



Lessons Learned from the Needs Assessment

Responding to and Preventing Sexual Violence in Paqtnekek Mi'kmaw Nation

April 2015

Prepared by Peggy Mahon, External Evaluator, based on discussion and reflection by the Advisory Committee in April 2015.

- 1. Advisory Committee Needs to Reflect the Community.** It is important to have an engaged Advisory Committee that is reflective of the community. Community members know best how to engage the community, know what works and what doesn't work, and can advise and support cultural relevancy. Also, they want to see change; therefore, they are committed to seeing the project move forward.
- 2. Identify Assets Early On.** Identifying community and external assets first as part of the needs assessment planning day was very useful. This helped to know what strengths to draw on to support community engagement.
- 3. Network of Informal Supporters.** The network of informal supporters is very important. It is important to understand how this works – who supports whom with respect to who will be able to speak out.
- 4. Helpful Processes and Tools for Focus Groups and Community Engagement.** The following worked well during the focus groups:
 - a) General information available at the focus groups was very important. Definitions of violence and consent were helpful for participants and for supporters. In the evaluation, one topic that appeared to be challenging for both adults and youth was the extent to which the session helped to identify “what violence looks like in the community.” It was thought that this may be due to the fact that participants came with varying definitions of violence as observed by the facilitators; therefore, thinking about a different definition or a different way of understanding violence was part of the learning process for many participants and some were still digesting this information at the end of the session. This reinforced the importance of having definitions available.
 - b) The boundaries discussion was helpful for some participants.
 - c) Engaging the community leadership and staff, as well as the informal support network, helped to engage others. We started with Chief and Council, Band staff, and Advisory Committee connections and word got out into the community.
 - d) Having a “support team” with a balance of formal and informal supporters worked well. Also, having both community members and “external or outside supporters” worked well. This offered participants a choice if they needed support and wanted to talk to someone.
 - e) The tips and advice notes prepared by the counsellors for the facilitators were very helpful.

- f) Offering incentives (mini-ipad) and food was important for engaging community members. We were asking for the community to participate and contribute their thoughts and ideas, so we offered them something in return.
- g) Having strong experienced facilitators worked well. It was helpful to have one community member and one not directly connected to the community. This enabled them to share facilitation and to spell each other off/step in for each other when needed.
- h) It is important to provide debriefing opportunities for the facilitators.
- i) Having a range of processes is helpful to engaging different people at different stages of the process. Some only attended focus groups and some only attended the community meetings. One suggestion for why this occurred was that perhaps a “community meeting” would be seen differently than the focus group related to expectations around participation. Also, the community meeting enabled different families within the community to attend, as well as several members within families to attend together.
- j) The community meetings were important to hold. The first, held at the beginning of the needs assessment process, was an opportunity to introduce the project and invite the community to participate. The second, held after the focus groups, let the community know what came out of the needs assessment and was an opportunity for the community as a whole to provide feedback and to confirm if the project was on the right track.
- k) It is important to use terms for the needs assessment that people are comfortable with (e.g. focus group may not necessarily be the right term to use).
- l) There was a large turnout for the second community meeting where the information from the needs assessment was shared and the community had an opportunity to provide feedback. We let people know that this community meeting was the last opportunity for input into the needs assessment.
- m) The facilitators made several observations about the focus groups as follows:
 - We do have a nurturing community;
 - The community engagement was more about process than the end result;
 - Humour is both a strength/factor of resilience, but can also be an obstacle to talking seriously about violence;
 - Support was modelled in the group;
 - People said they weren’t ready to talk about it but they came and talked about it;
 - People were hesitant to take part, but in the end were wanting to start working on strategies;
 - The men’s group was pretty powerful for the men involved.

5. Preparation Stage is Critical. Building on what worked well related to processes and tools for community engagement (above), the preparation stage for the needs assessment was seen as critical.

- a) It is important to have “start-up” time to ensure good planning and community engagement;
- b) Take time to get the right questions and specific questions for particular groups (for example, youth and residential school survivors);

- c) Take sufficient time to develop a support team of informal and formal supporters to support participants who might be triggered by the discussion. It would have been good for the informal supporters to have had the definitions of consent and violence ahead of time as this was a gap in their information.
- d) There were challenges with turnaround time (had to completed the needs assessment by deadline for funding). We could have taken more time to engage the informal supporters and, therefore, involve different groups.
- e) It would have been good to consider the various “groups” within the community and then have the time to talk to people within those groups who could engage others.
- f) The schedule could have been more spread out. This project completed all focus groups and the safety audit in one month, which was a very tight schedule for facilitators and for planning.
- g) The timing of some focus groups could have been different. Some evening/dinner-hour sessions when people were off work would be helpful.

6. Youth Engagement. The following were insights related to youth engagement:

- a) Take time and consider innovative ways to engage youth. For example, one idea was to use sports, such as a basketball camp. Unfortunately, the short timeframe didn’t allow enough time to plan and carry out some of these innovative ideas.
- b) Consider engaging a youth leader who has relationships with the youth and can involve them.
- c) Some sessions for youth after school worked well, while others did not. Perhaps a mix of strategies may have worked better, including working with the school to hold a focus group there.
- d) The age limitation (16+) was a challenge with engaging youth in Paqtnkek. This limitation for the focus groups meant there were only a few young men who could potentially be involved. Some youth suggested that the strategy phase consider strategies for younger age groups.
- e) We need to work to make things culturally appropriate for our population. It would have been good to find out more things suited to our community in engaging youth. Young people are more aware and are experiencing things earlier than the average population.

7. Advisory Committee as a Support and Resource. The following were insights related to the Advisory Committee. Having both a balance of community members and “outside resources” was very helpful. It enabled the following:

- The ability to include those with expertise and experience in addressing sexual violence (for example, the Waycobah Family Healing Centre and the women’s centre’s services and Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) program);
- Opportunities to share different ideas and perspectives which added to the richness of discussion;
- The ability to articulate how the needs assessment should move forward;
- Diversity of access to networks and resources;
- To be a “sounding board” and support for the Project Coordinator and Community Facilitator;

- Ongoing learning from each other. Everyone learned a lot!

8. *Build on Work Already Done.* The previous community conversations around domestic violence helped to move this forward.

9. *Identifying Solutions.* The project staff observed that suggested solutions across the groups were similar; and the “community is on the same page.” This was further confirmed by holding the second community meeting to get feedback on potential solutions.

10. *Need for Support for Supporters.* The needs assessment finding related to “support for supporters.” These are people who know what is happening in the community, but don’t necessarily know how they can help. This is a significant gap.

11. *Prevention and Response Strategies need to be rolled out carefully and be very strong.* It will be important to take advantage of opportunities for in-depth training for staff and for informal supporters to ensure right kinds of support and information are given to victims/survivors and in community education sessions.