

Project “Increasing the awareness of child-centered fathering in order to reduce the risk of harm to children and their mothers caused by domestic violence” 2018-1-EE01-KA204-047115

Dissemination of information about program, with discussions about goals and target groups

This intellectual output first discusses what goals dissemination of information has for the programs that work on social change. Then it discusses examples of target groups and after that different goals with discussions on how dissemination of information has been used with each target group. Previously found good and practices are discussed.

This text is based on NGO-experiences in Finland, research literature on dissemination of information regarding work with domestic violence and discussions with governmental organizations, educational organizations and NGOS.

Why put resources into telling about the program?

When talking to NGOs and businesses that work on the field of social change, the resources allotted to working with others have various meanings. Some simply call it marketing, some social engineering, some cooperation, some public relations, some talk about media manipulation, some like to describe their work as branding, some talk about cultural change, some do networking some just say they want to help and use resources to make that easier.

All these approaches have different goals but contain similar elements. One of these elements is the need to make the program known. Every program succeeds or fails according to the cooperation it has with the society that surrounds it. This cooperation can take many forms, but the first basis of this cooperation should be getting the information about the program disseminated in a useful manner.

This dissemination of the information about the program must be planned, and resources must be allocated to this work. It should be regarded as an integral part of the program, that can't stop while the program is going on. The basic resources, whether time, money, organizational prestige or anything else, must not be wasted. Because of this the distribution of knowledge must have distinct goals. These goals should be reachable and work towards creating the change the program and the organization strive to create.

Target groups

The main target groups for dissemination of information are the ones that are needed to implement the change the program strives for. For violence work in Finland, the most important and most often mentioned ones were the following six target groups:

- 1) Government and ministries
- 2) Local authorities
- 3) Ngos
- 4) News organizations
- 5) Society at large
- 6) Customers and their families

Project “Increasing the awareness of child-centered fathering in order to reduce the risk of harm to children and their mothers caused by domestic violence” 2018-1-EE01-KA204-047115

Government and ministries are the highest level of governance. In Finland these are ruled by a coalition of parliamentary parties. These governments change every four years, but most parties have long-term goals that does not change rapidly.

Most of the actual work is done by civil servants that can have decades-long careers and because of this have some hold on the long-term plans that ministries work for. They inform the ministers and are responsible for the final implementation of laws and ordinances that Finnish parliament (led by government coalition) decrees.

The political parties and ministries are essential because they work on legislation and its implementation. These are the slowest things to change, but also have the most widespread effect in society, both directly and as ripple-effect. Because of this the information about the programs should be disseminated among different levels of government.

Special care should be taken to inform the ministries and officials that concentrate on the issues of the program. The usual examples are the ones that work on welfare, judiciary, internal security and criminal sanctions.

It should be noted that if opportunity rises and interest overlap, others can be engaged too. For example, in Finland the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Education have been involved with programs that seek to decrease the amount of domestic violence.

Local authorities are local governing bodies. These are distinguished from others by their powers that are based on legislation. For the work with violence, the ones that are usually mentioned are the educational system, local justice system, health care and social work.

These actors have both local knowledge and power to make decisions that will affect the perpetrators of violence, victims of violence and the people around them. They also shape local policies and how the violence is discussed and worked with. Because of these things the local authorities should be given information about the programs that work to diminish the violence in society. If the program can become cooperative partner with local authorities, it is much more likely to succeed and be taken seriously.

The main downside of working with local authorities is that they may be averse to taking any extra responsibilities or non-mandatory work. They already have their plates full. Because of this the information should be catered to them so that they can readily see the benefits of cooperation.

The same could be said about the work with various **non-governmental organizations** (NGOs). They should be made feel that the information about the program will make their work easier. If they feel that work is a burden for them, unethical or simply not useful, they are not likely to take the information about the program very seriously or act in a useful manner.

Most of the NGOs that work with issues of violence have some particular issue that they work with and cooperation can be easy to establish as long as the programs are not stepping on each other’s toes. If the programs have for example different target audiences or different geographic locations, they are less likely to have issues with each other.

Project “Increasing the awareness of child-centered fathering in order to reduce the risk of harm to children and their mothers caused by domestic violence” 2018-1-EE01-KA204-047115

Different religious organizations should also be accounted for when thinking about non-governmental organizations that work with families and violence. Most of the religious organizations do various work for the betterment of society. Programs can find issues that the religious organization and the program agree on. Work on domestic violence reduction is usually one of these issues.

News organizations are usually in need of noteworthy news with new insights into different societal issues. Programs that work on these issues are usually good sources for news organizations. The information given to them should be concise, informative and contain enough human-interest viewpoint that they can see how they can create a news story out of that information.

If a program can reliably give both good information and good interviews, news organization tend to stick those organizations. Because of this is a good idea to keep on giving information about the program, its progress and new ideas regularly to news organizations.

Society at large is one of the vaguest and least approachable target audiences. It is reached through other target audiences and it is likely to be least interested in knowing about the program in detail. At the same time changing the opinions of the society at large and having enough presence in the society that the program will be known about if it is needed is essential for every program.

Because of this every program should work on disseminating information about it to society at large, but at the same time most of the resources should not be put to this use. The ratio of resources used and impact that this work has usually not been great enough.

Customers and their families are the core target audience for every program. This audience is primarily reached by having enough of a presence that when problems arise, the information about the program will reach this audience. Usually this is done by working with the all the other aforementioned parties, having enough web presence and building trust among the core audience by successful work so that good word-of-mouth will bring in customers in the long run.

Goals

The strategic goal of the dissemination of the information should always be about the main goals of the program. When working on reduction of violence, the main goal is always to find the ways by which the violence will be prevented in the long run.

The long-term strategic goals are essential to keep in mind, but in everyday use the tasks are usually guided by tactical short-term goals. These aim to create the groundwork for the strategic goals in a more manageable form.

When talking to NGOs, reading their materials and research on dissemination of information, the tactical level tasks are a multitude. The following are just some of the most important ones that are mentioned in most discussions and materials. In discussions these tactical three goals were usually described as making

Project “Increasing the awareness of child-centered fathering in order to reduce the risk of harm to children and their mothers caused by domestic violence” 2018-1-EE01-KA204-047115

the program and its viewpoints more widely known and accepted, but when asked to clarify, these three goals were among the described ones:

- 1) Getting participants into the program
- 2) Creating cooperation and finding synergies
- 3) Influencing the public opinion and legislation

We'll go through all these goals, considering different target groups and how information about the program should be disseminated to them.

Getting participants into the program

Getting participants into the program is the basic lifeline for all programs that work on violence reduction. The program may be as good as any other, but if the potential participants or people around them cannot find the program, the program is doomed.

In short-term, the most relevant parties to get the information about program to are the local ones. In practice this means concentrating on local authorities, NGOs, news organizations and potential participant with their families.

When programs seek the potential participants, they must spend only targeted resources. Usually this means marketing directly to only the target group, whether through meeting targeted audiences wherever it can be met, using targeted social media presence or using other forms of advertisement.

Participants are finding the programs more and more through web searches. Because of this clear and regularly updated social media presence in those medias that the target audience uses is vital to reaching them.

The local authorities and NGOs are usually the first cooperative partners that the program will need. They need clear information about the program, that lays out what they can get from the program and how it will help them. Usually this attained best by having short marketing materials and meeting people working on same issues regularly. After they are certain that the program will help people and make their work easier, the local authorities and NGOs can distribute materials about the program, recommend it and refer participants into the program.

News organizations are a route to get boost into participation. After every larger appearance in the media, the participation will go up. Because of this good and regular communication with media is useful for programs. This can be attained best by catering clear new ideas or progress reports with human interest perspective to media. The program needs to make the information it gives to news an easy product to use.

The program can use the news media boost to time its participation numbers. For example, if there is a regular decrease in numbers at some part of the year, this boost can be used just before this time to avoid the decrease.

Project “Increasing the awareness of child-centered fathering in order to reduce the risk of harm to children and their mothers caused by domestic violence” 2018-1-EE01-KA204-047115

Boost effect is not in proportion to the number of ideas that the program gives to the media. Several ideas get about the same amount of attention as one does. In Finland the programs have begun to divide their reports and ideas into smaller parts, which they then cater to news media one at the time. The results have been excellent, as the total effective attention gained for the program has gone up. The effect has also been prolonged.

Government and ministries can only bring people into program by passing legislation that makes the programs mandatory to attend or makes their operation. This is long-term work and should not be prioritized during

The society at large can bring in participants, but this will happen slowly and mainly through working on other work. The dissemination of information about the program apparently must reach a certain basic level of recognizability to get the word-of-mouth going on. This is easier to accomplish when there are already successes and there is clear multilevel cooperation going on around the program. After this the name recognition for the program is sufficient to get participation simply by continuing its work.

Creating cooperation and finding synergies

Cooperation and synergies are usually essential for every program. Almost no program tries to help all the audiences with all their problems. No workforce will know everything or have time to research every subject. Because of this every program will need to form a cooperative network, keep it alive and renew it regularly.

Governmental bodies are usually cooperating with different programs to promote the most effective programs, learn from them and maybe have some of them brought in for national use. If any program can get governmental support or funding, this can help other cooperation immensely. Because of this, the political and bureaucratic elements of society should be met with regularly and their needs of information should be addressed.

Having regular discussion with politicians is of course important and if done early enough in their careers, may bring benefits later as the program is more trustworthy to them. The program should also have regular discussions with bureaucrats and party officials. These people may have more time and last longer in their positions than politicians do.

Local authorities are a key part of the legitimacy of the program, especially when working with violence. There needs to be trust and regular communication with local authorities, so that they can see why they should cooperate with the program. For this the program should have its ethical guidelines and basic structure of its services readily available for them. Showing that the program is clearly targeting the right problems and that the program has practical solution for those problems is essential.

The main thing to show to NGOs is that the demarcation lines between programs is clear. If the programs have the same target audience and try to solve the same problems, finding synergies can be hard. In Finland there have been NGOs that after decades have only found cooperation after merging together as a larger organization, just because the boundaries of the work have not been clear. If the lines on the other hand have been drawn and the programs know how their work differentiates, programs with quite similar objectives have found cooperation easy to accomplish.

Project “Increasing the awareness of child-centered fathering in order to reduce the risk of harm to children and their mothers caused by domestic violence” 2018-1-EE01-KA204-047115

Having clear target group, clear geographical area, clear problem to solve and defined services helps. Even if even one of these is different enough, synergies and cooperation can be found between NGOs.

News organizations have clear synergies with programs that seek to reduce violence. The programs need publicity and news organizations need material for their medias. The programs can provide this material and this material will usually get through to medias.

It is noteworthy that most news organizations are doing their work in a faster cycle than before. In Finnish experience the new organizations used to be able to allocate time for reading reports and going to various press conferences. This time has diminished and the need to format the information for news organizations in shorter format has gone up.

The news organizations also have need for material for web-based material that was not needed in past decades. The programs that can give interviews and provide graphics (i.e. graphs, pictures of groups, information packages) for the articles get more media time. Making things easy for news organizations pays off.

Society at hard to reach cooperation and synergies. Violence is usually something that people do not want to think about and that is hidden. Even fundraising from general public usually only succeeds if the stories that are told about the program have a clear message of right and wrong, providing information about the benefits of the program. The campaigns need to be both heartfelt and show the impact that giving the program money will have. For violence perpetrator programs the evidence for the effectiveness of the program may be readily available, but making the program seem likable or personally worthwhile can be hard. This maybe could be done by pointing the advantages of the program to others. In programs with family aspect like Caring Dads the benefits for the other family members - especially children - could work this way.

Customers and their families can be part of the cooperative network around the program. They may provide feedback. They may be available for interviews with the media, although the anonymity of the customers should be prioritized. They may work as volunteers around the program, if there are opportunities for that.

Influencing the public opinion and legislation

Influencing public opinion and legislation are longest term goals the programs have. These goals may take decades to reach and they usually are not the first priority of any program that is just starting. Reaching the position to make these changes is easier when the program has experience and success to show. The experience usually hones the program and shows what changes are locally the most important ones and how these changes can be handled.

The public opinion changes a very slow pace. Some changes in attitudes can take even generations. Fortunately, changing people’s behaviour by changing what they perceive to be acceptable changes much faster. This change in behaviour can be attained by for example having regular discussions in media about violence and framing these discussions so that people begin to consider their violent behaviour.

Changes in laws are also effective in framing what the society finds acceptable. These changes are usually slow but can sometimes be more forward-thinking than the society itself is. The changes between laws

Project “Increasing the awareness of child-centered fathering in order to reduce the risk of harm to children and their mothers caused by domestic violence” 2018-1-EE01-KA204-047115

sometimes happen faster than the changes in opinion, although usually the laws only change after the public is ready for these changes.

Governmental institution can be working for the changes by laws and degrees, education or local experiments. Programs can play a part in all of these and should seek to have regular communication with politicians and bureaucrats who have interest in violence reduction in some ways.

Unfortunately, the Finnish experience is that the changes in laws have only happened slowly and only after there have been numerous experiences from other countries to show. The discussions for the changes have usually had alarmist tone, that has had both concerns that have real basis and concerns that have been baseless and unhinged. Both should be addressed with respect and knowledge by programs that work for or against the changes. Knowing how similar laws have worked in other countries and giving concrete examples has worked.

It is vital to engage not only the parties that are in power at the time, but also those who are in opposition. The government parties probably have the least time and have the most people trying to influence them. Because of this talking to opposition parties can be easier and more effective. In most democracies the opposition parties will be in power at some point and bring in the ideas that they have honed while in opposition.

Local authorities are vital in changing the local opinion about violence. The local law enforcement, education system, social welfare and health care system all form a network that forms the opinions about violence and families, even if they do not acknowledge this. All of these instances should be contacted and used for forming the opinions of the public.

Ngos can form networks that work to change public opinion and legislation. This networking can create change in a much faster pace than any organization or program could do alone. The cooperation can be informal or formal, but it should be a goal for every organization working to reduce violence in society.

The easiest way the network can begin to work for the common goals is to begin bringing up the same topics and supporting the changes the network seeks to do. The common ground should be found. After that supporting each other in public and working towards common goals becomes easier.

The most common ways the NGOs work together are the publicity campaigns and the statements made together. Publicity campaigns in their easiest form can be just addressing the same issues regularly in similar ways through different medias and bringing up the need for similar change. The most formal way can be statements made together about various law changes.

Religious organizations should be contacted regularly, and their opinion should be known to organizations seeking to change the laws. The work of the religious organizations can be either a great boon or hindrance for work against violence. There have been religious organizations that have taken the frontline in changing the opinions and laws regarding domestic violence. One of the greatest benefits of this can be that the vocal religious groups that usually oppose all legislation against violence are not the only one giving religious insight into the discussion.

Project “Increasing the awareness of child-centered fathering in order to reduce the risk of harm to children and their mothers caused by domestic violence” 2018-1-EE01-KA204-047115

News organizations are essential in changing the public opinion and in giving the stage for various opinions when changes in laws are discussed in public. Their work can be beneficial when disseminating the information that the program wants to use to change the public opinion, but they do also work as gatekeepers, keeping false information out from the public discussions. Because of these roles the work with the media is easiest when the work on public opinion changing is part of regular cooperation and the information is something that news organizations publicize along with other useful media input the program provides for them.

If this cooperation is turning into propaganda without basis, the new media may not want to support the message or will be critical of it. If, on the other hand there is research basis, examples from other places, success from the program and a human-interest aspect to the stories, the media is more likely to accept the message and publish it. Having different organizations provide the same message or different organizations talking about the different aspects of the issue can also be beneficial for getting the message through to the news media.

Society at large plays a key part in changing the laws of the land. If the opinions of the society are against the changes, the politicians are wary of changing the laws. Because of this, the society at large should be addressed, and the public opinion changed.

Changing public opinion usually happens through long term work. Public awareness campaigns that have a noticeable impact on public opinion are rare. Those that are remembered or discussed have usually some new perspective, wordplay, dramatic staging or a way to get many people involved in spreading the campaign in some form. Most campaigns are underwhelming in their long-term impact, so public awareness campaigns should only be used if the key ideas are strong and presented in some exceptional way.

Customers and their families can provide key ingredients to changing the opinion or the law. This can sometimes happen because of the tragedies that have happened that get publicity and sometimes because the people want to be a face for the change.

Unfortunately, this cooperation happens rarely when working with perpetrators of violence. They do not want to speak publicly about their situation and because of the possible consequences it would be unethical for a program to push them to do so.

Made by Joonas Kekkonen

Development and Training Manager

19.05.2020

MISSAKIT RY

Annankatu 16 B 28 00120 Helsinki

puh. 09 6126 620

miessakit@miessakit.fi