Community Responses to Acts of Injustice

Campaigns, marches, and public forums are effective ways to build consensus in a community that violence against women and girls is unacceptable. Each action offers individuals a chance to participate at a level where she/he feels comfortable. The following pointers are designed to create public awareness of the issue, recruit more volunteers, educate the community about the broader social context of the crime against women and girls, and gather as many allies as possible in order to mobilize to create change. The following is a checklist and some guidance based on the experiences of the Transforming Communities project.

There are a range of incidents which might warrant a public action, such as poor police response to a domestic violence call resulting in a serious injury, a rape, or even death. As soon as the issue becomes known, set up a meeting time and place, invite all active volunteers and organizational allies via phone calls, fax and flyers.

Agenda for Community Meeting

The following is a sample agenda. We suggest that you have an experienced facilitator run the meeting. Be prepared with flip charts, markers, and refreshments!

- **Share Responses to the Incident**
  
  Begin by sharing the emotional impact that the incident may have created in the community, i.e., sadness, outrage, fear. This is an important first item in a community meeting on responses to a sensitive subject.

- **Establish the Facts and Discuss the Incident**
  
  Obtain and sort out the facts. Ask participants to share current information (e.g., media reports) on the violent incident in question, with Captain, Chief of Police, and the District Attorney’s office.

- **Brainstorm Community Responses**
  
  Based on what is known about the incident, the group should discuss/brainstorm the next steps. It is very important that this be an open process. Do not pre-judge responses.

- **Establish Criteria for Selecting a Community Response**
  
  The following are some questions that can guide this process:
  - Could this incident have been prevented and, if so, by whom or what institution?
  - Is our community response the way to get immediate change?
  - Is our community response a way to heighten awareness for long-term change?
  - Should a family member of the victim be contacted to obtain more information and to
assess whether political action by the community would help prevention efforts or bring further harm to victim?
• Should an impromptu forum be quickly organized as a way to discuss feelings about the incident?
• Should the community organize a march to be the “voice of consciousness,” stating that domestic violence is no longer acceptable?
• Should the incident be an opportunity for a system change (public policy, school board guidelines, or police officer re-training program)?

**Decide on a Plan of Action**

Whatever community response is decided upon, the group should come up with a step-by-step plan. Use the Map for Social Transformation (see Module 4, Train for Action) to guide the process. Think through allies and opposition. The overall goal of ending domestic violence and dating violence should inform every activity. Volunteers provide lists of friends, family, and others who would be able to participate in the action. Break down the plan into a series of tasks which get assigned to individual volunteers and overseen by organizers. Start files pertaining to the violent incident, including newspaper reports. Initiate activity. Make sure that the call-to-action and demand-for-change is clearly identified. Keep an updated database of volunteer activities.

**Tips to Make the Action Successful**

• If a public forum is being planned, the date and location of the event must be selected immediately. Set agenda and assign speakers. If a formerly battered woman has volunteered to speak, make sure emotional support is provided. Discuss impact of exposure with the speaker and create a safety plan in advance (e.g. potential retaliation from batterer).

• If a march is being planned, a march route must be established and a permit obtained from the local police department. Safety monitors (with arm bands to identify) and media spokespersons should be assigned. (Permit fees are generally waived for nonprofit organizations.)

• If a campaign is being launched, organizing tools must be developed so that interested community residents can obtain a flyer identifying what needs to be done. Media attention is important. Local reporters need to be contacted to ensure coverage is obtained before, during, and after the event. At the event itself, volunteers should ensure that all participants are signed in and are given information about the next meeting or event. Following the event, be sure to record the names of all participants and collaborating organization personnel for follow-up calls and activities.

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