

The Initiative for Peaceful Families and Communities in Ramsey County

Perspectives, Lessons and Products
From the First Nineteen Years of
The Initiative

December 2008

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The Opportunity and the Challenge

- *“The moment that we learn something, everything changes.”*

Jean-Paul Sartre

Sartre teaches us that as we learn, and help others to learn, everything is possible. Violence CAN be prevented.

Background and History

Ramsey County is the smallest County geographically in the State of Minnesota, with the second largest population; the City of St. Paul makes up roughly half of the County.

Counties in Minnesota are mandated to intervene in family violence cases (child abuse, domestic violence and elder abuse.) In the mid-1980's major efforts were undertaken to improve internal intervention systems; while successful, they also demonstrated a clear need to begin to work on *prevention* in order to stem the financial and human costs of family violence.

Background and History

Based on this experience and research from *Breaking the Cycle of Violence* (Minneapolis League of Women Voters, April 1990) the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners initiated a community-wide violence prevention effort which 19 years later continues to grow and impact the Ramsey County community with tools and messages that have proven to be effective in preventing violence in families, workplaces and communities.

The initial strategy to accomplish the work of The Initiative was the formation of Community Action Teams comprised of individuals and organizations interested in learning about root causes of violence and developing and implementing tools and strategies throughout the Ramsey County community. This work has evolved into a Community Systems Organizing approach led by Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health staff in partnership with community agencies and leaders.

Initiative Definitions of Violence

- ***Violence is Words and Actions That Hurt People***
- ***Violence is the Misuse of Power and Authority***
- ***Violence is Any Word or Action Where the Intention or Impact is to Cause Pain, Fear or Hurt***

These definitions, created in the Ramsey County community in partnership with agencies/people who work in the field of family violence intervention services, show violence as a continuum of behaviors that everyone is capable of, are understandable, and therefore preventable.

Initiative Strategies/Assumptions

The Initiative was developed based on the following Hypothesis:

Attitudes and behaviors in populations and individuals are shaped by complex and often random interactions of intentional and unintentional messages and incentives delivered from community systems and key individuals over time.

Initiative strategies focus on creating tools and resources that promote & teach respect and nonviolence that are “embedded” in community systems (schools, workplace, media, congregations), repeated and enhanced over time.

Initiative Strategies/Assumptions

Initiative Action Teams and later Community Systems Organizing efforts have embraced and utilized Primary Prevention and Marketing Strategies:

The Initiative works to simultaneously identify “negative” messages/ social norms and act to remove from our community, and create and embed “positive” messages/social norms through community systems and key individuals.

No single message/tool will prevent violence; sustained broad-based efforts can, by creating and promoting:

Multiple Messages, From Multiple Messengers, Over Time

What is Prevention?

In Public Health, we refer to **Three Levels of Prevention: Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary.**

- In **Primary Prevention**, no group nor 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, with the assumption that the population/individuals are not at this time engaged in the behavior we are trying to prevent.

What is Prevention?

- 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.
- In **Tertiary Prevention**, or Intervention, we are working with people who are both engaged in potentially damaging behaviors and who are in need of treatment to address ill effects caused by these behaviors.

What is Prevention?

Primary Prevention is not “better” – 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 – *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.

Three Stages of The Initiative : 1990-2009

Changes and key lessons learned over The Initiative's first 19 years.

	<i>Stage 1: Starting</i>	<i>Stage 2: Building</i>	<i>Stage 3: Sustaining</i>
<i>Vision</i>	Hard to see past Personal/ Self Interest	New Vision: What can WE Do Collectively?	Development and Ownership of Shared Vision(s)
<i>Commitment</i>	Personal	Organizational	Institutional/ Community
<i>Action</i>	Question ability to accomplish anything	Decide to develop and do project(s)	Move from project mentality to seeking system and community change

Lessons Learned

- ***ONE: Don't start by finding money***
- ***TWO: Avoid the excuse "We don't have the right people around the table"***
- ***THREE: Don't seek "THE THING" to do; identify something you CAN do and will commit to building and institutionalizing***
- ***FOUR: Proceed with authority – YOU CAN
AND MUST DO IT.***

Note: While these lessons reflect the unique nature of the Ramsey Initiative, they may be of interest to other communities as well.

Lessons Learned

- ***ONE: Don't start by finding money***

While grants and other funding sources are certainly helpful, especially to complete projects, they can have the unintended consequence of getting in the way of communities' and people's creativity and dreams. Develop the vision, create the tool, then find the money to make it real.

Lessons Learned

- ***TWO: Avoid the excuse “We don’t have the right people around the table”***

Who ARE the “right people”? This is a question we will likely never answer. Go with the energy and commitment of people you DO have at the table and always work to engage more people and communities as best you can. Always pay special attention to intentionally and respectfully engaging and reflecting diverse communities.

Lessons Learned

- ***THREE: Don't seek "THE THING" to do; identify something you CAN do and will commit to building and institutionalizing***

“The Thing” to prevent violence probably does not exist. Be clear in your beliefs and understanding regarding what violence is and what causes it, and use integrity and commitment to design tools with the vision of creating lasting social, community and individual change.

Lessons Learned

- ***FOUR: Proceed with authority – YOU CAN AND MUST DO IT.***

Gandhi said, “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” We all have the power to bring our wisdom and passion to the work of preventing violence.

Learn about effective prevention strategies, find something you can and will do as an individual and in your community and commit to making your vision and dreams real.

Guiding Principles/Wisdom

- *“Acts of violence in our society are performed largely by those seeking 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*

In The Initiative we see *violence as a misuse of power arising from a sense of powerlessness*. The strategies and tools created through The Initiative have been based on this belief and have been demonstrated to work in preventing violence.

Guiding Principles/Wisdom

Researchers have unequivocally confirmed that the roots of family violence can nearly always be traced to the abuser's family of origin...we can 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, *Violent Partners*

Guiding Principles/Wisdom

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

Niebuhr suggests that love and understanding are at the core of peaceful, healthy relationships and communities.

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

Deming shows that our work will only be effective when “the oppressor”, as well as “the oppressed”, understands and practices nonviolence and respect.

Guiding Principles/Wisdom

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

Garbarino provides direction to the content of our violence prevention tools – we strive to intentionally build these three fundamental elements into all of our work.

- *“Civilization is the long process of learning to be kind.” - Jennifer James*

James provides us with perspective about the long journey we are on and that in spite of the enormity of the challenge that we must continue to seek and find the path of peace and understanding.

Violence Prevention Tools and Strategies

Since 1991, hundreds of people have been engaged in developing and implementing violence prevention tools and strategies across the Ramsey County community. Educators have developed and implemented tools for schools; business people and human resource professionals have developed and implemented tools for workplaces; clergy and lay leaders have developed and implemented tools for congregations.

We use theatre, music, art, brochures, posters and formal trainings, all grounded in the strategies and beliefs of The Initiative – and we are seeing these strategies work in preventing violence in families and across the Ramsey County community.

Violence Prevention Tools and Strategies

Updated descriptions and listings of all Initiative violence prevention tools and strategies can be found at:

<http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/ph/hc/violenceprevention.asp>

The following slides provide a few examples of current efforts:

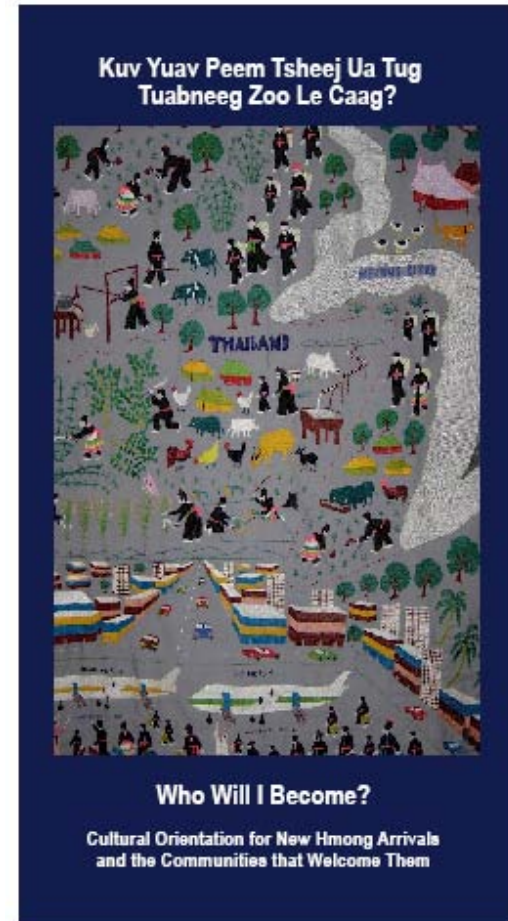
Violence Prevention Tools and Strategies: The Wakanheza Project



Wakanheza is the Dakota Word for Child – its English translation is “Sacred Being”. Using the power and beauty of this word, the Wakanheza Project effectively prevents harsh treatment of children and helps adults respectfully connect with young people in public places – clinics, museums, libraries, businesses, congregations – by providing kindness and assistance to parents and their “Sacred Beings” and positive connections with young people.

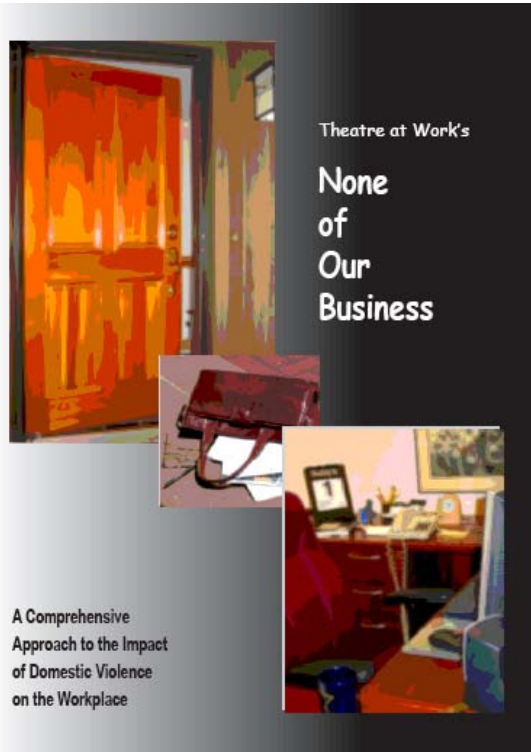
Violence Prevention Tools and Strategies: Hmoob Thaj Yeeb (Hmong Peace)

Hmoob Thaj Yeeb (Hmong Peace) creates tools that promote peace and respect within the Hmong Community and across Ramsey County. Major efforts include “Who Will I Become”, a television show reflecting on the stories and successes of Hmong people coming from Laos to the United States (produced in partnership with Twin Cities Public Television, the Minnesota Department of Health, and Hmong American Partnership), and the creation of Peaceful Hmong Family Circles to promote healthy, positive communication in adult relationships.

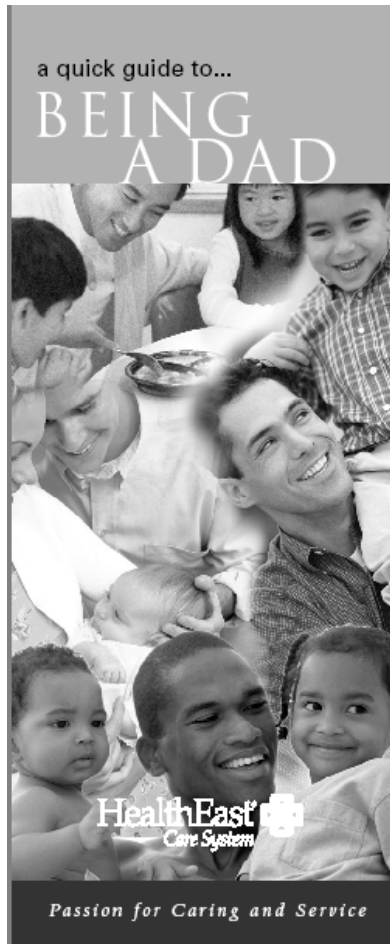


Violence Prevention Tools and Strategies: Violence-Free, Respectful Workplaces

The Workplace Action Team has developed tools ranging from posters and seminars to video-based theatre training to create and maintain respectful, violence-free work environments, and provide understanding and strategies for preventing and addressing domestic violence at work.



Violence Prevention Tools and Strategies: Men's Messages and The Men's Line



The Men's Line is a 24-hour, 7-day a week crisis line that opened July 1, 1997. Operated by Crisis Connection, the Men's Line has received over 5,500 calls in its first 8 years. The Being a Dad Project gives new and current dads tools and hope for the toughest and best "job" they will ever have.



Violence Prevention Tools and Strategies: Preventing and Eliminating Violence in Media

The Media Action Team has effectively addressed media violence, convincing dozens of local and national companies to remove violent advertising images, and has created its own messages and media images promoting peaceful, healthy relationships that are becoming social norms throughout Ramsey County.



An Invitation

Through our work since 1990 our community has learned a great deal about what causes violence, and most importantly that it *can be prevented*.

Please explore our website:

<http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/ph/hb>

to learn more about the specific tools and resources created by The Initiative for Peaceful Families and Communities in Ramsey County and for contact information.

Thank You, and Peace