



*Responding to and
Preventing Sexual Violence
in Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation*

Summary Evaluation Report

A collaborative journey of sharing, open dialogue and learning

Responding to and Preventing Sexual Violence in Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation was a two-year collaborative project between the Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation Health Centre and the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association (AWRCSASA). The project was funded through Status of Women Canada from April 2014 to March 31, 2016.

The evaluation report is intended to recount or *tell a story* about what happened over the two years, and connect what happened with how well the project activities achieved results and met the overall goals. Project goals include:

1. Establish collaborative relationships with Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation community leaders, Band staff, Health Centre staff, First Nations partners, and local community organizations working in the field of violence against women and girls.
2. Engage the community and partners in planning and assessing community needs;
3. Engage the community in violence prevention and response strategies;
4. Share project results and lessons learned with the network of partners and First Nation communities.

Project Activities & Participation

An Advisory Committee was formed to provide overall direction and support to the project. The committee consisted of a diverse membership that included a balance of community and external partners. About one-half of the members represented Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation and about one-half represented AWRCSASA, Mi'kmaq organizations and communities, Antigonish RCMP, and StFX University. The Committee participated in planning a culturally relevant needs assessment process, designed to engage community members. They also identified values to guide project activities. One of these, nurturing, was considered a community strength, where community members go above and beyond to provide care and nurturing.

Values to guide the needs assessment & the project

- *Nurturing*
- *Culture*
- *Sharing*
- *Inclusivity*
- *Holism*
- *Strength*
- *Honouring*
- *Safety*
- *Capacity*
- *Transparency*
- *Pro-activeness*

One hundred and thirty-seven (137) community members participated in the needs assessment, 99 females and 38 males. Activities included two community forums, twelve focus groups, a community safety audit, and an open house and survey for external service providers. Focus groups were held for residential school survivors, men’s wellness, young women, young men, Chief and Council, band staff, health centre staff, directors, and open sessions. Care was taken to provide support by having an Elder and/or a counsellor available.

The following key themes and recommendations emerged from the needs assessment. Paqtnkek is a nurturing community. There are networks of informal supporters who are trusted in the community. Community members came with varying definitions of violence/sexual violence, healthy relationships and consent. There are various challenges with disclosing and reporting sexual violence. Residential school trauma, intergenerational trauma, and the cycle of violence are widely experienced. Racism and colonialism are broader forms of oppression that contextualize violence in the community. Culture is significant in addressing violence and sexual violence through healing and forgiveness. One general recommendation was that the project must be inclusive, collaborative, community-led, and community-wide. Other recommendations were that it must break the cycle of violence, promote safety, and build community capacity to continue and sustain the work. There were specific recommendations for response to and prevention of sexual violence.

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Needs Assessment Findings

The findings were presented at a community forum where community members identified priorities for action. *Response strategies* included: Healing & Ceremony; Support for Supporters; Policies & Procedures; and Tools & Resources. *Prevention strategies* included: Education and Awareness, Online Safety and Social Media and Healthy Relationships. The priorities were incorporated into an action plan that focused on building on community assets to strengthen capacity to respond to and prevent sexual violence.

Activities offered through the action plan included: Community Healing Circles; *Healing Through Workshops*; Supporters Team sessions; Policies and Procedures Task Group; External Service Provider education; Educator Team training; Education sessions for youth and parents; and a final community forum. Participation in these activities was 292, 219 females and 73 males. Awareness events, videos, a “Think Respect” campaign, and distribution of fridge magnets involved 666 participants.

Project results and lessons learned were shared formally, through presentations and workshops, and informally, through meetings and networks. Six formal presentations and a *Lessons Learned* workshop involved 112 participants, 99 women and 13 men.

Outcomes: Project Partnerships & Collaboration

One project strength was that, through the Advisory Committee, partners developed a shared understanding of what each would contribute, and then worked collaboratively to plan and support the project. This resulted in an appreciation for the diverse knowledge, experience, and perspectives of the partners which, in turn, strengthened the project. All understood that the project would be community-based and community-led and were aware of the need to be respectful of Mi'kmaq values and traditions. Community partners knew best how to engage the community, knew what works best for their community, and could advise and support cultural relevancy. External partners were able to provide other kinds of expertise and access to resources and networks.

There was an attempt to balance non-Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and I think there was real learning

Advisory Committee Member

Collaboration between the community and external partners strengthened relationships. Ultimately, this has resulted in a level of comfort and trust with each other, in it being less intimidating to reach out, and in services being more accessible to community members. Advisory Committee members were actively engaged and felt informed about project activities and findings. Overall, members were satisfied with their involvement including feeling that their ideas were supported and their contribution was valued.

Outcomes: Community Engagement & Open Dialogue on Sexual Violence

Community members started to become engaged in the project during the needs assessment phase and continued to be engaged up to the final closing meeting. The overall approach of a community-led, community-based project that was culturally respectful supported community members to be engaged. Also, participation was open, inclusive, and care was taken to provide safe spaces and support for them to be involved.

If you have people sharing and it is comfortable sharing in a setting where they are able to talk about what they have seen in the community, it was quite amazing to be honest to be part of that.

Focus Group Facilitator

The support and participation by Chief and Council, Band staff and Health Centre staff sent a signal that this effort was being taken seriously. The participatory methodology and implementing what community members said was needed meant that their contribution mattered. Multiple strategies engaged community members at different times over the two years according to their comfort level and needs. Having a Community Facilitator who knew the community, as well as knowledgeable, trusted and experienced facilitators for all sessions supported participation. Grounding activities in culture and ceremony was important to meaningful participation.

Perhaps the most important project outcome was that the community engagement process opened up a dialogue about sexual violence, an issue that had not previously been openly talked about. The process also enabled community members to support one another within that dialogue and to have support from a counsellor if needed. When asked what was most helpful about the focus groups, participants said the the interaction, sharing, open dialogue, courage to speak out, learning, support, people’s input and ideas, information, and facilitation. They also talked about hope for change and a promising future.

The biggest thing is bringing the community together to first begin talking about the issue within the community, and to have support from one another within that discussion.

Community Member

Opening up dialogue around such a sensitive and complex issue and providing opportunities to learn more about sexual violence was not without challenges. Feedback from the facilitators and participants indicated that both adults and youth had varying definitions and understanding of sexual violence and consent. This was largely because sexual violence had become normalized in the community. This raised another challenge of how to address this normalization with adults and with youth. Two other significant challenges that emerged were realizing the impact of intergenerational trauma and how to work with and support perpetrators who may also be survivors. While these were openly acknowledged, they are not easily addressed. Throughout the project, Advisory Committee members and community members explored ways to best approach these challenges over the long term.

Outcomes: Response & Prevention Strategies

The Community Healing Circles created culturally safe spaces for community members to talk about, share their experiences, and start to heal. Confidentiality agreements, a support team, and trusted Mi’kmaw facilitators, who don’t reside in the community, enabled community members to trust the process and feel safe enough to share their stories. This also gave all community members the option to participate.

This is your story and this is your time to heal. Once you leave here, you can live your life. Releasing these type of stories really helped.

Community Member

Supporters, who were viewed by others in the community as trusted people to talk to, formed a “Supporters Team” as part of the response strategy. Through skill-building sessions, they learned more about different forms of violence and trauma, laws, healthy coping skills, and practicing self care. This gave them insights into how they could be more supportive and compassionate in their role, hence increasing community capacity to provide support and information to community members. Opportunities to share and debrief with a counsellor and to support each other were very important. They identified benefits of having men in the group and of involving men and boys in this issue. They suggested ways this work could continue and be strengthened.

In their workshops, external service providers learned more about the impact of residential schools, colonialism and intergenerational trauma; as well as trauma-informed, culturally safe, and holistic practice. They identified actions they intended to take in their workplace to strengthen awareness, service provision and organizational practice. This has the potential to increase access for community members to culturally safe and trauma-informed services.

The motivation and the need to weave trauma-informed practice and culturally safe services into my work and the organization as a whole

External Service Provider
Education Session

A Policies and Procedures Resource was developed with input from other Mi'kmaq communities. This has built community capacity to develop policies and procedures for a harassment-free and violence-free workplace. There is a community plan to move this forward.

I liked the Mi'kmaq discussion and I learned about consent

Youth Participant
Education Session

Education workshops for youth and parents increased understanding about healthy and unhealthy relationships, consent, sexual violence, and online safety for a good portion of youth and parents who participated. The Seven Sacred Teachings was a valuable cultural inclusion. The plan to have a community Educators Team did not come to fruition; however, training three community members to lead educational sessions started the process of building capacity for ongoing education. Various

awareness events, the "Think Respect campaign, videos, and fridge magnets in every household raised broader awareness about sexual violence, respect in relationships, and resources available.

One project challenge was to effectively engage youth in Grades 9-12. In thinking about future engagement of this age group, community members suggested it is important to ensure that youth have a fuller understanding of healthy relationships, sexual violence and consent in order to support healthy interactions and prevent sexual violence. They also pointed out that, while it is important for young people to recognize sexual violence is a problem in the community to address the normalization of violence, it is important to build resilience and supports for youth, particularly for those who may have experienced and/or witnessed sexual violence and experienced trauma.

It is important to help young people recognize sexual violence is a problem in the community to address the normalization of violence. it is also important to build resilience so they will be able to handle the trauma that they may be experiencing.

Supporters Team Reflection
on Supporting Young People

Outcomes Sharing Knowledge & Lessons Learned

The formal “Lessons Learned” workshop held after completion of the needs assessment was successful in sharing knowledge about the project, as well as successes and challenges. Participants were very positive about what they had learned, identified various ways the session had been helpful for them, and identified actions they planned to take back to their community as a result of the workshop.

Storytelling about one community’s efforts to address a difficult issue; affirms storytelling as central to Indigenous ways of learning and knowing.

Participant
Lessons Learned Session

Conclusions & the Way Forward

Paqtnkek Mi’kmaw Nation has embarked on a collaborative journey of sharing, open dialogue and learning. By building on community strengths, the project has strengthened individual and community capacity in a number of areas, while starting to build capacity in others. Overall, the project has achieved the four goals. Through the evaluation, community members and partners expressed a very strong commitment to continue the work begun through this project. Their suggestions for the way forward are summarized in the last section of the evaluation report.

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