

**Needs Assessment for *Responding to and Preventing Sexual Violence***  
**Information for Participants – Invitation Letter, Consent to Participate, and Group Agreement**

**What is the project about?**

*Responding to and Preventing Sexual Violence* is a collaborative project between Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation, the Paqtnkek Health Centre, the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre & Sexual Assault Services Association, and other key partners.

The project addresses both the response to sexual violence and the prevention of it, based in a culturally relevant, revitalizing, and safe approach.

While our focus is in Paqtnkek, we are connecting with other Mi'kmaq communities in Nova Scotia to share our knowledges and to build our local capacities.

The project ends on March 30, 2016 and is funded by Status of Women Canada.

**What is the study about?**

To strengthen how we address sexual violence against Mi'kmaq women, we invite community members and stakeholders to participate in focus groups. The intention of these focus groups is to provide us with recommendations from the community on how to better respond to and prevent sexual violence, centered on the community value of nurturing.

Examples of questions that may be asked in the focus groups include: What is violence? What does the community do and others do to respond and prevent? What works? What are the barriers or gaps? What could be strengthened?

Ultimately, the goal is to come to a common place of understanding sexual violence where everyone's voice is heard in strengthening our response and prevention efforts. In a follow-up community meeting at the end of the study (the study will run from January 2015 to March 2015), the findings from the focus groups will be presented and the recommendations will be prioritized into an action plan for the second year of the project (March 2015 to 2016).

**Who are we looking for to participate?**

We are looking to hear from all Paqtnkek community members who are *16 years of age and older* – women, men, elders, youth, parents, and so on. We will be holding a series of focus groups from January 2015 to March 2015 for specific groups of people. A schedule of the focus groups will be distributed.

The more focus groups that a participant attends (dependent on the specific groups themselves), the more chances she/he will have in a draw for 1 of 2 mini iPads; these prizes will be drawn at the follow-up community meeting in March 2015 mentioned above. Details to be determined.

**What will I be expected to do?**

We emphasize that participants practice self-awareness and self-care in identifying for themselves if they are able to speak about these issues. We ask that participants say only what they are comfortable saying and participate as much or as little as they feel comfortable.

We ask that participants read this *Invitation Letter*, sign the *Consent to Participate*, and comply with the *Group Agreement* to prepare for the focus groups, as well as, if possible, arrive 10 minutes ahead of time.

While we will not ask for people to register, we will try to limit the numbers for each focus group to 15.

All participants will be given the opportunity to share their thoughts in confidence with the Project Coordinator and/or the Community Facilitator, if they should need or if they feel comfortable after the focus groups.

A digital voice recorder will be used to record the conversations for transcription. Notes will be taken as well.

### **How much time will it take?**

The focus groups will run no longer than 2 hours with breaks and nutrition provided.

### **Will anyone know what I said?**

Confidential and non-judgmental support will be available for all focus groups and resources will be provided. Confidentiality will be respected as much as possible. All participants will be asked to comply with the *Group Agreement*. Anonymity will be maintained. The use of gendered pronouns (i.e. she/he), if suitable, will be encouraged; however, other unique identifiers (i.e. names) will not be encouraged or even more published in the focus groups. The findings will be kept in a locked cabinet in the Paqtnekek Health Centre and the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre for 7 years then destroyed. The results will be kept on the hard drive of the Project Coordinator's and Community Facilitator's computers for 7 years then deleted.

### **What happens if I change my mind and wish to withdraw?**

Participation is entirely voluntary. All participants will sign the *Consent to Participate* below. At any given time, participants have the option to withdraw from the study, even after having given informed consent. Upon choosing to withdraw from the study, a participant may leave at any time. Breaks will be included in the focus groups. In the case of withdrawal from the study, we will not use the uncompleted data. During the focus groups, all participants have the option to opt in and out of the conversations, as they see fit or as they would like, if they do not wish to withdraw completely from the study.

### **What are the potential benefits and harms associated with participation in the study?**

A possible benefit associated with participation in this study is that participants may get an understanding of the issues of sexual violence and the ways to strengthen response and prevention. Because these are triggering issues, we will provide a support team (made up of formal and informal or community supporters) and service resources. We also ask participants to read this *Invitation Letter*, sign the *Consent to Participate*, and comply with the *Group Agreement* to mitigate the risks of talking about these issues. Upon consultation with a Sexual Violence Consultant, an External Evaluator, and a diverse Advisory Committee, questions have been adapted to reflect a culturally relevant, revitalizing, and safe approach to the issues of violence in general and sexual violence in particular to Paqtnekek.

### **Where do I get questions answered?**

*Molly Peters* / Project Staff – Community Facilitator / [molly@awrcsasa.ca](mailto:molly@awrcsasa.ca) / 902-386-2048  
*Annie Chau* / Project Staff – Project Coordinator / [annie@awrcsasa.ca](mailto:annie@awrcsasa.ca) / 902-318-3300

**The *Consent to Participate* and the *Group Agreement* documents are attached.**

**By reading the *Invitation Letter*, signing this *Consent to Participate*, and complying with the *Group Agreement*, you agree with the following statement:**

**“I have had an opportunity to read the information provided or it has been explained to me, and any questions that I may have had have been answered. I consent to participate in this study, understanding that I am doing so voluntarily, that confidentiality will be encouraged and anonymity will be maintained, and that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any point using the means outlined in the above materials.”**

**Name:**

**Phone Number:**

**Email:**

**Signature:**

**Date:**

## Group Agreement

These standards were created by the project staff (Project Coordinator and Community Facilitator), as guided by the Advisory Committee, the Facilitation Team, and the Support Team for the project. They were created to foster a safer space for the focus group conversations.

Agreeing to participate in the focus groups, participants promise to:

- Maintain confidentiality and anonymity\*.
- Attain consent\*.
- Establish a safe and open space. A space that is:
  - Free from drugs and alcohol. (Prescription medication is permitted.)
  - Free from verbal and physical violence, abuse, harassment, or bullying of any kind (emotional, psychological, physical, and sexual).
- Take responsibility to create a positive sharing and learning environment for all.
- Show care and concern for all.
- Respect the personal space and privacy of all.
- Share what we know. Acknowledge the different kinds of knowledge and experiences we all have that are valid, but not universal. Further, respect our own expertise about our own lives.
- Share the air.
- Use language appropriately to explain, but not to demean or “shut down”.
- Listen to each person and respond appropriately.
- Participate when and where we feel comfortable.
- Take care of our own needs.
- Keep phones on silent or vibrate.
- Apply what we have learned about the issue in strengthening response and prevention after.
- Know that we can participate in aspects we feel comfortable to and can opt out of others – that that’s ok!
  - Note on confidentiality and anonymity\*
    - Some demographic data (i.e. gender and age) will be collected to better understand the dimensions of violence and will help us advocate for change, based on the intersecting factors of violence.
    - In making the comments and recommendations public, no identifiers will be attached to specific comments, recommendations, or people.
    - When sharing stories, participants will be asked to maintain anonymity and use pronouns or fake names.
    - The use of gendered pronouns (i.e. she/he), if suitable, will be encouraged; however, other unique identifiers (i.e. names) will not be encouraged or even more published.
    - The findings will be kept in a locked cabinet in the Paqtnkek Health Centre and the Antigonish Women’s Resource Centre for 7 years then destroyed. The results will be kept on the hard drive of the Project Coordinator’s and Community Facilitator’s computers for 7 years then deleted.
    - A digital voice recorder will be used to record the conversations for transcription. Notes will be taken as well.
    - **Confidentiality will be breached and there is a duty to report if there are “reasonable grounds to suspect” that a child may be in need of protection; this includes harm or risk of harm from physical, sexual or emotional abuse, or neglect.**
- If any of these standards are broken, the infraction will be dealt with by the focus group facilitators and may result in one warning and/or in the participant being asked to leave the focus group.