

## Profiles in Prevention: REAL Relationships

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Also a critical partner in DCADV's DELTA FOCUS project, Turning Point at People's Place operates the REAL Relationships program, an organization-focused strategy that seeks to build capacity within a partnering youth-serving organization around adoption of policies and practices and improvement of organizational climate to mitigate dating violence among youth. The overall goal is to support and facilitate review, adoption, and operationalization of organizational policies and practices that reflect best practice for establishing an organizational environment that contributes to prevention of dating violence among students. Implementation of REAL Relationships is focused within the Delaware Adolescent Program, Inc. (DAPI), a statewide social service and education program that provides an alternative education setting for pregnant and/or parenting girls between the ages of 12-19. DAPI collaborates with the REAL Relationships program by serving as the implementation setting for piloting development, implementation, and evaluation of organizational policies and practices that are trauma-informed and address dating and domestic violence. Informed by the evidence-based Start Strong<sup>1</sup> prevention model, REAL Relationships' strategy efforts are comprehensive and multi-layered and include a focus on 3 core areas:

**Staff Training, Capacity Building, and Technical Assistance.** Program staff are often a primary point of contact for the dissemination of healthy relationship information and disclosures of teen dating violence for young adolescents. Therefore, it is crucial that staff and educators at DAPI are informed and comfortable speaking to their students about healthy relationships and dating violence.

Through training and technical assistance, staff are assisted in developing an understanding of their role in prevention of teen dating violence, their ability to recognize when students may be involved in unhealthy relationships, and to make warm referrals to appropriate agencies and services. Additionally, staff are supported in building their capacity around understanding the impact of trauma and contributing to the creation of safe, respectful, inclusive, and trauma-sensitive environments.

**Student Education and Support.** Student groups are held weekly and cover critical topics such as: gender norms; media literacy; overcoming stereotypes; effective communication; identity and self-esteem; healthy relationship characteristics; and courageous by-standing. Providing education to students enrolled at DAPI complements efforts to build staff capacity in order to comprehensively influence a school culture that understands teen dating violence and is engaged in preventing it. The content and structure of the student education component is also incorporated into staff training and policy development so that it is holistically institutionalized into the organization's core programmatic structure and curriculum content

**Organizational Policy, Procedures, and Environmental Changes.** Organization Leadership are supported in identifying model policies for prevention of and response to teen dating violence as well as developing comprehensive trauma-informed procedures and physical changes to the organization environment to effectively address dating violence within the program and organization culture. Core areas of focus for development and implementation of trauma-informed policies and procedures for the response & prevention of dating violence include: universal screening for dating violence; confidentiality and mandatory reporting requirements; response protocol to disclosures of violence; ongoing required professional development for staff around dating violence; required student education on dating violence/healthy relationships; student conduct and school climate; policies and procedures to support an organizational environment that fosters health promotion and staff/student self-care; and policies that provide avenues to elicit student input and voice.

The REAL Relationships collaboration at DAPI is still in the initial stages of evaluation. However, early reviews of evaluation findings have revealed several key facilitating factors for early successes. These include: focusing implementation efforts on ‘outer layer’ organizational aspects (policies and procedures, program climate) rather than only focusing on more traditional individual-level aspects (student education, awareness programs); expanding the focus of policy and procedure development and technical assistance beyond dating violence to also include building organizational capacity around trauma-informed approaches; the willingness and commitment from DAPI (the implementation site) to fully share their organization’s policies and procedures and engage in organizational change; and an ongoing focus on strengthening agency-to-agency relationships between DAPI and Peoples Place to expand access for DAPI to additional services and resources provided by Peoples Place and their community agency partners to help meet the needs of DAPI students.

## References

1. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2015). Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships. Retrieved from: <http://startstrong.futureswithoutviolence.org/4-elements-of-success/engage-influencers/>

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