

GIRLS CHAT PROGRAM

BY

SANDY ONYALO

(SANDYO@MAGMA.CA)

OTTAWA RAPE CRISIS CENTRE

NOVEMBER 4, 2010

About the Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre

The idea of an Ottawa-area service for sexual assault victims originated with a small group of women in 1974. They discovered that there was no organization that helped women deal with these experiences. At that time in Canada, Rape Crisis Centres existed in Vancouver and Toronto. In Ottawa, support was solicited from police departments, hospitals, psychiatric clinics and community groups leading to the installation of a 24-hour crisis line at the Ottawa Women's Centre. The ORCC officially opened on December 15th, 1974.

About the Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre

- In 1976 the staff at the ORCC included four full-time staff members and 40 volunteers. Today the staff at the ORCC consists of three full-time and eight part-time staff members, as well as various project staff. There are around fifty volunteers that work on the 24 - hour crisis line, provide public education activities and sit on our Board. The staff and volunteers also act as liaisons with the police, hospitals, lawyers and other social service resources.

About the Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre

Our innovative projects/programs...

- **work with exotic dancers on sexual harassment and assault in the workplace, offering chair yoga to women with disabilities, leading training in the community on cultural competency counselling & sexual violence issues, addressing the issue of sex, sexuality and sexual violence to name a few. The Centre also provides weekly support to incarcerated women at the Ottawa Carleton Detention Centres. This program funded by the Ministry of Correctional services and Community Safety has been running for over 16 years. We are one of the few rape crisis centres consistently offers support to incarcerated women in the province.**

What we know about immigrant and refugee families

Lack of access to basic needs leads to:

“A lot of the girls end up in prostitution and escort businesses

Need for parents to hold multiple jobs, lack of supervision of youth limited family time

Conflict between girls and the parents (i.e. dating, make-up, going out)

Rossiter, Marian J. University of Alberta

What we know about immigrant and refugee families

*Women abuse in the home

*Women headed single parent families

Stresses related to the separation and reunification of family

What we know about immigrant and refugee families

Stresses related to the separation and reunification of family

Some children have lost mother & father and are living with an aunt or an uncle or grandmother.

Many families have lived in refugee camps before coming to Ottawa

Experiences of racism and discrimination in the school system

School Risk Factors

Lack of age appropriate (culturally appropriate) services

Lack of culturally competent services

Lack of supports to deal with youth anger

Lack of youth voice

Isolation, lack social networks, few leadership opportunities

High levels of poverty

High levels of underemployment, unemployment for parents



School Risk Factors

Lack of adequate, nutritious food

What is Girls Chat?

- This project is in its fifth year and currently runs out of six Ottawa high schools with 90 young women participating weekly.

Who we work with

Girls and young women from immigrant and refugee backgrounds

Families country of origin: The Caribbean, The Congo, Haiti
Rwanda, Congo, Somalia the mid-east

Languages: Arabic, French, Somali,

Religions: Christian & Muslim

How Girls Chat Works

- to provide young women from immigrant and refugee backgrounds the opportunity to address their issues in a confidential and supportive environment. Through weekly discussions, young women with immigrant and refugee background receive information on different topics such as healthy body image, self-esteem, healthy sexuality and sexual violence.

How Girls Chat Works

**Two peer co-facilitators coordinate all Girls Chat activities.
School guidance counsellors & the Multicultural Liaison
Officers (MLOs) refer girls to the project**

**MLOs is responsible for discussing the project with parents
and obtaining parental consent forms.**

Girls Chat Objectives...

To organize information sessions for teachers, school administrators and other service providers in the community. In these sessions the multiple needs of young women with immigrant and refugee background are highlighted and ways to increase their access to available services identified.

Girls Chat Objectives...

To decrease isolation amongst young women from immigrant and refugee backgrounds;

Identify and support the social and emotional needs of young women at risk of violence;

Promote and support social networks amongst these young women;

Increase awareness about healthy sexuality, date rape, healthy body image, and sexual violence in a youth friendly and culturally appropriate manner;

Build leadership skills amongst these youth women; and

Foster positive relationships between school personnel and students.

Project Challenges.....

ORCC needs to keep a low profile in the school system;

Needing to help school trustees to be aware of the reality of violence against girls in the school;

Finding sustainable funding

Program Successes.....

Girls renamed the project “Girls Chat”;

Urban & Priority Schools Funding (2 schools); &

Co-facilitators look like, speak the language of the girls

Ran the first Girls Chat Leadership Camp in 2010

Why is GC is unique!

- This approach is innovative because the Girls Chat Program has a strong partnership with the Ottawa Carleton District School Board and the Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs) in delivering this program in the schools.. A healthy lunch is provided to the girls during the program this is important for those girls coming from low income communities where there are high levels of poverty..

Why is GC is unique!

- Therefore the girls do not have to leave school property to participate in the program.
- This program is also unique because the MLOs and school personnel are instrumental in referring girls to the program and obtaining consent forms from the parents. Girls Chat Co-Facilitators are specifically trained in the school policies and their legislative obligations to report, if violence occurs in the school or in the home environment

Why is GC is unique!

The only program in Ottawa that specifically targets girls and youth from immigrant and refugee backgrounds and specifically addresses issues of isolation, body image, sexuality & healthy dating, depression, sexual exploitation and abuse, etc in a confidential, youth friendly, culturally competent manner.

The Future of Girls Chat

Second Summer Leadership Camp 2011

Develop mentoring skills for young women and girls;

Hope to add 1 -2 schools;

Hope to reach the Asian community

Boys Chat Project (for all boys)