

From Reacting to Preventing: Addressing Sexual Violence on Campus by Engaging Community Partners

A report prepared by Julie S. Lalonde for the University of Ottawa
Task Force on Respect and Equality

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Disclaimer

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Context

Report backgrounder

University of Ottawa President Allan Rock announced on March 6, 2014 that he would strike a Task Force on Respect and Equality with the following mandate:

The University of Ottawa Task Force on Respect and Equality (“Task Force”) will provide recommendations to the President about how to foster a culture on campus that encourages respectful behaviour, prevents sexualized violence and ensures that members of the community, women in particular, can learn and work free of harassment and sexualized violence.

The Task Force answered the call of students who had referred to several incidents on campus as examples of rape culture.

Although several definitions of rape culture exist, it is commonly understood as a culture that actively condones sexual violence.

“In a rape culture, people are surrounded with images, language, laws, and other everyday phenomena that validate and perpetuate rape. Rape culture includes jokes, TV, music, advertising, legal jargon, laws, words and imagery that make violence against women and sexual coercion seem so normal that people believe that rape is inevitable. Rather than viewing the culture of rape as a problem to change, people in a rape culture think about the persistence of rape as ‘just the way things are.’” (FORCE: Upsetting Rape Culture)

Recognizing the incredible capacity of community organizations and agencies, the Task Force wanted to explore partnerships between campus and community.

Report mandate

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the best ways for Canadian universities to respond to sexual violence on campus. In particular, this report looks at positive examples of partnerships between universities and their broader communities, as well as examples of administrations partnering with their student groups.

This report is *not* exhaustive and is meant to serve as a launching point for further inquiry and discussion.

About the author

Julie S. Lalonde is an Ottawa-based social justice advocate, support worker and public educator. She has a master’s in Canadian studies from Carleton University and has been working in the field of sexual violence for over a decade. Julie has won wide recognition for her work, including the 2013 Governor General’s Award in Commemoration of the Persons Case and Volunteer Ottawa’s “Best Volunteer in a Leading Role” award.

This report was approached using a community-based research method.

Introduction: Sexual violence on campuses across North America

Sexual violence on campuses is by no means a new phenomenon. University-aged women remain one of the most vulnerable groups in Canada¹.

What we have seen over the past year, however, is a sustained conversation about rape culture on campuses.

This spring, the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights released the names of 76 postsecondary institutions that were being investigated under the federal Title IX mechanism "for possible violations of federal law over the handling of sexual violence and harassment complaints."²

This news thrust the issue of sexual violence on campus into the limelight and ignited a conversation across North America. With prestigious universities like Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Princeton and others under investigation for alleged mishandling of sexual assault on their campuses, it became difficult to deny the systemic nature of the problem.

Here in Canada, the federal minister of the status of women announced in 2011 that she was "concerned complacency is getting in the way of ending violence against women on college and university campuses."³

The conversation continued in Canada with high profile incidents at Saint Mary's University,⁴ the University of British Columbia⁵ and the University of Ottawa that drew widespread outrage.

Viewed in isolation, each incident could be chalked up to a campus-specific reality: inadequate lighting on walking paths; too few security officials; a lack of training for front line workers on campus; poor management of "Frosh Week" activities; campus' location in a "bad neighbourhood."⁶

Sexual assault is not unique to one campus, one community or one neighbourhood. What makes the issue of sexual violence unique for each campus is its approach to addressing it. The Toronto Star recently launched a series on campus sexual violence and found, for example, that only 9 out of 100 Canadian campuses have a specific sexual assault policy.⁷ Concerns about universities' failure to generate sexual assault policies and about inadequate sexual assault policies have also been raised by community groups such as METRAC, which recently published a discussion paper on the topic.⁸

1 Brennan, Shannon and Andrea Taylor--Butts. Statistics Canada, 2008.
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85f0033m/2008019/findings--resultats/trends--tendances--eng.htm>

2 United States Department of Education, 2004.

3 <http://www.ed.gov/news/press--releases/us--department--education--releases--list--higher--education--institutions--open--title--i>

4 CTV news. "More action needed on campus sex assaults: Ambrose." November 25, 2011.

<http://www.ctvnews.ca/more--action--needed--on--campus--sex--assaults--ambrose--1.731544>

5 cbc.ca news. "Saint Mary's University frosh chant cheers underage sex." September 2, 2013.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova--scotia/saint--mary--s--university--frosh--chant--cheers--underage--sex--1.1399616>

6 cbc.ca news. "UBC investigates frosh students' pro--rape chant." September 7, 2013.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british--columbia/ubc--investigates--frosh--students--pro--rape--chant--1.1699589>

7 NOW. "York pursuing libel action against Toronto Life." September 27, 2013.

<https://nowtoronto.com/news/york--pursuing--libel--action--against--toronto--life/>

8 Toronto Star. "Canadian post--secondary schools failing sexual assault victims." November 20, 2014.

http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/11/20/canadian_postsecondary_schools_failing_sex_assault_victims.html

9 METRAC. "Sexual Assault Policies on Campus: A discussion paper." October 30, 2014.

http://www.metrac.org/wp--content/uploads/2014/11/final.formatted.campus.discussion.paper_.26sept14.pdf

When viewed as a whole, it is clear that campuses are dealing with a systemic problem that requires a multi-pronged approach. As the experts in this report demonstrate, campuses have traditionally focused on reactive measures rather than actively working to *prevent* sexual assaults. Furthermore, they've often failed to utilize the expertise of the full campus community, which includes their community partners, such as sexual assault centres and community health resources.

This report aims to fill that gap by speaking with community groups to better understand how campus-community partnerships can reduce levels of sexual violence on campus and provide students with a more supportive and responsive campus community.

Methodology

Over the summer of 2014, I conducted **19 semi-structured telephone and Skype interviews** with individuals who were currently or had recently been working with a Canadian campus on the issue of sexual violence. They worked for frontline agencies such as community sexual assault centres, community resource centres and women's centres across Canada. In a handful of cases, the people I spoke with worked directly within the university as faculty or staff.

The movement to end sexual violence in Canada has been led by women; however, the experts I interviewed varied in gender, race, age and years of experience in the field. I spoke with advocates who had been doing frontline work with women sexual assault survivors for 30 years and recent social work graduates who were just entering the field.

The organizations and individuals I interviewed have worked with campuses across the country. There is geographical representation from the Atlantic Provinces to British Columbia. No postsecondary institutions from the Territories have been included.

A starting point for my outreach was contacting 20 organizations that were awarded a Status of Women Canada grant as part of the 2011 call for proposals to examine the issue of sexual assault on campus. I contacted these groups over the summer of 2014, when many were winding down their projects. I received responses from 15 of the organizations I contacted.

Although the mandate was to examine the specific responses of *university* campuses, many of the community groups were working with all the postsecondary institutions in their community, including CEGEPs. The Status of Women Canada grant was not specific to universities but included all postsecondary institutions. Lastly, the inclusion of CEGEPs in this report was emphasized as important by experts in Quebec. It is for this reason that this report includes universities, colleges and CEGEPs.

I also conducted an open call via social media and within my own network. I received responses from a few community organizations and individual activists who had worked to address sexual violence on their campus as students.

It is important to note that the *vast* majority of people I interviewed would only speak to me if they could remain anonymous. Some of the people I spoke to refused to disclose which campuses they were working on, for fear that their feedback would not be entirely confidential. The resistance to talking openly about one's work to address sexual violence on campus is in line with a recent *Maclean's* piece on campus sexual violence whose author encountered academics who weren't even willing to speak openly about their research because it was "impossible to anticipate what the consequences might be."⁹

9 Quinlan, Liz. Quoted in "Why don't Canadian universities want to talk about sexual assault?" Browne, Rachel. <http://www.macleans.ca/education/unirankings/why-dont-canadian-universities-want-to-talk-about-sexual-assault/>

My interview subjects are recognized experts in their field, active members of their community and respected advocates. However, they felt that their standing in their community and, in particular, in relation to the campus(es) they were working with was incredibly precarious. I got a strong sense that people feared reprisals for talking about the existence of sexual violence on campus, let alone any critical comments regarding the campus response to it.

Much of the concern centered on how publicly identifying themselves or their work would damage their precarious relationship with the campus. For groups who were doing work on campuses via the Status of Women grant, there was also apprehension about how critical their work could be under the rubric of their funding agreements. Many of the funding recipients I spoke to felt the tension of wanting to use their project grants as a window of opportunity to shake things up on campus while also wanting to ensure a sustained relationship with both their funders and the campuses they were targeting.

For all these reasons, the individuals, organizations and campuses spoken about in this report are not identified, with the exception of Dr. Charlene Senn and the University of Windsor, whose work has been very publicly lauded as an example of a best practice in the area of sexual violence prevention.

The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to two hours, based on the amount of information the individual wanted to provide.

I used a semi-structured interview style, where I asked each interviewee to provide me with a quick overview of their role with the campus, the goal of their project and/or job description and any major successes or challenges they faced in trying to address sexual assault on campus. I asked them to share with me what they viewed as best practices in regards to preventing sexual assault, supporting sexual assault survivors and addressing rape culture more broadly.

Although the experts I spoke to were working across campuses from different communities, key themes quickly began to arise in the interviews. I've fleshed out these themes in the Findings section.

Some participants went on to share reports or documents prepared as a result of their work, which have been included in the References section.

This report looks at campus and community partnerships to address sexual violence in over **30 universities and colleges** across Canada, ranging from large, urban-centred university campuses to rural colleges. This report covers English and French institutions, including CEGEPs.

In this report, I refer to the community agency's interpretation of "best practice" in regards to addressing sexual violence on campus, whether it was based on their own measurements of successes or on the assessment of an external evaluator.

With so many projects happening across so many campuses, it was impossible to set a baseline measure of "best practice" with the time and resources I had at my disposal. I deferred to the expertise of the people I spoke with as to what they deemed most beneficial. This was quickly proven to be an effective method, as common themes kept emerging. **All of the findings in this report were validated by the experts I interviewed.** The findings of this report reflect their recommendations. There was a consensus that if campuses followed through on them, they would make significant progress in addressing sexual violence on campus. Despite the lack of an academically evaluated baseline definition of "best practice," I think this report provides a significant starting point for examining the importance of universities engaging with community partners to address sexual violence on campus.

Findings

1. Partnerships are vital for ending sexual violence on campus

The community partners and campus community members that I spoke to were strongly in favour of partnerships between campus and community. Even in cases where community groups encountered incredible resistance to their work, they felt it was imperative to continue working with campuses.

When community groups spoke with those who had been sexually assaulted on campus, the latter responded positively to the engagement of community groups, because they provided a “neutral” party that survivors could rely on. Community groups received encouraging feedback from survivors who appreciated that their presence provided an alternative to institutionalized campus services such as security, health services or human rights officers. Confidentiality is a major concern for any sexual assault survivor, but particularly in a campus setting. Since the community agency was generally viewed as an “outsider” group, students felt that they would be less likely to side with the institution and more likely to provide them with a “neutral” perspective. The idea of “neutrality” from a community group was raised by several individuals and organizations I spoke with as positive response they often heard from survivors.

For those who work on campus, collaboration with community is seen as an excellent means of tapping into years of knowledge regarding community-based research and advocacy. In some cases, those working to address sexual violence from within campuses referred to the expertise of community groups to represent the voices of survivors. Some campuses were aware that community organizations were more likely to receive disclosures and reports from their students than administration-run services. By engaging with community organizations, those working on this issue from a campus perspective could begin to investigate why students were so reluctant to report to campus-based services and, hopefully, aim to address those concerns.

“Before we joined the Sexual Assault Committee on campus, I think the administration was really naïve about what was *actually* going on at their school,” said one woman working for a community agency that had recently partnered with their local campus. “At the same time, I don’t think the school had any idea what we did, the services we offered, the years that we’d spent advocating for victims.”

Partnerships between community groups and campuses created possibilities for knowledge exchanges. Community groups were able to gain access to academic research while campuses were able to learn about grassroots responses to violence. If these relationships are nurtured, they can be mutually beneficial in many ways.

It was interesting to note how many community agency workers had experience that pre-dated that of their campus counterparts. Several of the individuals I spoke to had been leading anti-sexual violence work in the community for significantly longer than those doing this work at the campus. This sometimes created tension between the two groups. Community agencies might have had more years of experience than their campus-based counterparts, but their expertise was often seen as of inherently less value because it was not academic.

In some cases, campus administrators and academic experts were shocked to learn *from community groups* how the campus had traditionally responded to sexual violence “incidents.” These could be tense moments but community groups felt that if their campus counterparts approached the issue respectfully, they could be a great opportunity for building trust and mutual understanding of the complexity of addressing sexual violence. Furthermore, they could be important reminders of how past approaches to addressing sexual violence can taint future efforts. If community groups had historically been “burned” by the campus administration or vice versa, these awkward, albeit important relationship breakdowns needed to be named in order for the groups to move forward together.

The most common way in which campus and community formally engaged was through a sexual assault advisory committee. These varied slightly depending on the campus and the community, but were generally committees formed on campus and made up of community, administration and student groups who had the mandate to address sexual violence in their work. Some committees were very structured, with members having fixed-year terms, while others were more informal and had flexible membership.

Community groups had varying experiences with these committees. A number of committees were described as productive, effective at moving the agenda forward and at ensuring that the work was not done in isolation. In these cases, the community groups felt like their membership in the committee was a positive usage of their time and a great way of ensuring they were connected to what survivors needed on campus.

In other cases, community groups found membership in these types of committees to be very difficult. Many groups were dogged with internal conflict, often over political differences. Overworked advocates and front-line workers from community agencies felt like their presence were merely tokenistic or that their voices were actively silenced. They expressed frustrations about the level of knowledge that campus members brought to the table.

One west coast community group addressed the knowledge gap within the advisory committee by developing and implementing training for the committee members to ensure everyone was grounded in survivor-centred, anti-oppression politics. Although it was an investment of their organization's time, they felt it was a long-term investment worth making because it allowed them to focus their meeting times on the practicalities of addressing sexual violence on campus.

Members of one community agency told me about their frustration in having to sit through meetings with members of the campus community, who often held incredibly problematic views on sexual violence. Members of the campus community who sat on these committees would downplay the prevalence of sexual violence on campus, resist critiques about campus services and outright deny survivor stories. When this happened, it would create tension and division within committees. Community members on these committees refused to acquiesce to the resistance, but also found it frustrating to spend a large portion of their time educating the members of the committee rather than focusing on the work itself.

The importance of building strong relationships between campus and community groups cannot be downplayed. One community group I spoke to listed all the successes of their campus engagement project, including the creation of a campus-specific bystander campaign, partnerships with the athletic department and a successful needs assessment process. But for them, the biggest success of all was building a new partnership with the campus administration that they felt was respectful and best of all, sustainable.

Another community interviewee perfectly summed up the importance of engaging community: "As frustrating as it is to navigate a system that is so politically different from our own, campus work is important work and we're going to stick it out as long as we can."

2. Government funding is an effective means of getting the ball rolling but success requires a long-term funding commitment from campuses

Many agencies had never partnered with the campuses in their community prior to the Status of Women funding grant and felt it was an amazing opportunity to build a sustained relationship with those in their catchment area. The funding allowed them to hire someone specifically focused on campus work and gave them the capacity to build new relationships and strengthen alliances in the community. Once the funding ran out, however, and the projects were completed in the eyes of Status of Women Canada, the future of the partnerships on campuses were often uncertain.

A fear that community groups were to continue doing this work for free or risk losing ground was palpable for many. They often had not realized until their project-based funding ran out that the campus was relying on the community group to do most of the “heavy lifting.” Administrations and academic experts were supportive of the work being done, but many community groups felt like at the end of the day, the work fell on them to do. Furthermore, there were many concerns that if the community groups were to pull out, the campus would rely on the free labour of students to continue the work or abandon the issue completely.

Although every individual and organization I spoke with felt it was imperative that students and student groups have positions of leadership on campus regarding sexual violence, there was fear that a reliance on free student labour meant that projects would be short-lived. Students have notoriously over-burdened schedules; community groups felt that making students the sole organizers of this work on campus meant that the latter would burn out. Community groups were also aware that relying strictly on students to lead the movement meant that sustainability would be difficult, as students transition out of campus life every four years or so.

Community groups felt that their expertise should be valued through compensation by university/college/CEGEP administrations and that the same should apply to student organizers. Many of the experts I interviewed were opposed to the reliance on free student labour, for practical and political reasons. “If campuses value this work so much, they should pay for it.”

This was a common response to the issue of sustainability in their work. Community groups expressed frustration that in many cases, the campus response to sexual violence felt like lip service.

Administrations expressed a desire to address sexual assault on campus, but were not willing to “put their money where their mouth is.” From the perspective of overworked and underpaid community agencies, the expectation that they would continue this work for free once the grant money expired was offensive.

As one community-based frontline worker told me, “To expect us to lead the projects and basically do all the work but to not compensate us for it speaks to how little they value what we bring to the table.”

Another agency’s experience drives home the point about devaluing feminist, community-based work. The small pocket of funding that supported their work had run out, and so, they were forced to rely on volunteer labour to keep up the momentum they had built on campus. They believed in the work so they kept at it. However, they soon realized that *other* community groups were doing similar work but being funded. “To see the campus funding *other* community agencies to do work around mental health and addictions, for example, while we’re volunteering our time to ensure survivors are heard on campus is really, *really* insulting.”

Through the Status of Women Canada funding to address sexual violence on campus and other project-specific initiatives, many community groups performed needs assessments with their local campuses. As part of those assessments, they produced a list of recommendations for addressing gaps in the existing services and responses on campus.¹⁰

A common recommendation across different campuses was the need to establish a long-term committee and/or point person within the university to ensure lasting success. Groups felt this was imperative for ensuring the work continued long past the media focus on a specific “incident,” the timelines of a particular project or the legacy reach of one key ally within the administration. *Investing* in such a committee or point person was a recommendation made to me by every person or organization I spoke to while preparing this report.

Community groups were adamant that campuses needed to monetarily invest in this work in order to demonstrate a true commitment to ending sexual violence on campus.

3. Campuses need to focus on prevention rather than simply reacting to specific “incidents”

While I was conducting my interviews, it was very interesting to note the clear differences between campuses where there had been a recent “incident” versus those where there had had no recent public case of sexual violence or example of rape culture on campus. Very early on in my conversations with community groups, they would indicate to me whether there had been some sort of precipitating factor in their relationship with the campus. “We were contacted by the school after X incident” was a common refrain from community groups.

A high profile “incident” or “scandal” was a mixed blessing for community groups, who were outraged at the incidents in question but grateful that it meant a fire had been lit on campus. In the vast majority of cases where there were active partnerships going on between community groups and campuses, it was as a result of an incident that had brought the issue of sexual violence to light in a public way.

Although community organizations were unanimous in their frustration that it took a media frenzy for the university to come aboard, they were all grateful that at least the campus had chosen to respond by engaging with them. It is important to note that in many cases, community groups were the ones who made the initial contact with campuses and not the other way around. Community agencies would see that sexual violence was a concern and approach the campus to provide support. It could certainly be argued that community groups simply “got to them first,” but in a few cases, community groups wanted it to be noted that *they* had worked to create that relationship. For them, it was a noteworthy distinction because it pointed to a campus that was *not* connected to its community partners. There was also a sense from many that their expertise was not recognized by the university/college/CEGEP.

Many of the community-based experts I spoke to talked about their sense of being devalued by academic institutions. There was nothing explicit that they could point to, other than a general sense of dismissal for their expertise and approach. They did not have specific proof as to why that was, but indicated that their use of a grassroots rather than medical model and/or an explicit feminist, political stance might be why the campus administration was reticent to engage them.

A few of the individuals I interviewed spoke of the irony of the situation, where the institution that is clearly struggling to address sexual violence is acting like *it* is the expert on the issue. “Meanwhile, we’ve got decades of experience doing this work and doing it well, and we’re being passed over because we don’t have academic credentials backing us up.”

10 For an example of such a report, see SACHA’s “It’s Time” project:
<http://sacha.ca/our-centre/it-s-time-project>

I mention the issue of respecting the expertise of community groups and acknowledging that community-based groups are often the catalyst for partnerships between campus and community because it speaks to a larger approach regarding prevention.

Evidently, if a campus's approach to sexual violence only addresses high profile cases, then it is not adequately focused on prevention.

As for campuses that had not had a high-profile incident or "scandal," it was harder for community groups to engage the campus administration. Agencies trying to work with campuses that had not had a recent incident found it incredibly difficult to do so. There was a strong sense that campuses felt it was not an issue for them and that doing public anti-sexual violence work would only bring upon them the kind of attention they were grateful to have avoided thus far.

One campus that has successfully taken on prevention work is the University of Windsor, through the work of Dr. Charlene Y. Senn and Dr. Anne Forrest. They have worked to bring bystander intervention training to students as a means of preventing sexual violence. By embedding the workshops into classrooms, they've been incredibly successful at bringing their message to a large number of students, many of which are not traditionally reached by public education strategies. The success of their Bringing in the Bystander™ program is a great example of how campuses can prevent sexual violence while maintaining a positive image.

In fact, none of the individuals I spoke to who were working on a campus without an "incident" had any luck in moving the issue forward. It is important to recognize that this could simply have been reflective of the timing of when I contacted them. Nonetheless, without exception, every individual or organization that I spoke with working on a campus or in a community that was not affected by a "scandal" felt that their work, up to that point, had been a major struggle that, so far, had led nowhere. One campus-based expert I spoke with expressed great frustration that their campus was missing a major opportunity to "get ahead" of the issue. "We don't have a 'scandal' yet, but it's only a matter of time before we do, so why not focus on prevention now?"

Regardless of how relationships were formed between campus and community groups, the community members I interviewed felt that campuses are talking very little about sexual violence and when they are, the focus is almost entirely on reacting. An emphasis on encouraging survivors to report is one example of how campuses focus on reacting to sexual violence rather than preventing it.

Many of the individuals I interviewed were frustrated with their administration's focus on getting victims to report. Campuses were quick to dismiss concerns about sexual violence on campus because their statistics did not show that it was an issue on campus. However, when presented with feedback from survivors, students and community groups about how so few assaults are reported, the administration would often respond with the assertion that the "issue" is a lack of reporting and that survivors should be encouraged to report.

Community organizations that are rooted in the experiences of survivors were resistant to making "reporting" the primary concern because they felt it ignored the larger issue of hostility and victim blaming that discourages survivors from speaking out. "It's like putting the cart before the horse," one woman told me. "You can't just say 'We need more people to report.' You have to make the environment safer for survivors to come forward. That's a much bigger project than simply saying 'Reporting is important.'"

A focus on reporting is fundamentally at odds with prevention. Hoping that a survivor comes forward after they have been assaulted does not prevent that assault from happening. Although it could be argued that reporting *can* reduce the chances of a perpetrator victimizing others, it still does not eliminate sexual violence

completely. Furthermore, making reporting the sole focus of a campus anti-sexual violence strategy can be read as victim blaming, for it places the onus entirely on those who have already been assaulted to take action.

There is, however, an encouraging trend towards innovative public education campaigns, particularly in the realm of bystander intervention.

Bringing in the Bystander[™] is a program from the University of North Hampshire that has recently been adapted by the University of Windsor. The campaign focuses on prevention by engaging bystanders of all genders to learn about their role in preventing sexual violence, challenging myths about sexual assault and supporting survivors.

Bringing in the Bystander[™] has been evaluated and found to be an effective means of empowering students to make a difference. The university made the innovative program more accessible by integrating the bystander intervention training workshops into existing course content.¹¹ In doing so, it was able to engage students in areas such as business and law, who don't traditionally take these workshops.

Since the University of Windsor launched the campaign, it has trained about 60 facilitators and over 800 students have participated in workshops.¹² The campaign is currently in its second phase and is evaluating the long-term results of its training.

Green Dot Etcetera is another acclaimed, U.S.-based, bystander intervention campaign with programming specific to campuses.¹³ The campaign's philosophy is that every incident of violence is a red dot on a map, whereas every incident of bystander intervention is a positive and therefore, is a green dot. The goal is to create maps of campuses, communities and entire cities covered in green dots rather than red ones. In this way, the campaign engages bystanders to choose who they want to be: a red dot or a green dot.

The campaign has been picked up and adapted by various organizations and campuses across North America, including York University and the University of Toronto.

One Canada-specific bystander intervention campaign is draw-the-line.ca/traçons-les-limites.ca. Developed and managed by the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres and Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes, the campaign uses a variety of scenarios to engage bystanders in thinking about their role in ending sexual violence. The campaign includes a user guide for workshop implementation, an interactive website, posters, postcard-style pamphlets and resources such as YouTube clips and a radio PSA. [Draw-the-line.ca/traçons-les-limites.ca](http://draw-the-line.ca/traçons-les-limites.ca) employs a flexible copyright approach in which the campaign roll-out can be tailored to each campus. For example, at Laurentian University, a short video was developed in which students spoke about how they would "draw the line."¹⁴ The guide and all campaign resources can be downloaded for free from the website, which allows for easy roll-out of campaign workshops. The campaign is currently in its second phase of evaluation and has been picked up by a number of campuses across the province including Carleton and McMaster, in addition to Laurentian.

This trend towards bystander intervention campaigns is positive because it signals a desire for campuses to prevent, rather than simply react to, sexual violence. In my interviews, the experts I spoke to were encouraged to see bystander intervention approaches picking up steam. Bystander intervention campaigns are generally well evaluated academically, and the groups I spoke to felt they were better received by students. Focusing

11 Course descriptions for Bystander initiative:

http://www1.uwindsor.ca/womensstudies/system/files/Bystander_Initiative_Course_Descriptions.pdf

12 Tamburri, Rosanna. "Bystander intervention program changes attitudes about sexual assault." University Affairs. October 15, 2014.

<http://www.universityaffairs.ca/news/news-article/bystander-intervention-program-changes-attitudes-sexual-assault/>

13 <https://www.livethegreendot.com/>

14 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5sXxz-DD00>

on everyone's positive role in ending sexual violence rather than painting men as perpetrators and women as victims was a welcome change by community and campus groups alike.

Community organizations also appreciated a focus on bystander intervention because it facilitates a continuous dialogue about sexual violence on campus. In talking about sexual violence as *everyone's* responsibility, community-based advocates felt that campuses can move away from reacting to specific incidents on campus and instead, focusing on creating a positive culture on campus where everyone looks out for each other.

4. Importance of engagement with senior administration

Bringing community, students, staff, faculty and administrators together to address sexual violence is incredibly important. However, it is also important to bring together those who are in a position to make decisions. Often, community groups felt they were wasting their time sitting on committees that had no real power to create change. There was a sense of frustration felt by many people that there were keen, well-intentioned people coming together on a regular basis whose work often felt in vain.

The tone of the committees shifted very drastically when there was strong engagement from senior administration and other powerful campus leaders.

Community groups struggled with the recognition that advisory committee members were often made up of a mixture of folks who were keen but powerless and those who were perhaps less interested in the issue but held more decision-making power. In other cases, *nobody* sitting on the committee had any power within the academic institution itself. In the cases where the committees were only there as *advisers*, members felt their participation was less fruitful. Members did not maintain the same level of commitment and advancing specific projects or initiatives was slow. In some cases, the committees fell apart and dissolved completely.

In cases where there was strong buy-in from senior administration, however, decisions moved forward and real change happened. Lengthy committee meetings resulted in concrete plans, speedier decision-making and an overall sense of effectiveness from committee members. This resulted in a stronger commitment from members as a whole.

Often, having an engaged senior administrator at the table was the sole deciding factor between success and failure. One organization told me that "once there was a change of upper admin and we got someone who was *really* invested in the issue, we were in business. The entire tone of the project changed and we felt like we could finally get our hands dirty."

Having a strong commitment from senior administrators was a key to ensuring concrete change was going to happen on campus. However, this was not easy to attain, seemingly due to personalities as much as campus structure. But the people I spoke to were unanimous in naming an engaged senior administrator as a deciding factor in whether a campus adequately addresses sexual violence or not.

5. The role of campus communications departments

When asked what their biggest challenge was, the parties I spoke to were unanimous in naming the campus communications/ public relations /marketing department as a major impediment to addressing sexual violence on campus. Although these departments vary from campus to campus, everyone I spoke to was quite clear in naming them as the biggest barrier to moving forward.

Some community organizations felt they had to water down the work in order to get it approved by the university communications departments. One campus was censored from using the word “rape” in the project’s Facebook group because it was “too alarming” and “not in line” with the “tone” the administration wanted to set on campus.

Other organizations felt that they were completely unable to name the issue of sexual violence and/or rape culture on campus because of resistance from the communications department. Many campus groups talked about the delicate maneuvering needed to get words like “sexual violence,” “violence against women” or “rape culture” included in their projects and campaigns. Across many campuses, there was a desire from the administration to subsume the work under umbrella terms like “mental health,” “bullying” or “harassment.”

Although the mandate of many advisory committees was to address sexual violence, gender-based violence or violence against women, the administrators often pushed for vague language such as “respect,” “healthy communities” or “safety.”

There was particular resistance to gendered language. Naming the problem of sexual violence was difficult enough but ensuring that a gender-based analysis was applied proved incredibly difficult for many campuses. This was often a serious point of contention for community groups. Gender-neutral language was overwhelmingly preferred by campus communications departments. This was often taken as an insult by community groups. One organization in particular expressed clear outrage that at every turn, the communications department was pushing back against its gendered lens. “I work for an organization whose name and mandate is *explicitly* about violence against women and yet, campus kept insisting that we act as though men and women are equally affected by rape culture?!”

I heard versions of stories like this from several different people I interviewed.

From the perspective of community groups and their allies within the administration, naming the problem of sexual violence and clearly identifying its primary victims is imperative to addressing the problem. However, what they heard from campus communication teams was that the language is often too “controversial” or “political” for their liking.

The issue might appear on its surface as simply a matter of semantics, but it was evident from everyone I spoke to that it was indicative of political differences. For community-based advocates, calling the issue “sexual violence,” “rape culture” or even “violence” was imperative to addressing sexual assault on campus. And yet, they felt incredible resistance from campus administrators who told them that the terms were alarmist. It was also quite clear to me that community groups and their campus allies felt it was incredibly disingenuous for campuses to strike committees meant to tackle sexual violence on campus while removing the committee’s ability to *name* the very issue it was trying to address.

From a logistical standpoint, this meant lengthy meetings and conference calls that many felt stalled the progress of the projects, campaigns or committees.

In some cases, entire projects had to be re-written due to fears from the communications departments that the language, tone or approach would reflect badly on the campus. Projects meant to address sexual assault against women on campus were re-written to meet the strict demands of communications teams. For example, words like “sexual violence,” “rape” or “rape culture” were changed to “sexual harassment,” “bullying” or “creating a culture of respect.”

Several project managers I spoke with had their timelines shifted because getting approval from campus communications took much longer than anticipated and in many cases, these delays were a significant cause of stress.

Press releases, recruitment posters and communications to students about initiatives on campus were listed as examples of straightforward documents that many community agencies were shocked to discover took days and even weeks to approve because of careful maneuvering by the campus’ communications department.

For many community agencies, this was a source of incredible frustration because they felt campuses were being hypocritical. On the one hand, campuses were relying on the expertise and knowledge of community groups. On the other hand, campuses were trying to depoliticize their work in order to preserve the campus’ image.

For many community partners, this was difficult terrain for them to navigate. **“How do I stay true to the work while ensuring I don’t burn a bridge with campus?”** In light of the findings mentioned above regarding the importance of partnerships and the need for that work to be continually funded, one can see how community organizations would struggle to strike the perfect balance.

Conclusion

Across the country, there are amazing individuals and organizations working to end sexual violence. By tapping into this vast network of experts, college, university and CEGEP administrations can move towards making their campuses safer and more inclusive spaces.

In order to move forward:

- 1. Campuses must meaningfully engage with their community partners**
Grassroots community organizations have been fighting to end sexual violence for decades and have a wealth of expertise. Campuses would gain a great deal by creating advisory-type committees that include community partners and giving them a substantive role. Campuses must compensate community partners performing the work appropriately and be willing to engage them through a long-term commitment, not simply as a means of addressing a “scandal.”
- 2. Campuses must fund anti-sexual violence work on a sustained basis**
Simply allocating this important issue a tiny pocket of money or project-based funding will not provide the needed momentum to address sexual violence on campus. A financial commitment to addressing sexual violence would include, for example, the funding of a permanent point-person on campus who is dedicated solely to addressing gender-based violence and the funding of continuous public education initiatives.
- 3. Campuses must prevent sexual violence and not simply react to it**
Administrations need to place an emphasis on addressing the campus culture that allows sexual violence to happen. They must invest in strong public education that focuses on engaging the campus community in ending sexual violence.
- 4. Campus initiatives to address sexual violence must include senior administration**
Any projects, committees or initiatives must include members of the senior administration who have the power and authority to create change on campus. The inclusion of senior administration demonstrates the campus’s prioritizing of the issue.
- 5. Campuses must name the problem**
Sexual violence on campus can only be eliminated if it is named. Communications departments, public relations offices and/or marketing teams must make the brave choice to be transparent about sexual violence and the work being done on campus to address it.

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<http://www.universityaffairs.ca/news/news-article/bystander-intervention-program-changes-attitudes-sexual-assault/>
- Unsilence the Violence StFX. Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and partners at St. Francis Xavier University.
<http://unsilencetheviolencestfx.wordpress.com/about-the-project/170-2/>
- FORCE: Upsetting Rape Culture
<http://upsettingrapeculture.com/>

Selection of prevention campaigns

- Bringing in the Bystander™
<http://cola.unh.edu/prevention-innovations/bringing-bystander%C2%AE>
- [Draw-the-line.ca](http://draw-the-line.ca/) / tracons-les-limites.ca
- "Green Dot Etcetera." <https://www.livethegreendot.com/>
- "No Means No." Canadian Federation of Students.
<http://cfs-ns.ca/no-means-no/>
- "Start the Conversation." Carleton University.
<http://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault/sexual-assault-psas/>

Selection of guides or references on addressing sexual violence on campus

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"Making the Grade? Findings from the Campus Accountability Project on Sexual Assault Policies."

SAFER: Students Active for Ending Rape. October 2013.

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Appendix A

*METRAC has identified five factors that improve safety for students on campus:*¹⁵

1. Space layouts, building features and security provisions that increase monitoring and reduce isolation and barriers to access/movement
2. Robust policies and practices that address dating abuse, sexual assault and other gender-based violence with an understanding that violence most often happens between people who know each other
3. Training for staff, faculty, first responders and students on violence and how to sensitively deal with survivors/victims
4. A holistic spectrum of programs and services that integrate prevention, intervention, risk assessment and crisis response
5. Regular “temperature checks” that measure attitudes on violence, evaluate interventions and monitor unreported incidents

15 <http://www.macleans.ca/education/unirankings/why-dont-canadian-universities-want-to-talk-about-sexual-assault/>