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Reflection: Working Toward Peaceful, Healthy Communities

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Building Peaceful Community

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REFLECTIONS: WORKING TOWARD PEACEFUL, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Donald Gault

Abstract:

Family violence is a pervasive problem locally, nationally, and worldwide. Since 1990, staff from Saint Paul-Ramsey County (Minnesota) Public Health have worked with hundreds of community members and organizations in a unique partnership approach to preventing violence. The process of developing and sustaining this unique partnership is described, as well impacts and outcomes from work developed and implemented over 25 years of sustained efforts. Implications for practice in community organizing and partnership, violence prevention, public health, and adherence to evidence- and research-based best practice models are discussed.

Keywords: Family violence prevention and intervention, community partnerships, community systems organizing, public health, primary prevention, appreciative inquiry

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In 1987, I was hired as a Planner for the Saint Paul-Ramsey County Public Health Department in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Two years later, as part of my role, I joined a small group of people who developed a community-wide approach to preventing family violence. Over these 25+ years I have been privileged to work with and learn from hundreds of individuals, including founders of the domestic violence prevention movement; therapists, probation officers and child protection workers; business owners and employees; courageous political and community leaders; and people touched by violence in their families and communities. Working together, we have implemented strategies to end violence in families, workplaces, and communities through the creation of healthy, peaceful relationships. The cornerstone of this life-changing work has been to build authentic, sustainable community partnerships that are based on trust and shared vision.

This work has transformed me, personally and professionally. This work has also helped me to understand the true value of primary prevention and how it has transformed our community and the lives of its citizens over the past quarter century. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to reflect on the many opportunities and challenges of this work, to share the key lessons learned, and to celebrate the many partnerships that have created a shared vision that peace and health in our lifetime is indeed a real possibility.

COMMUNITY SYSTEMS ORGANIZING

In 1989, a five-year old boy was beaten to death by his mother's boyfriend in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Compounding this tragedy, the family was being "intervened on" by a range of highly skilled and committed intervention service providers from both county programs and community-based agencies, including child protection workers, public health nurses, mental health professionals and social workers. The fact that this horrible act of family violence happened while the family was being cared for by a highly skilled, functional, coordinated community response team of intervention experts led to a crucial and courageous decision by the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners and Ramsey County Manager: to develop a community-wide partnership dedicated to the primary prevention of family violence.

This decision led to the creation of the *Ramsey County Family Violence Initiative* (Initiative) in 1990. The Initiative was launched by bringing hundreds of community members together under a compelling mission - to create a community-wide collaboration over the next five years that will:

- establish a "no-violence" standard in the public mind
- greatly increase effectiveness in the prevention of family violence
- greatly increase effectiveness of intervention in the inter-generational cycle of family abuse, and
- build a strong foundation to sustain these efforts into the future

The Initiative was built around a strategy I now describe as *Community Systems Organizing*. This strategy engages a broad range of community partners who create and implement self-tailored and owned strategies through community action teams. Each action team plays a separate, yet coordinated, role in creating a peaceful, non-violent community. From its inception, the Initiative was based on the premise that the only way to effectively respond to and prevent family violence was through sustained community partnership work. Key to success was the fact that the action teams created and implemented their own strategies, rather than the more common approach of task forces and other work groups who make findings and recommendations that are intended for others to hopefully embrace and implement.

At its inception, the Initiative was organized into eight community action teams: Child Abuse Prevention, Intervention, Workplace, Media, Neighborhoods & Citizens, Inter-Faith, Education & Schools, and Legislative. Later, additional teams were formed, including Men's Messages, Strong Hearts of the Circle (a Native American community team), Hmoob Thaj Yeeb (Hmong Peace), and Gun Violence Prevention. During the first 10-12 years of work, these action teams and their individual members developed and implemented a broad range of successful and unique tools and strategies. Some of these tools and strategies include the following:

- Theatre-based trainings (*Unless There's Blood*, *From The Ground Up*, and *None of Our Business*) and complementary training tools, videos, and documents resulting in more respectful, violence-free workplaces, and employers and employees actively engaged in family violence prevention.
- Development and implementation of the Ramsey County Respectful, Violence-Free Workplace Policy, covering all county employees and elected officials.
- Two musicals (*Change* and *Nobody Home*) on understanding how people can end up in violent relationships, and how to build and rebuild peaceful, healthy families and relationships.

- Persuading the Twin Cities' two major newspapers, the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* and the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*, to stop the decades-long practice of running ads for strip clubs and X-rated movies in their sports sections, and convincing numerous local and national companies, including GUESS and Marshall Field's, to stop running sexually exploitative advertising.
- Development and implementation of The Men's Line, a 24-hour, 365-day-a-year anonymous phone line for men to call to seek support, counseling, and resources to find within themselves and learn to practice healthier, more peaceful relationships.
- State legislation providing resources supporting violence prevention work by local school districts and community agencies.
- Development and statewide broadcast of violence prevention Public Service Announcements (PSAs) featuring SONY recording artists October Project, and three violence prevention television specials created in partnership with Twin Cities Public Television (now Twin Cities PBS).
- Creation and implementation of Student Athlete, Coaches', and Fans' Codes of Conduct in partnership with all five Ramsey County school districts.
- Distribution of thousands of gun locks and safe gun storage educational materials.
- Development, implementation, and evaluation of *Strong and Peaceful Families*, a program designed to provide long-term, customized support to families affected by family violence, and development of *Strong and Peaceful Men*, an intervention approach for men convicted of domestic violence offenses, designed to help them re-find and embrace their own humanity, rather than focusing on the worst moments of their lives.

- *The Wakanheza Project*, a best practice strategy for preventing child abuse by reducing harsh treatment of children and isolation of families and teens in public places, and *Family Transformation*, offering the vision that all people carry within essential elements of core health, wisdom, and love.

These efforts were organized and supported by staff from Saint Paul-Ramsey County Public Health's Healthy Communities Division, which I have managed since the Division's inception in the mid-1990s through early 2016. Unlike many initiatives undertaken by local governments and communities, which often rely on short-term grant funding to address long-term issues, the Division's violence prevention work has been supported, at all times, by local funding and a skilled and deeply committed group of Healthy Communities staff. I believe that this sustained investment, in combination with the commitment and ownership of hundreds of partnerships made up of community members and organizations, have been instrumental in the long-term success of these primary prevention programs.

EVOLUTIONARY AND REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

This Initiative has undergone many changes over the years. Obviously, the people and organizations involved have not remained the same. Changes in understanding and emphasis also took place, in part reflected in the Initiative's many names, including the following:

- *The Ramsey County Family Violence Initiative*, reflecting the County's leadership and sponsorship at the outset; to
- *The Initiative for Violence-Free Families and Communities in Ramsey County*, reflecting evolutionary change toward greater community partnership and ownership; to, finally,

- *The Initiative for Peaceful Families and Communities in Ramsey County*, reflecting the revolutionary change of shifting from a problem state (family and community violence) to an outcome state (peaceful families and communities).

At this point in the process, the Initiative moved to an intentional *Appreciative Inquiry* approach that envisioned and worked toward a desired outcome (peace) rather than away from what was disdained (violence). To this day, this approach is largely unique in the field of violence prevention.

The Initiative's various name changes over the years also reflected ongoing research by the Healthy Communities staff and community partners. Three key questions were ever-present over the years (*See Figure 1*):

- What is violence?
- Why do people act out violently?
- Can violence be prevented, and if so, how?

From a public health perspective, these three questions remained crucial in developing primary prevention strategies. Courageous, sometimes revolutionary responses to these questions have also shaped the many evolving strategies that the Initiative implemented, including the following:

- The notion, from Malcolm Gladwell's book *The Tipping Point* (2002) and Dr. James Gilligan's book *Violence: Our Deadly Epidemic* (1996) that violence (and other behaviors) can arise in response to immediate situations and environments, and may not result solely from the more traditional notion that violent behaviors are the result of deeply held beliefs and character traits (i.e. sexism, racism, misogyny, and other forms of oppression.)
- The notion, from Rollo May, in his book *Power and Innocence* (1972), Dr. James Garbarino, in his book *Lost Boys* (1999), and Dr. James Gilligan, in his book *Violence: Our Deadly Epidemic and Its Causes* (1996), that violence can arise out of a sense of

powerlessness, even among people who objectively have power (i.e. men, parents, etc.)

- The notion, from Dr. Linda Mills, in her book *Violent Partners* (2008), as well as consistent local, national (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), and international data that *all* people, women and men, are both hurt by violence and capable of being violent toward their loved ones (*See Figure 2.*)
- The notion that the most effective way to prevent and effectively intervene in cases of family and community violence may be to choose and walk the paths of empathy, understanding, restoration, and love.

What is violence?

Violence is any words or actions where the intention or impact is to cause pain, fear or harm; it is a misuse of power and authority. --The Initiative for Peaceful Families and Communities in Ramsey County

Why do people act out violently?

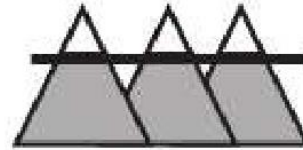
Accidental

Environmental/Situational

Intentional/Pathological

"Deeds of violence in our society are performed largely by those trying to establish their self-esteem, to defend their self-image, and to demonstrate that they, too, are significant . . . Violence arises not out of power, but out of powerlessness." --Rollo May

"A person will act out violently when they are overwhelmed by a sense of shame and humiliation" --Dr. James Gilligan



"...(R)esearchers have now unequivocally confirmed that the roots of family violence can nearly always be traced to the abuser's family of origin...we can now identify four key conditions that, if present simultaneously, are very likely to turn an otherwise typical child into an angry and abusive adult: 1) insecure attachment; 2) witnessing domestic violence; 3) child abuse and punishment; 4) teaching violence." --Linda Mills, J.D., Ph.D., [Violent Partners](#)

"(T)he Fundamental Attribution Error...is a fancy way of saying that when it comes to interpreting other people's behavior, (we) invariably make the mistake of overestimating the importance of fundamental character traits and underestimating the importance of situation and context." --Malcolm Gladwell, [The Tipping Point](#)

Can violence be prevented? If so, how?

"A liberation movement that is nonviolent sets the oppressor free as well as the oppressed."
--Barbara Deming

"The real problem of our existence lies in the fact that we ought to love one another, but do not." --Reinhold Niebuhr

"All people have three fundamental needs: Stability, Security, and Affirmation."--Dr. James Garbarino

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." --Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Figure 1. Summary of Perspectives on Violence (Gault, 2015)

Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence Fact Sheet

1. More than 1 in 3 women (35.6%) and more than 1 in 4 men (28.5%) in the United States have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
 -- **from** CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2010 Summary Report*
2. Intimate Partner Violence resulted in 2,340 deaths in 2007 – accounting for 14% of all homicides. Of these deaths, 70% were females and 30% were males.
 -- **from** CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control *Understanding Intimate Partner Violence Fact Sheet 2012*
3. An estimated 27.2% of women and 11.7 %of men have experienced unwanted sexual contact in their lifetime.
 -- **from** CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2010 Summary Report*
4. Approximately 46% of American Indian/Alaska Native women, 43.7% of non-Hispanic Black women, and 53.8% of multiracial non-Hispanic women in the United States have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
 -- **from** CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2010 Summary Report*
5. Approximately 43.5% of American Indian/Alaska Native men, 38.6% of Black men, and 39.3% of multiracial men in the United States have experienced rape, physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime. 1.7% of White non-Hispanic men have experienced rape at some point in their lifetime.
 -- **from** CDC National Center for Injury Prevention and Control *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2010 Summary Report*
6. “In its latest report on sexual assault, the Pentagon estimated that 26,000 service members experienced unwanted sexual contact in 2012, up from 19,000 in 2010. Of those cases, the Pentagon says, 53% involved attacks on men, mostly by other men.”
 -- **from** *The New York Times*, June 23, 2013
7. 9% of American youth report committing some form of sexual perpetration in their lifetime. Gender by age of first perpetration:

	<= 15 years old	16-17 years old	18-19 years old
Male	98%	90%	52%
Female	2%	10%	48%

 -- **from** *The Journal of the American Medical Association, Pediatrics*, October 7, 2013
8. The US Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that in 2011 and 2012, 3.2 % of all people in jail, 4% of state and federal prisoners, and 9.5% of young people held in juvenile detention “report being sexually abused in their current facility during the previous year.” The Bureau estimates that “nearly 200,000 people were sexually abused in American detention facilities in 2011.”
 -- **from** *New York Review of Books*, 10/18/2013

Figure 2. Summary of Violence Statistics (Gault, 2015)

Initiative strategies implemented since the early 1990's have raised the revolutionary possibility, at least partially proven through the Initiative's noble work, that the primary prevention of family and community violence may indeed be an attainable reality.

The first step in realizing this revolutionary vision was to shift the community's focus away from a problem state that demanded intervention, judgment, and punishment, to a focus on community-wide strategies that were based on individual and community actions that promoted peaceful, healthy relationships. Another way to think of it was that we made a conscious shift from domination to a partnership paradigm. This shift in thought and action began to raise remarkably hopeful and inspiring new possibilities. For example:

- To the extent that violence may arise out of immediate conflicts within public places, work places and relationships, the use of tangible, doable prevention strategies that can be practiced by everyone in the community, not just professionals and agencies, becomes more possible. Working to intentionally create positive, welcoming environments in the moment is a clear, doable, and measurable task that can be embraced by all, as compared with trying to undo years of sexism, racism, misogyny, and other forms of oppression.
- To the extent that violence may arise out of a sense of powerlessness, isolation, and shame, the use of tangible, doable prevention strategies that can be practiced by everyone becomes more of a reality in creating hopeful, healing and restorative environments. The Initiative contained many strategies to develop public spaces where individuals felt not only support and empathy, but also received information and resources to assist them in better understanding and managing their many relationships, whether in the home, in the workplace or within the community.
- To the extent that family violence affects *all* of us - women, men, adults, and children - the Initiative's primary prevention strategies were developed to benefit and

support all individuals within the community. Although women are disproportionately affected by intimate partner violence, it is also known that men are impacted by violence as well. By recognizing and suggesting that all people have both a moral interest and self-interest in building and living in peaceful, healthy relationships, the Initiative was able to engage all individuals in making the vision of a peaceful, healthy community much more achievable.

- To the extent that we choose to build our approaches on empathy, understanding, restoration, and love, rather than on punitive criminal justice approaches, I believe we have a far greater opportunity to free those living in the shadows of family violence from the current cycle of lives lived in shelters, prisons, and pain.

The ideas summarized in Figure 1 have largely shaped, philosophically, the approaches of most of the work and products developed and implemented through the Initiative. They call for an Appreciative Inquiry approach to violence prevention: in other words, working toward and placing emphasis on what we seek - peaceful, healthy relationships - as opposed to focusing and placing emphasis on violence that we abhor.

Two additional philosophical approaches have guided the Initiative: A core approach borrowed from the fields of Marketing and Communications, "The ABC's of Communication", and a discussion of the "Three Levels of Prevention" from the field of Public Health.

THE ABC'S OF COMMUNICATION

Richard Wilson, one of the co-founders of the Wilson-Griak Advertising Agency, spent decades developing jingles and advertising campaigns selling products ranging from The Minnesota Twins baseball team to margarine. He became involved in the Initiative as a volunteer member of the Inter-Faith Action Team. His involvement spanned more than a decade, including co-writing the musicals *Nobody Home*, which explored the roots of

violence in relationships, and *Change*, a musical exploration of healing and restoring healthy, loving relationships.

In the early 1990s, Wilson taught Healthy Communities staff and community partners in the Initiative his version of *The ABC's of Communication* - the notion that in order to be successful at selling a product or idea, effective communication must include the following three components:

- Provide clear and unambiguous Awareness of an idea or product
- Demonstrate the Benefit to the person or persons you are trying to convince
- Provide a clear and doable Call to Action

These three items may seem at first glance to be very obvious and simple to achieve, but in my experience working in the fields of violence prevention and public health, I have found more often than not that one or more of these crucial components is missing from prevention messages and community strategies:

A: Awareness

While most public awareness and community change initiatives are designed to provide awareness of an idea or product, assuring that these efforts provide clear and unambiguous information is often a challenge. Consider the three names of the Initiative cited above: *The Ramsey County Family Violence Initiative* in retrospect is neither clear nor unambiguous, and in fact could have been understood as an initiative *promoting* family violence. The second and third names, *the Initiative for Violence-Free Families and Communities in Ramsey County* and *the Initiative for Peaceful Families and Communities in Ramsey County*, are perhaps closer to meeting the standard of clarity and unambiguousness, though there is still a room for confusion, for example, over the meanings of the words violence-free and peaceful.

Bottom line is, if one is trying to sell/promote an idea or product, it is important that the recipient(s) of the message are absolutely clear about what that product or idea is.

B: Benefit

In order to successfully demonstrate the benefit to the person(s) you are trying to convince, it is necessary first to be clear about the target audience. I believe that to successfully prevent violence, the audience must include people who have been or are at risk for being violent toward their loved ones. The message must engage all of us in choosing to live in peace with one another. Many historical and current approaches to ending domestic violence have been built around the notion that men must dedicate themselves to ending violence against women and children. I believe that a more effective, and holistic approach is to articulate a vision where all people - women, children, and men - can live in healthy, peaceful families and communities. If we want to engage men in working toward preventing family violence, I believe our starting point can and must be demonstrating how this will benefit everyone, including men. In addition to meeting the second of the ABC's, this approach speaks to the fact that local, national, and international data consistently show that all of us - women, children and men - are victims of intimate partner violence, sexual violence and child abuse. (See Figure 2.)

C: Call to Action

Just as the ABC's provide the challenge that awareness must be clear and unambiguous, the call to Action must be clear and doable. Much current and historical violence prevention work has been and is built on the notion that we live in a violent, misogynist/sexist, racist culture that does not respect or honor women and children. While I fully support, and have dedicated my life and career to working toward, communities free from "isms," identifying the problem in such broad, sweeping terms makes it very difficult to develop and implement clear and doable calls for action. I believe that whether we are working to promote peaceful, healthy relationships or any other social goods, we can and must design achievable strategies. Our calls to action must be based on clearly articulated problem statements, measurable objectives, and tangible steps that individuals and partnerships can undertake to accomplish positive, measurable, timely change.

THREE LEVELS OF PREVENTION

In Public Health and the fields of violence prevention and intervention, many if not most practitioners refer to their work as "prevention." I would like to offer a clear and unambiguous description of the Three Levels of Prevention: Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary, based on my learning and practice in the field.

In *Primary Prevention*, no group or individual is designated "high risk." Instead, we work to bring a message or skill set to an *entire population* in order to prevent people within that population from ever beginning a potentially damaging behavior or practice. The assumption is that the population/individuals are not at this time engaged in the behavior we are trying to prevent. Our goal is to prevent people from ever engaging in the potentially harmful behavior in the first place.

In *Secondary Prevention*, we target our prevention messages and tools to individuals and groups who are already engaged in potentially damaging behaviors, but are not yet showing any ill effects as a result. Our goal is to convince people who are engaging in a potentially dangerous behavior to stop and quit, before there are serious, harmful impacts from those behaviors.

In *Tertiary Prevention or Intervention*, we are working with people who are both engaged in potentially damaging behaviors *and* they are in need of treatment to address ill effects caused by these behaviors. Our goal, which is much more complicated, is to both convince people who are engaging in a potentially dangerous behavior to stop and quit, and to treat and cure them from the consequences of those behaviors that have begun to manifest.

Primary Prevention is not "better" than the other forms of prevention. Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary strategies are all necessary and must work in concert to be effective. The word Primary merely refers to *when* these strategies take place - in the

case of violence prevention, prior to violence occurring. Secondary and Tertiary strategies occur in the *immediate and later aftermath* of violence. All are crucial, and are more likely to be successful with community-wide coordination between the three.

It has been my experience that the notion of approaching people and communities with the premise that, "The population/individuals are not at this time engaged in the behavior we are trying to prevent," can be a challenge. This is often particularly the case for people and groups who have spent most of their careers focusing on tertiary prevention or intervention, trying to undo the terrible harm that results from violence in families.

In my opinion, the first challenge in embracing the concept of primary prevention of violence is at least for the moment putting aside the idea of "victims" and "perpetrators," and building our work from the premise that all people have within them, and seek to live their lives from, a core place of health, caring, and love. While this premise may sound trivial, the book *A General Theory of Love*, written by three psychiatrists (Lewis, Amini, & Lannon, 2000) in fact argues and documents from a biological and anthropological standpoint that connection, caring, and love are the key emotional underpinnings of humans, and offers a roadmap to healthy, sustainable families and communities.

A SHIFT OF FOCUS OVER TIME

The initial vision and mission of the Initiative was, I believe, unique, ambitious, and sweeping. While the community-wide partnership approach was highly successful in engaging large numbers of people who created and implemented strategies across a wide range of community systems, schools, faith communities, worksites, etc., after the first 10-12 years of this approach, energy for working in so many disparate areas began to wane. In 2002, the decision was made to focus most community and Public Health resources and efforts into one area: Working to reduce and prevent child abuse by reducing and preventing harsh treatment of children in public places. This work,

which came to be known as *The Wakanheza Project*, has in my opinion ended up being the most powerful and enduring strategy and accomplishment of the Initiative. The Wakanheza Project has become a nationally recognized best practice violence prevention strategy.

THE WAKANHEZA PROJECT

The Wakanheza Project was developed in 2002 as a primary prevention strategy to reduce and prevent child abuse by reducing harsh treatment of children in public places. The approach and impacts of The Wakanheza Project have been described in an article titled, "*The Wakanheza Project: A Public Health Approach to Primary Prevention of Family Violence*" (Erickson, Gault, & Simmons, 2014). Access to this article and additional information on The Wakanheza Project can be found on the Ramsey County (Minnesota) website: <https://www.ramseycounty.us/residents/health-medical/public-health-initiatives/wakanheza-project>

Three key points from The Wakanheza Project offer guidance to communities and practitioners on ways of thinking that can promote enduring, authentic partnerships to create tangible, positive change.

1. The Wakanheza Project is built on a compelling vision and a set of clear, powerful, transformational principles.

The starting point for The Wakanheza Project is the word. Wakanheza is the Dakota (Native American) word for child; in English, it translates as "Sacred Being". Sharing the power of this word with hundreds of people in places ranging from children's museums and child care homes to domestic violence shelters and detox centers, has opened people and organizations to a new sense of both possibility and responsibility:

- The possibility that we can find, and re-find, the sacred within us all;

- The responsibility to build safe, loving communities and environments, and practice empathy and respect recognizing that children, and by extension all of us, are sacred beings.

As described in Erikson, Gault, and Simmons (2014), the first organizations that implemented The Wakanheza Project were places designed to serve families and children: The local children's museum, library system, and a domestic violence shelter. Wakanheza Project discussions start with participants learning the meaning of the word "Wakanheza" followed by six simple principles:

- **Judgment** - when we judge others, it is hard to be able to open up and show genuine kindness.
- **Culture** - when we think that another's culture is different from our own, it can generate fear of doing what feels (and is) natural, i.e. showing kindness and seeking connection.
- **Powerlessness** - once we recognize that people tend to not act their best when they feel powerless and ashamed, we can more easily set aside judgment and practice empathy and respect.
- **Empathy and Respect** - This is the first call to action in The Wakanheza Project - practicing empathy and respect toward fellow human beings who may be under stress - for example, taking children into public places and fearing judgment from others.
- **Environment** - Understanding that remarkably simple factors in physical and social environments may be adding to others' stress and potentially triggering harsh treatment toward children and/or other adults.
- **The Moment** - This is the revolutionary and freeing call to action in The Wakanheza Project. Once we clear our heads and hearts with the first 3 Principles, we are able to be empathetic and respectful, and remember that we all have the power and responsibility to create peaceful, respectful environments. Instead of thinking we need to "fix them", all we need to answer is: What can I do in this moment to make the situation better for the people around me, as well as for myself?

2. The Wakanheza Project does not constrain people and organizations by requiring "fidelity to a model."

Many grants and related program guidelines require that strategies be built around "research and/or evidence-based best practices", and "fidelity to the model", and that these ought to govern how people and organizations do their work.

I have no quarrel with being responsible managers of money, and also believe we must push ourselves to assure we are making tangible, positive impacts in the lives of people and communities. However, it has been my experience that requiring fidelity to others' models can have the unintended impact of removing the possibility for creativity, innovation, and true, authentic partnership. The "model" of The Wakanheza Project is to engage diverse communities and partners in building a peaceful, caring community; how they do it is, and must be, unique to and developed by the people and organizations that will do the work now and into the future.

Following discussion of the word Wakanheza and the 6 Principles, participants are asked two simple questions: Can you think of times where you see repeated stress and tension in your daily work? And, once you identify these predictable points of stress, what can you do to change your environment and practices, within the reality of available staffing and organizational resources, to try to reduce and hopefully prevent these recurring problems? As described by Erikson, Gault, and Simmons (2014), remarkably creative solutions arise immediately - solutions that cost no money, and that work. "Funstigators" and "playologists" were sent forth to play with children waiting in line at the Minnesota Children's Museum, the largest children's museum in Minnesota, located in downtown Saint Paul and serving close to 500,000 visitors per year. Modifications to the intake process were instituted at Women's Advocates Shelter in Saint Paul, one of the nation's first domestic violence shelters, which serves hundreds of women and children each year. Rather than immediately starting the intake in packed front office cubicles, new arrivals are told that they are safe now; they are settled in their rooms,

then helped to fill out intake forms in their rooms. Again, remarkably creative solutions that cost no money, and they work!

The only requirement to practice The Wakanheza Project is an authentic interest and desire to improve the lives of people and the community and the courage and willingness to take action as organizations and individuals. Those of us who have the privilege of bringing The Wakanheza Project to organizations and communities have recognized that we are not experts at the work our partners do every day. We do not know how to operate museums, shelters, libraries, child care homes, or detox centers. Our role is to share the vision and core principles, and then step back and watch the expertise, creativity, and passion flow and lasting change take place.

3. The Wakanheza Project is based on learning and accomplishments during the first twelve years of the Initiative; it has been embraced and adopted into the hearts and practices of hundreds of individuals and organizations, going well beyond its initial purpose of child abuse prevention.

I believe that the learning and successes of the first twelve years of the Initiative, and the energy of so many people brought together in partnership under a shared vision of preventing family violence, culminated in the power and simplicity of The Wakanheza Project.

The Wakanheza Project does not cost participating organizations and communities any money, and requires no adherence nor fidelity to strict implementation or evaluation guidelines. By taking this organic, partnership-building approach, changes based on Wakanheza discussions are sustained for years, often with no follow-up presentations or training. The vision, change, and subsequent work are embedded and then driven from within by individuals and organizations.

The original intent of The Wakanheza Project was child abuse prevention, and the original partners were organizations that served families and children. In recent years,

a far broader range of agencies and facilities, many with little or no focus on directly interacting with families and children, have embraced the Wakanheza process and concepts. One of the most fascinating of these newer partners is the Ramsey County Detox Center. Staff and leadership were inspired by the notion that small changes in practice and environment might improve the experience of people receiving service as well as staff. The results, in what is by definition a very challenging environment, have been beautiful and inspiring. (<http://photos.twincities.com/2014/10/28/art-transforms-ramsey-county-detox-center/>).

PERSONAL IMPACT OF THIS PARTNERSHIP WORK

Soon I will retire as Manager of the department's Healthy Communities Division, a job I love and cherish. I hope to continue to take what I have learned wherever there are people and groups interested in building peaceful, healthy communities.

I have come to believe that violence, and many other human-caused problems, are far more preventable than I previously thought and hoped. I in no way mean to diminish the terrible toll that violence takes on people and communities, including the intergenerational nature of its harms. But I have become convinced that by intentionally changing the situation and context, by creating respectful, healthy community environments, and by taking an appreciative inquiry approach, much of the violence that may be triggered by unwelcoming and disrespectful environments can be interrupted and prevented.

I believe that all people carry within them essential elements of health, love, caring, and wisdom, and that our nature and souls are not defined by the worst moments of our lives. Through my work, as well as in my life, I have had the challenge, honor, and privilege of meeting and coming to know many people who have been accused of doing, and many who have done, terrible things to other people, often those they love the most. I have come to believe that the word forgiveness does not mean excusing or saying these terrible acts are OK. Rather, I believe forgiveness means to look beyond

and try to see and believe in the sacredness within each of us. When I have allowed myself to look, I have been able to find it in others and myself.

I also believe that many of the practices that we have put into place in response to violence are well-intentioned but may be unintentionally driving much of the tragic cycle of violence we continue to see in families and communities. The original mission of the Initiative in 1990 was to improve effectiveness in both preventing and intervening in the tragedy of family violence. I believe we have demonstrated that primary prevention can and does work. I further believe that on the intervention side of the equation we can and must move from judgment to restoration, and rededicate ourselves to building and realizing what we seek: Peaceful, healthy families and communities.

By taking the evolutionary and revolutionary steps of more fully integrating principles of primary prevention and appreciative inquiry into our family violence intervention systems and continuing to build community partnerships, I believe it may be possible to realize the seemingly elusive vision of peace and health in our lifetime.

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