## The "Organic" Process of Preventing Sexual Violence

*Kristi VanAudenhove*, Co-Director
Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance

A few years back I decided to try my hand at organic gardening. First I read everything that I could get my hands on. Then I talked to some folks who had years of experience gardening organically. I spent hours and hours over the winter planning my vegetable garden, thinking about companion plants to keep the bugs down, successive crops that would take different nutrients from the soil and leave different ones behind, and varying needs for water, sunlight and compost. I learned some new skills - how to "double dig" a bed for example, and how to identify bad bugs and good bugs. I had to change a few attitudes - no more chemicals to kill bugs when I wasn't looking. Instead, I learned to live in harmony with lots of bugs, released a few thousand praying mantises into the garden where they would have a constant supply of food eating bugs that were trying to eat my vegetables, and even learned to squish a few particularly noxious things like tomato hornworms, barehanded.

Throughout the summer I watched to see what was doing well, and what not so well. I constantly adjusted watering and composting and mulching to try to help things along. There were a few disasters (ask me about the blow torch some time!), a few near misses (like the 4-inch ears of corn) and some prolific successes (thanks for the pickle recipe Ann!). Eating organic vegetables straight from the backyard was wonderful - they tasted good and I knew that they were good for me, for my family, and for the earth. As the growing season slowed down I started to consider what I might do different the next spring.

I might never be able to prove that one organic garden on the Northern Neck of Virginia made a significant impact on the environment, or that eating organic fruits and vegetables really did make my children healthier for life…at least not yet. But there is enough scientific evidence that organic gardening benefits the environment for me to feel good that I have introduced it into my environment, and now that I'm sold on it, I routinely try to convince other gardeners that it is worth the switch. And I am much more likely to pay more for organic produce at the store. So are the kids.

Preventing sexual violence is a bit more complicated than learning healthy gardening methods, but there are a few parallels worth noting:

- The building blocks are not new or untried - they have been around for thousands of years. And using them is somewhat intuitive - just as there is an easy to understand logic in healthy dirt being a critical part of healthy gardening, so to it is easy to understand how respecting limits and boundaries is a part of healthy sexual interactions.

- Evaluation is an integral part of the process of both successful prevention and successful gardening. It starts with planning that is based on scientific evidence, includes thoughtful and intentional implementation of the plan and a constant process of assessing - is this plan getting us the results we wanted?  Any time the answer is no, an adjustment can be made.

Enjoy this issue of Moving Upstream. Embrace evaluation as part of the organic process of preventing sexual violence, and enjoy the fruits of your labor!

## Empowerment Evaluation, Getting To Outcomes, and Primary Sexual Violence Prevention Programs

*Beth Leftwich, MPA*, Empowerment Evaluation Coordinator
Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance

While traditional evaluation models intend to assess program effectiveness in terms of success or failure, empowerment evaluation places a stronger emphasis on program improvement. This model asserts that evaluation be a part of a program from its inception and focus on the continual improvement of a program. Empowerment evaluation aims to improve program implementation by providing tools for planning, implementation, and self-evaluation. Evaluation becomes an everyday part of program management.

Empowerment evaluation is guided by ten principles:  improvement, community ownership, inclusion, democratic participation, social justice, evidence-based practice, community knowledge, capacity building, organizational learning, and accountability. These principles are the backbone of empowerment evaluation. They are used to design the evaluation and describe the dynamics of the empowerment evaluation model with regard to relationships, roles, power distribution, ownership, and social justice.

## <u>Funder's Forum</u>: Men of Strength Training!
*Robert Franklin, MS*, Male Outreach Coordinator
Center for Injury & Violence Prevention, Virginia Department of Health

**Men of Strength:** Understanding the role men and boys can play in preventing men's violence against women.

A one day training focusing on Men Can Stop Rape's "Men of Strength" curriculum. This training involves engaging discussions, exercises, and activities designed to build skills to engage men in efforts to prevent violence against women..

Training Objectives:
1. Examine the connections between traditional masculinity and men's violence against women.
2. Learn what men can do as allies with women to create a rape-free world.
3. Explore the challenges of engaging men in anti-rape efforts and learn effective ways to overcome these barriers.
4. Learn skills for speaking with men and boys about the primary prevention of rape.

Dates and Locations: **September 20th in Richmond** and **September 22nd in Roanoke**

Registration information available 8/01/2006 at: http://www.vahealth.org/civp/sexualviolence/index.asp

## *"How did this program prevent you from committing sexual assault?"* Challenges in evaluating primary SV prevention program outcomes.

*Brad Perry, MA*, Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator
Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance

*Editor's Note: In this article there are frequent references to primary sexual violence prevention programs in the discussion of how traditional outcome evaluation approaches have been applied to sexual violence work. It should be acknowledged that these traditional outcome evaluation approaches have also been applied to sexual violence awareness and education initiatives of all types – not just those that are consistent with a primary prevention approach. Also, to truly create sustainable change, primary sexual violence prevention initiatives should engage multiple levels of the social ecology, thus involving more than singularly educational programming which typically functions on the individual level. However, since sexual violence prevention outcome evaluation has been historically applied almost entirely to programming, and since programming is still likely to be a vital piece of any primary sexual violence prevention initiative, this article will maintain its focus there.*

The word "evaluation" evokes anxiety in many of us, perhaps because it is often synonymous with "judgment". While it is true that traditional evaluation approaches sometimes seem to be detached accountings of where something falls on a strict "success/failure" dichotomy, evaluation can also be viewed as a broader and far less rigid concept. In some sense, we all conduct constant evaluation over the options that confront us every day. We continuously weigh the pros and cons of countless factors, determining which choices hold the most value to us, eventually committing to a particular path only to then ask ourselves again if we made the best decision. Of course, evaluations of our programs are much more formalized, focused, and objective than these everyday appraisals, but it is important to recognize that evaluation – as a general concept – is more a part of us than we might initially think.

Those of us who do primary sexual violence prevention work are perhaps most familiar with process evaluation and outcome evaluation. The latter is what most people think of when they hear the term "program evaluation". The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define outcome evaluation as: "a systematic collection of information to assess the impact of a program, present conclusions about the merit or worth of a program, and make recommendations about future program direction or improvement" (Source: www.cdc.gov). Outcome evaluation is, by nature, oriented toward the "bottom-line" of whether or not a program is successful in accomplishing what it set out to do. Thus, it is not surprising that a person implementing a program aimed at impacting something as insurmountable as sexual violence would become anxious when asked to conduct an outcome evaluation.

The challenge of evaluating the impact of primary sexual violence prevention programs (PSVPPs) has been addressed by breaking the issue down into more manageable "chunks". Experts have determined that sexual violence is able to exist because of certain contributing factors such as: rigid gender roles; attitudes/norms that deny, minimize, or justify sexual violence; and attitudes/norms that cast coercion and violence as acceptable means to an end, etc.. The psychometric instruments that measure the extent to which these factors are present in a given individual (e.g., the various "rape myth acceptance" scales) have become important tools for evaluating the outcomes of PSVPPs.

**A Brief History of PSVPP Outcome Evaluation in Virginia**
In Virginia, the method for evaluating the outcomes of various sexual violence education efforts, including PSVPPs, has followed a fairly

# Promising Practices:
## Integrating pre-test/post-test evaluations into sexual violence prevention education sessions: Virginia's "Ben & Shawna" evaluation tool.

**Jennifer Hatfield**, Sexual Assault Prevention Coordinator
The Shelter For Abused Women in Winchester, VA

> *"With each additional question, the conversation has potential to become deeper by drawing the class into the discussion and adding the peer-to-peer dialog that creates the optimal presentation environment."*

*Editor's Note: While the traditional pre/post test evaluation design is not always a useful method to conduct assessments of primary sexual violence prevention educational session outcomes (see other articles in this issue for more on that topic), it can be adapted to better fit "real world" settings. Due to student feedback that previous pre/post measures were overly abstract and often disconnected from what was covered by the program, Virginia's "Ben & Shawna" evaluation tool was developed to assess comprehension of key concepts common to almost any sexual violence prevention program, and provide a brief, concrete scenario to which students could apply these concepts. Local programs were also encouraged to incorporate deeper discussion of "Ben & Shawna" into their educational sessions. One could argue that doing so corrupts any useable data (a sort of "teaching the test" effect), and that the concepts addressed by "Ben & Shawna" are too simplistic and overly specific to the dynamics of sexually violence (e.g., rather than focusing on bigger picture issues that might be more relevant to a primary prevention initiative). "Ben & Shawna" does have shortcomings and is not a model primary sexual violence prevention educational session outcome tool, but the fact that it can easily mesh with program content is useful to program providers who want to be able to gauge in real-time the extent to which students have grasped several important concepts. Doing so allows for on-the-spot modifications in program content and approach, and can inform future programs.*

As the Sexual Assault Prevention Coordinator with The Shelter for Abused Women, I have the unique opportunity to speak with hundreds of students in the Winchester, Frederick, and Clarke county areas regarding the issue of sexual violence. I am able to do these presentations through a prevention grant from the Virginia Department of Health.

In order to determine the effectiveness of the presentations, I frequently use pre and post tests to measure student "increase of knowledge" regarding sexual violence myths and facts. However, I observed several drawbacks when using this type of evaluation method within the classroom presentation format. Primarily, the pre and post tests seemed disconnected from the content of the presentations and time-consuming to distribute, and thus subtracted from the material presented rather than enhancing it. While a typical classroom presentation can last anywhere from fifty to ninety minutes, that time is constantly being encroached upon by various "stuff" of scholastic routine. For example, students have to get settled, the teacher takes roll and occasionally announcements come over the loudspeaker, etc. With the pre and post tests I was literally losing precious presentation time in order to pass out and collect the pre and post tests. The process created hurdles in terms of interrupted time and student engagement.
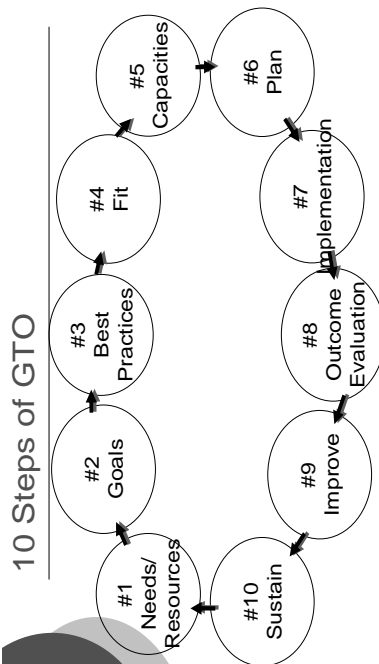
The process changed this year when the Virginia Department of Health and the Center for Injury and Violence Prevention gave RPE providers a new evaluation scenario that is to be used during presentations. I informally call the new evaluation the "Ben and Shawna" scenario. In the example, a story of power and control plays out through two fictional high school students, Ben and Shawna, as they interact at a party. The story introduces the two students and walks the reader through a realistic scenario that results in sexual assault. The reader is then prompted to answer fifteen questions pertaining to the scenario and how the students interact with each other. The questions revolve around the relative issues of coercion, boundaries, power and control, and consent. All students are asked to complete the test and openly discuss their answers.

One of the best things about using the new scenario is that it is very easy to make it a seamless part of the presentation; thus, engaging the students in the discussion as active participants. In one class for example, a student said that it was Shawna's fault that she was sexually assaulted because she was drinking and went downstairs with Ben. Then another student spoke up and said "Well just because she was drinking and went downstairs with Ben didn't mean that she wanted anything to happen or that she deserved to be assaulted". With each additional question, the conversation has potential to become deeper by drawing the class into the discussion and adding the peer-to-peer dialog that creates the optimal presentation environment.

In another class, one student focused on how much control Ben had in the situation. For example, he was older (he is a senior in high school, Shawna is a freshman), he is popular, he suggests that she have an alcoholic drink, etc. The same student also noticed that in the scenario Shawna did not have any power. Then another student spoke up and said "Ben did a really good job of isolating Shawna in making sure that she was alone and her friend wasn't with her". The old evaluation process would never have allowed for this level of discussion and student engagement. By discussing the scenario, it gives the students a chance to take part in the presentation and to share their feelings and observations about the scenario with other students. The benefit of the new approach has been immediately apparent, as the presentation flows without interruption and the class time is now used to have a lively discussion of important sexual violence issues.

## Evaluation Challenges (Continued from Page 2)

> *"The central question always seems to be, "How do we ever measure the true construct?" That is, we cannot "get inside" a person's mind to see if they choose to refrain from committing an act of sexual violence. The social stigma against admitting such an internal dialogue - assuming such a choice was even conscious - would prevent most people from being honest on any self-report measure."*

**10 Steps of GTO**

- #5 Capacities
- #6 Plan
- #4 Fit
- #7 Implementation
- #3 Best Practices
- #8 Outcome Evaluation
- #2 Goals
- #9 Improve
- #1 Needs/ Resources
- #10 Sustain

traditional "pre-test/post-test" model. A group of individuals are given a questionnaire - often adapted from, or similar to, an established psychometric instrument - to assess their knowledge, attitudes, and/or behavioral intent on a factor relevant to sexual violence. The group is then exposed to the PSVPP, and assessed again using the same measure at the program's conclusion. Any change in the group's knowledge, attitudes, and/or behavioral intent on this factor is inferred to be attributable to the PSVPP. An impact in the desired direction is considered to be a successful step toward preventing sexual violence. [Note: This method of outcome evaluation typically focuses solely on individual factors, as opposed to assessing factors at all levels of the social ecology - see Moving Upstream Volume 1, Issue 1 for more about the levels of the social ecology].

Those PSVPPs in Virginia receiving Rape Prevention & Education (RPE) funding have recently begun using a standardized and more refined outcome evaluation instrument. While this change helps to address the inconsistencies between different PSVPPs' evaluation tools, it is not able to address the larger methodological challenges inherent in applying a traditional outcome evaluation approach to primary sexual violence prevention work.

**Challenges to Traditional Outcome Evaluation of PSVPPs**
The most fundamental difficulty in PSVPP outcome evaluation is linked to the aforementioned anxiety many of us experience when we think about trying to impact the seemingly insurmountable issue of sexual violence. The central question always seems to be, "How do we ever measure the true construct?" That is, we cannot "get inside" a person's mind to see if they choose to refrain from committing an act of sexual violence. The social stigma against admitting such an internal dialogue - assuming such a choice was even conscious - would prevent most people from being honest on any self-report measure. Moreover, how could we ever know if a person's choice to not perpetrate was the direct result of the PSVPP in which they participated? Since control groups – a comparable group given the same assessments in the same time frame but without any exposure to the PSVPP – are not usually a practical option, an evaluator would be hard-pressed to isolate the effects of a PSVPP from a person's numerous other life experi-

ences. These questions illustrate the limitations we face in establishing a direct connection between PSVPPs and the true outcome we want to be able to measure: the occurrence/non-occurrence of sexual violence.

It is because of this fundamental challenge that we are relegated to assessing a PSVPP's impact on factors thought to be strongly correlated with the perpetration of sexual violence. While this technique can be useful (and is certainly better than nothing), it also has limitations. These factors are defined and categorized differently by different researchers, often leading to inconsistent measurement tools. For example, see the 1999 article about "rape myth acceptance" by Diana Payne and her colleagues in the Journal of Research in Personality for a detailed description of the erratic evolution of this well-known factor associated with the perpetration of sexual violence.

Another challenge to measuring factors correlated with sexual violence relates to the academic setting in which these instruments are usually developed. The goal of any given researcher in this context is to measure a given construct/factor as precisely as possible, so the psychometric instruments they develop tend to be lengthy and at an advanced reading level. However, most people doing frontline primary sexual violence prevention work cannot practically administer a questionnaire that takes more than 5-10 minutes to complete and is higher than a $6^{th}$ grade reading level. PSVPPs often take place in time-constrained environments and include persons of various academic abilities, such as classrooms, youth groups, and after-school programs. Thus, the instrument has to be modified, which consequentially compromises its integrity. Modified psychometric measures of sexual violence factors can still be useful tools to determine whether or not a program made an impact, since the modified instrument probably still assesses some approximation of a given factor. However, there is no longer a valid link between the modified instrument and the empirical evidence (e.g., research studies) that shows it actually measures the factor it purports to measure.

A similar challenge that also involves the actual delivery of a program is a phenomenon called "The Hawthorne Effect." The Hawthorne Effect shows that participants in a program can determine how the leader wants

## Empowerment Evaluation & GTO (Cont. from Page 1)

While it is distinct in many ways, empowerment evaluation is not completely disconnected from traditional models of evaluation. Empowerment evaluation relies on the tools and techniques of traditional evaluation models; however, those tools and techniques are disseminated to the program's stakeholders. For example, while an external facilitator is useful in empowerment evaluation, an organization/community ultimately owns the evaluation and needs to determine for itself what combination of tools and techniques make the most sense. The stakeholders are responsible for determining the outcomes of interest and the best methods for assessing those outcomes. An external facilitator, or empowerment evaluator, acts as a critical friend for an organization by providing knowledge of these tools and suggestions for implementation.

**What is "Getting to Outcomes?"**
"Getting to Outcomes" (GTO) is the name of a ten-step framework for planning, implementation, and evaluation that is intended to increase success towards goals. It can be used as a tool or framework for empowerment evaluation; however, it is possible to do GTO and not do empowerment evaluation. Furthermore, GTO is not the only way to do empowerment evaluation.  The ten steps of GTO are:  1) needs and resources; 2) goals and desired outcomes; 3) evidence-based practice; 4) fit; 5) capacity; 6) plan; 7) process evaluation; 8) outcome evaluation; 9) continuous quality improvement; and 10) sustainability. The steps mirror the principles of empowerment evaluation in that they aim to strengthen a program from its inception and focus on continual improvement. This model follows a linear pattern, thus one step leads to the next. The evaluation process does not end at the tenth step, but instead cycles back to the first step. The implementation of a program will inevitably impact the community's needs and resources. The changes in the needs and resources must be reevaluated. For a program to remain successful, it may need to be periodically redirected to reflect the changing needs. The cyclical nature of GTO means that there is not a definite starting point and this framework can be successfully applied at any point of an existing program.

**How Empowerment Evaluation Will Benefit Domestic and Sexual Violence Programs**
Empowerment evaluation is beneficial for domestic and sexual violence programs because it provides an opportunity for all stakeholders to commit to understanding the impact of their work while also recognizing that each community is unique and has varying needs and resources. A distinguishing characteristic of empowerment evaluation from traditional models is its acknowledgment and respect for people's ability to create knowledge about, and solutions to, their own experiences.

Some criticism - or perhaps skepticism - surrounds empowerment evaluation. In contrast to traditional evaluation models that prefer an external evaluator to insure objectivity, empowerment evaluation values community involvement and the presence of an evaluator who is invested in the success of the program. Empowerment evaluation, however, is not exempt from objectivity. It is imperative that the community remain objective about their work in order to truly understand what is going on. This model gives sexual and intimate partner violence service providers the opportunity to do so in an unthreatening manner. The community is able to focus their evaluation on utility, relevance, and practicality and not merely the success or failure of their program. The findings are not used to determine if a program should continue, but instead how a program can be improved. Empowerment evaluation does not assume that success is implementing the perfect program and that the program will run itself perfectly. Empowerment evaluation allows the community to remain open to continuing feedback and the opportunity to adjust the program accordingly.

> *"[Through the use of GTO] the community is able to focus their evaluation on utility, relevance, and practicality and not merely the success or failure of their program. The findings are not used to determine if a program should continue, but instead how a program can be improved."*

> *"...perhaps our evaluation approach should more closely resemble the functional and continuous evaluation we all conduct in our everyday lives."*

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## Evaluation Challenges (Continued from Page 4)

them to react, and subsequently behave differently because of this knowledge. Any type of program that seeks to change the attitudes and behaviors of participants is going to exude "demand characteristics" – the cues that convey the program's intent. Examples of demand characteristics in PSVPPs might include a facilitator giving more attention to responses that espouse non-violence or gender-equity, the manner in which scenarios, fact sheets, and/or questionnaires are worded to elicit a certain kind of reaction, or even just the fact that the facilitator comes from a sexual assault crisis center. Determining the intent of the program to any degree can cause some participants to skew their answers on an outcome evaluation instrument either toward or away from that intent. Regardless of the direction of the skew, the responses are artificial and thus invalid.

### Conclusion and Promising Future Directions

All of the challenges to PSVPP outcome evaluation discussed so far can be traced back to traditional outcome evaluation's roots in experimental design. In scientific experiments, it is crucial that researchers devise methods to minimize or eliminate any "confounds" ("outside" factors, or factors other than those being manipulated by the researcher) that could create artificial results. This need to "control" for confounds is why scientific research is usually conducted in the highly constrained conditions of a laboratory rather than in the field. However, when we want to know whether or not a program is working *in the field*, we hit an impasse because the only methods purported to be objective enough to make such an assessment originate from this highly controlled realm of experimental design. The objectivity stressed in traditional outcome evaluation seems far more exacting than is necessary for the goal of ensuring that a program is as effective as it can be. PSVPPs would be well-served by an evaluation approach that stressed "functional objectivity" instead of "laboratory objectivity".

This concept of functional objectivity does not mean ignoring important issues like demand characteristics or assessment tool development/selection. It does mean asking the people directly involved in the development and implementation of a given program what they need to know in order to optimize the program's effectiveness, and weighing these responses in the larger balance of evaluation concerns. Incorporating the idea of functional objectivity into a program evaluation plan also means providing constant feedback rather than detached observation. For example, the traditional outcome evaluation approach for PSVPPs can be simplified into, 1) teasing out specific factors, 2) figuring out how to measure them in a reliable and valid manner, and 3) doing so to determine whether or not a program *had* any impact on these factors. But rather than waiting until the PSVPP is finished to determine whether or not it made an impact, perhaps our evaluation approach should more closely resemble the *functional* and continuous evaluation we all conduct in our everyday lives.

If we reframe our main goal for PSVPP evaluation as "ensuring the best possible program at all stages" rather than "determining whether or not the program 'worked' after the program concludes," then perhaps PSVPPs will be able to get a richer array of information to optimize their impact. The application of empowerment evaluation to PSVPPs offers some promise to this end. The accompanying article (on the front page of this issue) describes how a particular empowerment evaluation approach, called Getting To Outcomes, can benefit PSVPPs.

## Pre/post (From Page 3)

I have also found that students take this scenario seriously. I like to distribute the scenario to the students in the second half of the presentation, with enough time so that we can discuss the material they have just reviewed. The questions from the evaluations ask things such as "How does Ben get what he wants from Shawna", "Who has more power in the scenario-Ben or Shawna", and "Is this a case of sexual assault"? The questions and answers posed by the students in response to these prompts from the evaluation scenario indicate a level of interest and thoughtfulness that is far above what I had experienced in the past. A wonderful byproduct of the seriousness that the scenario brings is it ensures that every class presentation is unique. For example, one class may spend more time talking about consent whereas another class might spend more time talking about power and control. That uniqueness allows for the students to take a primary role in their own education.

As prevention and education professionals we are always looking for the tools and resources to reach out to the next generation of students. This new evaluation presents a clear scenario and gives the students an opportunity to discuss important issues regarding sexual violence, in addition to providing valuable feedback for our program. As a presenter, I find the evaluation scenario to be extremely helpful with facilitating student participation, while giving me the opportunity to expand on demonstrated topics of interest. In-depth discussion such as these would not have been possible under the former pre and post-test evaluation model. I look forward to continued innovations that allow us to further maximize our contact with students in this way.