

"From this day forward, I promise to be part of the solution in ending violence against women and all gender-based violence."



Massachusetts White Ribbon Day

A Men's Initiative Project of Jane Doe Inc.

MEET WHITE RIBBON DAY CAMPAIGN AFFILIATE:

The Center for Hope and Healing

Through years of prevention work, The Center for Hope and Healing has realized that the fight to end gender based violence is not a one issue problem. They believe in an intersectionality approach that considers how institutional racism, sexism, and class inequality all contribute to the pervasiveness of gender based violence. This type of thinking is progressive and actually tackling all these daunting issues at once is difficult. But The Center for Hope and Healing is up for the task.

Located in the City of Lowell, The Center for Hope and Healing (CHH) witnesses these intersections every day. Lowell is home to a diverse community that continues to become more and more diverse; from 1990 to 2010, the proportion of ethnic minorities increased from 23.5% of residents to 47.2%. The number of refugees settling in Lowell continues to rise. The diversity creates a rich and cultured community, but it also means that CHH must serve tight-knit communities with diverse needs who might distrust outsiders.



CHH has shifted their outreach, programs, and services work by listening to and addressing the needs of the community. This commitment is also central to their prevention work. They first conducted a needs assessment and identified a gap in support and services for young men of color between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four. Under the leadership of Caitlin LeMay, the project coordinator for Engaging Men & Boys as Allies in Sexual Violence Prevention, they began brainstorming ways to reach this underserved population. Their goal was to create events, materials, and strategies tailored to the specific cultural needs of whichever community they are looking to engage. The White Ribbon Day Campaign was an excellent starting point for them. By targeting men and boys, it provided an event for the community of Lowell to get involved in, without a high stakes commitment. However, CHH wanted to expand their programming beyond the White Ribbon Day Campaign.

While doing research on their next steps in engaging more men and boys, they heard of one barber in Lowell who was running a resource center out of the back of his barbershop. There he was providing resources about substance abuse, recovery, and rehabilitation programs. It clicked for the Center: barbershops were a space where young men of color are already meeting and feeling safe.



Within a year, CHH created a partnership called the Buzz for Safety Campaign. Barber's host these events in their shops and bring their clientele, networks, and community. CHH provides information and workshops around sexual violence topics and healthy masculinity. LeMay says that the response has been great. Barbers are excited by the phenomenal discussions generated.



To celebrate the success of the Buzz for Safety Campaign, the Center for Hope and Healing threw a party called Barbers Giving Back. Initially the idea for the event was that the Barbers could have a competition to see who could create the coolest hair designs. LeMay says that when they brought this idea to the barbers, they said that instead they would prefer to give back to the community and give free haircuts. CHH listened once again to the community and the event

was a success; there were performers, a live DJ, and slam poetry and the barbers gave thirteen free haircuts in an hour and a half. LeMay says what was so great about the event was that the attendees were people who they otherwise might not have reached.

Beyond the events, CHH works every day to figure out how to reach communities of people who may not be receiving the support needed. When asked their tips on how to reach these groups, both LeMay and Elsabel Rincon, the Community Impact Manager, agree: it's all about having one relationship within the community and making connections through them. They stress the importance of entering a community where you may be viewed as an outsider with someone who is well-known within the community. This small step can put a distrustful community at ease and make the community members more responsive to the message. Additionally, when working with community whose native language is not English, LeMay has found it helpful to include a native speaker in all the conversations they have. These tips, while seemingly small, have an impact on the success of any campaign.

LeMay and Rincon make the work look easy, but Rincon can pinpoint one of the biggest difficulties of her job. She finds that when working with communities of color, they must overcome the limitations created by society to reexamine their behaviors and their impact. However, as she says, it's hard when "your community is being oppressed [but] you are part of that formula that's maintaining the oppression through behaviors." They don't let the difficulties discourage them and maintain hope that the work they do with their community is creating a lasting impression. Both feel that it is not an option to stop this kind of work until people stop being affected by gender based violence.



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Footnote: Demographic data from:

<http://www.lowellma.gov/dpd/devservices/Documents/Land%20Board%20Regulations/Final%20Master%20Plan.pdf>