Toward social change: Build capacity for prevention into state coalition work in Missouri

Practitioners and Advocates Featured:

Matthew Huffman
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With a commitment to social change, preventing sexual and domestic violence has been a decade-long priority for the Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (MCADSV). Matthew Huffman, the Public Affairs Director says, "We must change society and institutions to change norms and beliefs, and also work to shape environments and policies to reduce violence." To do so, MCADSV focuses on building both its internal capacity and the capacity of member agencies to support prevention efforts.

If you don't like the way the world is, you change it.
You have an obligation to change it.
You just do it one step at a time.
- Marian Wright Edelman

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER: THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARED LANGUAGE

In 2007, the DELTA Prep project funded the Missouri coalition and 18 other domestic violence coalitions to build their organizational capacity for prevention. Participating in this project helped MCADSV start conversations internally about which root factors contribute to health inequities. The coalition took time to define what prevention means and what they are capable of doing. To this day, MCADSV carves out time in staff meetings for discussions to cultivate shared language and cohesively advance goals. MCADSV believes everyone has the right to safety and therefore incorporates health equity considerations into staff meetings and the work, including discussions about sexual harassment, anti-racism/racial-justice, anti-oppression, and language access.

EMBEDDING PREVENTION IN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

Rather than isolating prevention as its own division, MCADSV has integrated prevention across all of its coalition's key areas, including education, alliance, research and public policy. The following are some examples:

- For education, MCADSV incorporates prevention and social change messages in all advocacy trainings.
- For alliance, the coalition reaches out to allies and trains them on community mobilization and prevention.
- For public policy, the team monitors legislation on prevention and includes prevention in statewide plans.
- For research, MCADSV gathers data on all prevention programming in the state.

LEADING THROUGH A TEAM-BASED APPROACH

With prevention as a cross-cutting area, MCADSV takes a team-based approach to prevent sexual and domestic violence in Missouri. For staffing, the coalition believes it is important for at least one person to be fully dedicated to prevention so that they can incorporate it in other staff members' work. The team-based approach also extends to community partnerships, which have helped expand MCADSV's sphere of influence and impact. This collective approach has translated into changes in the board of directors' structure. The board intentionally includes community members and brings in people from different sectors, fields and groups to again expand allies, partnerships, and community commitments to prevention.

SUPPORTING MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS PREVENTION CAPACITY

MCADSV has innovatively been running an Executive Directors' Academy for a number of years to offer training and peer-support for new leaders in the Missouri movement to end domestic and sexual violence. While the year-long training focuses on skills for executive directors like staff management and funding, MCADSV emphasizes prevention and social change in the curriculum. Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Assault's (MOCSA) CEO went through the Executive Directors' Academy when she first started. She has not only prioritized prevention at the organization, but also now serves on the coalition's board to further push for prevention at the state-level. See the MOCSA profile for more information on how the organization has built its local capacity for prevention.



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Building capacity for prevention can be tough as prevention often seems invisible, funding is limited and burnout is common, but MCADSV develops tangible markers of success (e.g. using partnerships as a measure), thinks about sustainability from the start of new efforts, and supports self-care for staff.

Matthew Huffman joined the MCADSV staff in 2012 as a program development specialist with a focus on prevention programming. He has experience in community organizing and education, policy, and program development, having developed programs on capacity-building, policy implementation, and sexual health promotion. He gained valuable experience first at the University of Missouri Women's Center, and next at True North, first as a victim advocate and later as the youth outreach coordinator.

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RESOURCES

- Delta Prep Toolkit on building prevention capacity – includes an assessment tool and action planning resources
- Embracing Prevention as Social Change: How to Build Organizational Capacity for Prevention

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