlight the ways in which cultural and structural violence intersect and influence violence against women and girls. This may include, as Gilligan points out, the need to deconstruct and reconstruct gender roles.

As Paffenholz (2014) acknowledged, while Galtung is credited with crafting original concepts of peacebuilding in the 1970's, the field of peacebuilding research and policy practices began to shift in focus from the international to the local during the 1990s. This shift toward the

local she credited as largely led by Lederach (2003), with the focus placed on local actors “in the driving seat” to determine local initiatives (Paffenholz, 2014, p. 11).

Feminist scholars in international relations have criticized the field for ignoring the wars going on inside the home in the form of domestic violence, when speaking of peace (Confortini, 2006, p. 346). The Be the Peace project can be understood as a response to this critique by positioning the violence against women that occurs locally, and in the home, as directly related to the field of peace studies. In recognizing the ways in which the “personal” is “political,” feminist theory complements Galtung’s framework of violence to provide a gendered analysis of power as essential to defining the influence of cultural and structural factors on interpersonal violence (Hanisch, 1970). Confortini (2006) also pointed out that one of the ways in which feminist theories add to Galtung’s (1990) framework of violence is to incorporate notions of gender as socially constructed and embodying relations of power. She noted that gender, rather than a synonym for sex, is a social construct that organizes social life in “hierarchical, mutually exclusive categories, which are in a relationship of sub/super ordination to one another” (Confortini, 2006, p. 335). A gender-conscious approach to violence infuses the concepts of structural and cultural violence with the recognition that power maintains relations of domination and subordination between groups of people. Further, a feminist intersectional approach points to the importance of recognizing other elements central to this analysis such as age, race, class, (dis)Ability, social status and social location (Crenshaw, 1991). Disability is written as (dis)Ability: “(dis)” to respect an individual’s social and physical connection with disability, and “Ability” to highlight the creative and innovative ways of dealing with societal barriers (MacDonald, 2008).

Feminist theorizing by racialized women foregrounded the intersectionality of systemic oppressions, particularly—but not only—racism and sexism, to highlight the need to disrupt historical relations that resulted in oppression (Profit & Ross, 2015). Feminist inclusion of an intersectional approach that recognizes multiple factors can contribute to marginalization and is analogous to the ways in which our understanding of what contributes to health and well-being has broadened to recognize the impact of social factors on health. It is now well recognized that biologic and genetic endowment, although very important, are not as significant as social determinants for the health of individuals, families, communities, and nations (McGibbon & McPherson, 2013). Just as the social determinants of health (SDH) play the major role in shaping health outcomes, the Be the Peace project explored the importance of the social environment as influential in determining a predisposition to engaging in violent behavior or being exposed to violence, or in the promotion of non-violence and peace. As noted at the

beginning of this section, positioning gender-based violence within a grassroots community peacebuilding framework offers theorists and practitioners a perspective that moves from a narrow focus on individual explanations of violence to one that seeks to understand broader societal factors.

This framework involves consideration of the ways in which meso-, macro-, and exo-systemic factors influence relationships at the micro level. For example, an ecological systems perspective regarding resilience is helpful to recognize individual capacity and the need for communities to provide support. Unger and Liebenberg (2011) define resilience this way:

1. The capacity of individuals to navigate their way to resources that sustain well-being;
2. The capacity of individuals' physical and social ecologies to provide those resources; and
3. The capacity of individuals, their families and communities to negotiate culturally meaningful ways for resources to be shared. (p. 3)

This definition acknowledges individual capacity while emphasizing that resilience is dependent on supportive environments and not solely on individual character traits. It implies that the risk of perpetuating violence can be mitigated by access to resources and supportive people. Concepts of ecological resilience contribute to a systems analysis that helps define initiatives able to contribute to non-violent behavior and peace.

Methodology

To engage the community in defining measures to end violence against women, a participatory action research approach was adopted that incorporated anti-oppressive practices. The objectives of participatory action research include sharing ownership, learning, and action to represent a philosophical approach rooted in social justice (Rutman, Hubberstey, Barlow, & Brown, 2005). According to Maguire (1988) it can explore important issues in a community by asking questions aimed at three types of change:

1. Development of critical consciousness of both researcher and participants;
2. Improvement of the lives of those involved in the research process;
3. Transformation of fundamental societal structures and relationships.

The Be the Peace project extended an invitation widely to all community members to come together in community forums to learn more about this issue and to participate in defining measures they believed essential to reducing violence against women. Anti-oppressive research, in its commitment to a social justice mandate, seeks to actively include and engage all marginalized and oppressed social groups (El-Lahib, 2017).

To help ensure that the voices of all who attended the Be the Peace community forums and events were heard, innovative facilitative techniques were employed, and skilled facilitators were hired for large events. These approaches included *Critical Appreciative Inquiry* and *Open Space Technology*. *Critical Appreciative Inquiry* seeks to recognize the impact that difference, power, and diversity can make in opening doors for inclusive dialogues, thus enabling a way of being in, and seeing, the world and bringing about change in human systems (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012). It was chosen as an approach that could utilize the best of what already existed in the community, and then define what could be built upon, acknowledging current challenges. It incorporates the principles of action research and is a collaborative and highly participatory process (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). *Open Space Technology* was used in combination with *Critical Appreciative Inquiry* to facilitate the opening of space as an intentional leadership practice, permitting all participants to have a voice (Herman & Jain, 2006).

The project's title was chosen to recognize that peace in interpersonal relationships is both a shared and individual responsibility. The intent of this project was to engage all community members and thereby avoid dominant discourses about relationship violence as primarily a women's issue. The project began by holding a large public community forum that was followed by two subsequent community forums in two subsequent years. These community forums were open to all community members and were therefore advertised among professional organizations that included nonprofits and the school, justice and community services, and various forms of public media that included radio, newspaper, posters, and online social media. Attendees at the forums included individuals who had previously experienced interpersonal violence, concerned citizens, professionals in relevant agencies, elected officials, clergy, and police.

Principles of Community Engagement

The project engaged people in an imaginative exploration of how their relationships and communities would look when "peaceableness" had come about (Boulding, 2002). It harnessed innovative community facilitation approaches to engage the community in challenging conversations about violence against women as a means of mobilizing people with the necessary courage to define and work toward social change.

The combination of *Appreciative Inquiry* and *Open Space Technology* effectively worked to encourage participants to create and define the agenda related to the theme "Be the Peace....Make A Change: from violence and fear, to peace and safety for women and girls in Lunenburg County." This theme was further defined as the following statement:

We gather together as one community of women, men, girls and boys to rise out of the silence, shame and stigma caused by violence to women and girls. Together we create peace in Lunenburg County through changes big and small, personal and systemic; each change positively uplifting the experience of women and girls, men and boys in our community; fostering hope, equity and creating peace. (Be the Peace, 2013)

The following simple rules were established to guide the community engagement processes of the project:

- Explore different views and listen for common ground;
- Uncover all assumptions and agree on expectations;
- Share leadership responsibilities and information generously;
- Treat everyone as a respected, trusted and cooperative partner;
- Take purposeful action when there is a clear path and energy;
- Invite all voices and perspectives to create safe spaces where everyone can belong;
- Ask even the hard questions. (Be the Peace, 2013)

One hundred and fifty-one individuals attended the first community forum held in the Town of Lunenburg in 2012. Following the identification of themes during the forum, teams and groups were formed that included a community planning team, an interagency network collaborative, and a team to explore community restorative justice. A group of men chose to meet regularly to speak about men's issues; a group of women also decided to meet regularly to speak about experiences of violence, and ways they could advocate for better justice responses; and a group decided to meet regularly to discuss steps needed in the community to improve responses to sexual assault. Further groups focused on how best to engage youth and schools and how to implement the "Neighbors, Friends and Families" program (2017), a public education campaign to raise awareness of the signs of female abuse so that those close to an at-risk woman or an abusive man could help (Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, 2017). Another group decided to meet regularly to discuss the relationship between substance abuse and violence, and others decided to meet to discuss how to collect stories related to violence against women. Finally, a group agreed to meet to discuss how to best support rural families in the New Germany (a very rural area) to discuss and address issues of violence against women. Many of these groups or teams met monthly for three years. However, over time, the number of teams decreased to concentrate on those thought to have the most impact.

The second forum, held in 2013 in the town of Lunenburg, was attended by one hundred and three individuals regarding the theme: “Stories of the Future—A New Narrative for Relationships in Lunenburg County.” This title implied that social change would influence local news headlines in the future—ones that would tell stories about relationships of non-violence, hope, and new possibilities. Among those who attended were many individuals who had experienced violence in their lives. The walls of the room were filled with pictures, posters, and graphics depicting stories and specific directions the community had described as necessary to end violence against women and girls. The following image (Figure 1) was created by graphic recording artist Janet Rhymes (2013) to record the words and images shared at the second large community forum.

Figure 1: Stories of the Future.



This graphic depiction captured the need for change and the vision for a more peaceful future expressed by participants. It highlighted the hope and energy of community participants that felt a need for a new narrative to inform relationships in Lunenburg County, and a belief that such change was possible (Be the Peace, 2013).

Stories of the Future: Lessons Learned

Fifty-eight individuals including Municipal Mayors, a Police Chief, members of Second Story Women Centre, the Director of Harbour House (a transition house for women fleeing violence), staff of the Be the Peace project, and local citizens including men, women, and youth attended the final community forum of the Be the Peace project held in the Town of

Lunenburg's fire hall, on April 18, 2015. They shared lessons learned and hopes for the future that would influence new narratives for relationships in Lunenburg County. Nine focus areas were identified by a participatory process, again facilitated by hired facilitators and loosely modeled upon a process, described earlier, by peace maker Elise Boulding (2002). Each focus area was titled as an imagined future news story headline, as described below.

Headline 1: "Your Life Matters: Your Voice Matters"

The need to engage schools and youth was universally regarded as central to the Be the Peace project throughout the three years. Throughout the project youth shared that they were not often given an opportunity to talk about issues connected to interpersonal violence and this led to feeling their contributions were not valued within communities and in schools. Students directly addressed teachers in their schools and at the School Board level about their struggle with relationships and with not having opportunities to speak meaningfully with caring, supportive adults about issues of importance to them. Youth spoke about the gender binary and of the courage it takes to step out of the gender-specific narrative to shift to a new way of being together, to talk together, to establish a new future. When boys and young men met together in partnership with the Second Story Women's Centre, several group participants spoke about gender identity and their belief that many boys don't feel safe. They expressed a need for male role models and opportunities for them (and girls) to deconstruct the gendered boxes that they experienced as hypersexualized and limiting.

As a result of the successful partnership between the Be the Peace project and the South Shore School Board, *Healthy Relationships for Youth*, a program co-facilitated by high school youth in Grades 11 and 12, is now delivered within the curriculum to grade 9 students. The school board is committed to having this program in every school from Grades 9-12. The work with youth and schools was transferred to the youth coordinator at Second Story Women's Centre and to the coordinator of the Healthy Relationships for Youth program, as well as to the coordinator of the boys program in partnership with HeartWood Centre.

These steps to influence structured curricula and youth activities are aligned with community-wide measures recommended by Klevens and Cox (2009). To end violence against women and girls, ongoing peace education that includes teaching nonviolent conflict resolution and healthy relationship skills in schools is an essential component of community responses.

Headline 2: "Government Takes Bold Steps"

Four local majors and a member of Nova Scotia's Legislative Assembly (MLA), representing Lunenburg County, shared a willingness for municipal and provincial governments to take steps to reduce violence against women and girls, which was a major accomplishment of

the Be the Peace project. Six areas in which action had been taken at the municipal government level included:

1. Incorporating an annual December 6 Resolution (The National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, also known informally as Purple Ribbon Day), as a day commemorated by community events in Lunenburg County;
2. Creating a position statement/policy commitment of our council;
3. Development of protocol to investigate domestic violence;
4. Working with wellness committees to provide staff and council respectful workplace guidelines;
5. The provision of learning opportunities for staff regarding how best to respond to interpersonal violence and how to address it (for example, in sports, by training leaders in the department of recreation); and
6. The inclusion of information related to matters of interpersonal violence four times a year in the local *Municipal Matters* publication.

Four municipal councils within Lunenburg County followed the lead of Lunenburg town to formally adopted the following resolution:

The Council of the Town of Lunenburg believes that all women and girls have the right to live in safety and dignity, free from threat, intimidation and violence. Gender based violence in all forms diminishes the quality of life for all and is unacceptable to the people of Lunenburg. (Lunenburg Town Council, 2015)

The measures profiled above serve as examples that any village, town, or city could formally adopt to demonstrate and highlight their commitment to ending gender-based violence.

Headline 3: “Resolution Through Conversation”

The Be the Peace team that had focused on restorative justice, meeting regularly for three years, began the process of establishing a Community Dispute Resolution Center. This center, under the guidance of a community-based advisory group, and under the governance of our local Community Justice Society, will teach skills in conflict resolution and attempt to resolve disputes outside the formal justice system.

Headline 4: “We Can Do Great Things Together in the HUB”

A community group initiated through the Be the Peace project, co-chaired by the Executive Coordinator of Second Story Women’s Centre in the Town of Lunenburg and a Chief of Police, included membership from Correctional Services, Probation, Harbour House Transition House, the Family Resource Center, Addiction and Mental Health Services, and Family Services. These service providers shared they had felt isolated in their work and their

belief they could do better work collaboratively. The HUB model, based on the Prince Albert, Saskatchewan Community Mobilization movement, incorporated lessons learned from research completed in Glasgow, Scotland (Prince Albert Community Mobilization, 2014). The model was modified for local needs to deal with challenging cases within a transdisciplinary process. It aims to bring down walls between organizations so communities can respond early and more effectively for those impacted by interpersonal violence, to improve interventions and prevention efforts.

Headline 5: “Women Survivors Thrive”

This group included women who had survived experiences of violence coming together to support each other and to give voice to their experiences, with the intention of influencing the ways in which the justice systems respond to gender-based violence. Survivors spoke clearly and candidly about their experiences with police and others in the justice system. For survivors of violence, finding their voice had a dual role and was described as central to their individual healing and to influencing social change. Participants spoke overwhelmingly about the need for change within the justice systems.

Headline 6: “Waking Up Freedom and Gratitude”

This headline reflected appreciation for efforts made to reduce interpersonal violence in Lunenburg County and recognition of the freedom within our communities to take a stand on this issue. While the Be the Peace project had hosted numerous public events for three years, providing opportunities to speak and develop strategies to address issues related to interpersonal violence, it was recognized this work needed to continue. The need for individuals to exercise their voice was reflected by one woman who stated that it was important to “always stand in your power.” The project, in its essence, was about speaking truth to power, and then asking for change—in individual lives, in organizations, and in the broader community.

Headline 7: “ACE Men”

Men who had been meeting together for three years to reflect on their experiences of being a man in Western neoliberal culture concluded “our liberation is tied to women’s.” This group of men took inspiration from the work of Bruce Dienes and David Hatfield (davidhatfield.ca) who had both provided workshops that focused on recognizing male privilege, deconstructing harmful forms of masculinity, and transformative education opportunities for boys. These workshops emphasized the need for men to examine and redefine their roles, relationships, sense of purpose, and the need for positive male role models for youth.

Headline 8: “Celebrate the Differences—Be an Ally”

This group reflected on the meetings between men and women that were titled “Gather the People” to discuss the issue of violence against women from gendered perspectives. These meetings were challenging, and participants recognized that it was necessary to think “outside of the box.” To do this, they felt it was important to acknowledge ways in which men are born into privilege, and that conformity to gendered norms often contributed to ongoing privilege. This group reported that stepping out of the “man box” was scary. Other participants faced the challenge of welcoming men into the work, understanding that ending men’s violence against women is a men’s issue, and that it cannot end without their involvement.

Headline 9: “No More Blame or Shame”

The Be the Peace project helped inspire the Sexual Assault Services of Lunenburg/Queens Project to develop an unprecedented amount of collaboration and cooperation that actualized effective changes in responding to sexual assault. By involving the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the town police, the Health Authority, and many other partners, new protocols were developed collaboratively to inform the development of new trauma-informed training and influence policy. The project also initiated a campaign titled “I Count 2015” that included a website: “A Place to Be Counted as a Survivor of Sexual Assault for Residents of Lunenburg and Queens Counties.” The campaign acknowledged that most sexual assault is not reported and that the website was a safe place to put experiences of sexual assault into words anonymously, with the implied message that when your voice is heard, and your story is told, it counts. This working group evolved into an independent project hosted collaboratively by Second Story Women’s Centre and Harbour House, dedicated to creating the first comprehensive sexual assault services in Lunenburg County.

Discussion: Successes, Limitations, and Challenges

The Be the Peace project served as a catalyst for many community initiatives that have been sustained within the community, including the introduction of changes to school curriculum, an increased response to sexual assault in our communities, and municipal government initiatives that were described in the previous sections. While efforts to establish better services for survivors of sexual assault had been ongoing, the Be the Peace project successfully established a Sexual Assault Services (SAS) working group that was influential in obtaining further grant funding to hire staff focused on this issue (Crowell & Godsoe, 2013). Collaboratively, their efforts contributed to expanded sex-assault examinations to victims in Lunenburg and Queens County including the expansion of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) services to this area (Bradley, 2016).

Challenges have included barriers to the establishment of a community dispute resolution centre for the South Shore—envisioned as a source for restorative approaches, practices, tools, education, and services for the empowerment of people to resolve their own conflicts. A determined group of people collaborating with the South Shore Community Justice Society (SSCJS) met for several years with this goal. However, the Board and Director of SSCJS expressed concern about the agency's capacity to handle community disputes, as well as the appropriateness of fit with their mandate to serve youth and adults who have been charged with a crime. Thus, currently, there is no hosting organization to carry forth the vision of a community dispute resolution centre.

Another challenge has been the recognition that discussing the issue of violence against women from gendered perspectives can become emotionally charged, and therefore facilitators need to provide safe and constructive “containers” to host these public meetings. Such meetings can become safer when prior attention is paid to the establishment of communication guidelines to insure respectful dialogue. Discussion regarding the need for these guidelines should acknowledge the historical constraints on such discussions, as well as respectful consideration of past hurt and trauma the participants may have experienced.

The short-term funding provided to the Be the Peace project limits its scope and ability to lead projects to fruition. Upon completion of the Be the Peace project, the coordinators formed a non-profit organization titled the “Be the Peace Institute,” dedicated to the mission of promoting gender equity, healthy relationships, and safe, peaceful communities and systems in Nova Scotia (Be the Peace Institute.com). Again, funded by Status of Women Canada, the first substantial project of this institute, in partnership with the Nova Scotia Association of Black Social Workers, will explore how women who have experienced gendered violence define justice and implement pathways to achieving that justice. This institute does not provide a service delivery function, and perhaps as a result, their funding is short-term, tenuous, and intermittent—posing ongoing limitations to accomplishing their mandate.

Conclusion

The Be the Peace project was premised upon seeking direction from the community by engaging boys and men, and girls and women, in the communities of Lunenburg County. This was accomplished by extending invitations to all community members to attend community forums and other events. A participatory action research design, paired with anti-oppressive research practices, helped insure all participant voices were heard and their contributions valued. A peacebuilding theoretical framework and feminist theory infused this project with the recognition that violence against women is influenced by cultural and structural factors and is a

community and societal issue. In de-centering a focus on individuals, to center a community response on the use of inclusive and innovative facilitation techniques, such as Critical Appreciative Inquiry and Open Space Technology, local wisdom and expertise was evoked that evolved to themes directing specific areas of focus for the project.

As described in the nine “headlines” above, a focus on valuing the contribution of youth and the engagement of youth and schools was identified as a priority in community efforts to reduce interpersonal violence. This focus specified a need for male mentors, ongoing critique of limiting gendered norms, and peace education that included curriculum related to healthy and non-violent relationships.

The second headline profiled initiatives municipal and provincial governments could take to highlight their commitment to ending violence against women and girls. The desired development of a community dispute resolution center and the introduction of a HUB Model are measures that can be effective to teach conflict resolution skills and collaborative work that improves intervention and prevention efforts.

Elevating the voices of victims of violence had a dual role central to both their healing and to influencing social change. As noted above, the need for change within the justice system’s response to women and girls was highlighted. The project validated the importance of claiming the freedom to exercise “voice,” particularly when speaking truth to power and asking for change.

The engagement of boys and men throughout the project revealed a need for safe spaces for men to discuss harmful forms of masculinity and to learn about steps they could take working alongside girls and women, to reduce violence against women.

The final headline addressed the shame and blame victims of violence often experience and the need to treat victims of violence with respect. Together, the nine headlines described above indicate that reducing violence against women and girls must involve youth and schools, government leadership, voices of survivors of violence, collaborative community responses, and the engagement of all genders.

The voices of community members determined the themes and direction of the Be the Peace project, and the voices of women who have experienced the justice system will continue to influence the direction of the Be the Peace Institute. A grassroots community peacebuilding approach is relevant to all communities throughout the world that experience interpersonal violence. Such an approach speaks to an emancipatory function through the promotion of environments in which all people can live full lives and explore their full potential (Curle, 1995; Mitchels, 2006; Galtung & Webel, 2007; Lederach & Lederach, 2010).

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