

“Into the Heart of Gender”

Case Study

Organization: [Chrysalis House Association](#), Kentville, NS

Partners: [Survivors of Abuse Recovering Society](#), Kentville, NS; [Be the Peace](#), Mahone Bay, NS.

Project: “Into the Heart of Gender: Gender-Aware / Gender-Transformative Facilitation”

Approach:

The project was based on the following key principles: Partnership Building, Collaborative Leadership, Process-based Intervention, Gender Equity in Communication, Transforming Male Communication Patterns, Capacity Building in Gender-Aware Facilitation.

Objectives:

To build capacity in local organizations and groups to design and facilitate productive and safe multi-gender dialogues on gender violence issues. To provide models and processes for engaging men in ways that transform their understanding of communication, promote deep listening and equitable participation in dialogue.

Background:

These workshops were inspired by the outcomes of an informal experiment with men’s groups in Illinois in the mid 1990’s. Three groups were started by the same facilitators. One was focused on content: The men were challenged to find topics for discussion that would raise issues around gender and gender justice. Another was focussed on process. The facilitators designed a simple generic format to be used each time (that disrupted typical male patterns of communication and modeled more egalitarian ones), but the men chose to discuss anything they wanted. The third was a quasi control group where the men got together regularly, but no specific training on content or process was offered. The third group stopped meeting fairly quickly. The first met regularly for a while, but broke up after a year. The process group was still meeting when the facilitators returned three years later, and the men were engaged in various social projects around gender justice in their community. The clear message was that it was much more important to effectively transform the WAY in which men interacted, rather than focus on WHAT they interacted about. It also seemed clear that this preparation amongst men paved the way for more effective communication with other genders.

Activity:

There were two phases to this project. The [Gender-Aware / Gender-Transformative Facilitation Training](#) was held in two locations in the Annapolis Valley, NS in partnership with Survivors of Abuse Recovering Society. The “Gender-Aware” element was focussed on what would motivate men to attend an event on gender justice issues, and what would optimize the chance of the event being successful in creating productive dialogue. The Gender-Transformative aspect was looking at process that would minimize the sometimes unproductive patterns of communication that are common in male culture, encourage awareness of gender dynamics in communication, and build new skill sets for men to use in future community work on these issues. See [the report](#) for a detailed description of the training.

The second phase was in response to a request from Be the Peace, who had been having difficulties with their “Gather the People” dialogues becoming unproductive and, to some, an unsafe space. These were a follow-up from Gather the Men, a men’s group formed to address ending gender violence. This group had done some profound work to come to a deeper understanding of issues of gender justice. But since they had focussed mostly on content rather than process, they were not well prepared to enter effectively into the multi-gendered dialogue. They had delved deeply into the first two of the engagement questions: “What are the Issues?” and “Why Should I Care?”, but had not yet mastered “What Can I Do?” and “Who Will Help?”. (See the “Outside the Box” case study for an explanation of these stages.)

We partnered with Be the Peace facilitators and also contracted with a gender diversity expert from the [Youth Project](#) to move the perspective beyond the gender binary. This series of three workshops was called [Into the Heart of Gender](#) and gave people experiences and tools that broke through the blocks that had prevented equitable dialogue. Of particular use were the ten components of the [Thinking Environment](#) tools of Nancy Kline. However, basic practice in taking turns, equal time and reflective listening were equally important. See the rough [Facilitator Notes](#) for details.

Key Results:

1. Fifty-one people trained in the [Gender-Aware / Gender-Transformative Facilitation Training](#).
 - a. Participants reported greater confidence in designing events to increase dialogue across genders.
2. Thirty people participated in the [Into the Heart of Gender](#) series.
 - a. Many who had been put off by negative experiences at Gather the People were pleased with the new approach and stayed involved through the series of workshops. There was a new sense of hope for future dialogue.

Outputs:

- Report from [Gender-Aware / Gender-Transformative Facilitation Training](#)
- Poster from [Into the Heart of Gender](#)
- [Agenda and Facilitator notes](#) from Into the Heart of Gender

Key Lessons Learned:

1. One of the key challenges in engaging men in gender justice issues is helping them become conscious of the way in which gender conditioning may have influenced their patterns of behaviour, in particular their way of communicating, that may compromise their ability to do effective work in collaboration with other genders. Since these patterns are not conscious, exercises and processes that bring them into light and begin to transform them are needed.
2. You cannot just stop a behaviour. It has to be replaced by something else. And the practice of replacing it needs to be consistent and long term to be effective.
3. Education on the issues is a necessary but not sufficient step in engaging men.
4. It is possible to create safer and more effective environments where even people who have had previous negative experiences communicating with one another can come together fruitfully.

Contact:

Ginger McPhee, Executive Director, Chrysalis House Association

PO Box 356 Kentville, NS B4N 3X1

Phone: (902) 679-6544 Fax: (902) 679-2723

ed@chrysalishouseassociation.org

<http://chrysalishouseassociation.org>