

Child Abuse Prevention Campaign Learning History

Organizations like ours try to learn from our experiences, both the successful and not so successful ones. This is a way of assessing our effectiveness and sharing information. It is an important process for the growth of any organization. In doing so, we have recorded some of our learning process around the concept of a “learning history.”

We went back to the source of our Child Abuse Prevention Campaign Initiative -- the people who created it, those who developed the concepts and formed the process for driving it and those who helped to implement and manage it. We tried to capture and convey the experience and insights of these people. The result of this new form of assessment, a learning history, is put forth on the pages that follow. We believe that what we have learned will help you to develop and implement a successful Child Abuse Prevention Campaign for your community or organization.

Memorial Hospital staff members are more than happy to answer any questions you may have regarding this process. Please feel free to call us at (219) 284-7115.

Phil Newbold
CEO, Memorial Hospital/Health System

The Source

In late 1990, administrators and physicians at Memorial Hospital of South Bend were faced with the frustration of treating the injuries of physically abused infants and children. Simply treating the medical needs of these children seemed far removed from addressing the root causes of what brought them to the hospital in the first place. Even though the frequency of children arriving in need of care wasn't higher than national projections for a city the size of South Bend, a closely spaced series of

deaths resulting from abuse had physicians saying, “This isn’t why I went into medicine.”

Dr. Bob White was one of these physicians. He estimates that the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit of Memorial Hospital might see three to four cases of severe child abuse a year. “That doesn’t sound like a lot,” said Dr. White, “but they are the toughest – absolutely the toughest – cases for nurses and doctors to take care of...Every time we would get one of those [cases] we would promise ourselves that we’ve got to do something.”

And they have.

Memorial has always embraced a broad outlook of community health, and the Hospital’s role in health promotion has focused on many aspects of development and education, rather than a narrow view of treatment. The hospital recognizes that a community’s success in strengthening families, supporting education, and addressing issues of poverty and crime are directly linked to the health of its members. Memorial has strived to be an active partner in community improvement. For them, the frightening issue of child abuse in patients was an opportunity to look at a larger picture, one that begins far outside hospital walls.

Hospital staff met with administrators to brainstorm projects that might address child abuse. Prevention was the common theme of this process, as participants recognized all too well that treating injuries inflicted on young people from abuse just seemed to bring to light the pain of a child too late. Dr. White and others emphasized the feeling of helplessness that can overtake a hospital staff member involved in a child abuse case, and that just beginning to talk about how the hospital could do more than simply treat the injuries of abuse after the fact was an affirming step.

After consultation with representatives from a number of community agencies, hospital administrators decided to fund an ad campaign that would focus on the prevention of child abuse. Thirty thousand dollars was set aside, and Memorial commissioned its advertising agency, McDonald, Davis and Associates to move ahead and develop creative concepts for a campaign that would call attention to a crucial problem and inspire others to take action.

National Objectives:

† Memorial will share the campaign with other hospitals or businesses who would be willing to fund the placement of the message in their own communities;

† Memorial will work with the National Council to Prevent Child Abuse to distribute the materials and gain extensive publicity about the effort, and;

† Memorial will establish itself as a national leader in assisting this effort to perform a valuable public service.

Radio Spot Local Objectives:	Radio Spot
<p>Imagine trying to fight back when you're not even old enough to talk back.</p> <p>* To help increase public awareness of the scope and incident rate of various forms of child abuse.</p> <p>In America, one million children lived in a nightmare. They needed to defend themselves from the very people who were supposed to protect them. But they couldn't. Kids can't fight back. We have to fight for them.</p> <p>* To help educate abusers that what they are doing is wrong and has life-long consequences and</p> <p>One of the most important ways we can help is to educate people on how to be better parents. Education doesn't mean preaching or punishing. It means helping parents find ways to change their behavior. Here are some starting points</p> <p>* To help educate bystanders who may suspect or have knowledge of an abusive situation so they will act on the information and report to the proper authorities.</p> <p>If you ever feel like lashing out, stop. Count to one hundred. Close your eyes and imagine how you would feel if this was happening to you. Call a friend. Always remember that children are people. They are just like you, only more fragile. They behave in certain ways because of certain needs. Just like you do. At times, what they need conflicts with what you need. When that happens, remember...</p>	<p>(SOFT MUSIC TRACK UNDER)</p> <p>Listen to what many people have done to stop child abuse lately.</p> <p>(MUSIC STOPS, LONG PAUSE OF SILENCE)</p> <p>Many of us have kept silent. Hoping it would go away. But keeping silent about child abuse is what keeps hurting children, and the abusers. If you think you need help yourself, you're not alone. Being a parent isn't easy for anyone. Maybe you never learned that there's another way to treat your children. If you're afraid of what you might do, now's the time to break the silence. Talk about your problem. Help comes when you start talking. Or, if you suspect someone else is abusing a child, it's time to speak out. You'll be helping them as well as the child. Child abuse hurts everyone. But it can be prevented. Call CANCO, the Child Abuse and neglect Coordinating Office in South Bend at 232-3344. If we're going to break the cycle of child abuse, we have to break the silence...</p>

Given the value the campaign might have for the South Bend area, Memorial Hospital administrators saw the benefit of spreading the campaign to other communities. As a result, the program is advertised to be used anywhere in the country. Other organizations interested in sponsoring a child abuse prevention campaign pay a shipping fee and whatever cost might arise from placing the newspaper and radio ads in their market. Materials from the campaign can be ordered by phone, or by sending in a coupon from a flyer used in the marketing of the project.

The Message

The overall theme of the Child Abuse Prevention and Education Campaign is "To Break the Cycle of Child Abuse – We Have to Break the Silence." The campaign includes radio, newspaper and billboard messages.

The ads address child abusers, as well as the general public. They work to heighten awareness about what child abuse is and its frequency, as well as offer steps potential abusers might consider employing to avoid situations that can get out of hand. Decidedly persuasive without resorting to tactics that might arouse anger or outrage, the ads contain a variety of perspectives.

“People who abuse kids are hardly ever malevolent, evil people,” said Dr. White, “They’re just people who lose control. And they’re good people 99.9 percent of the time, who let their temper get away from them...It’s a fine line between somebody who has justifiable anger and keeps it under control, and somebody who loses it.”

This attitude of understanding the complexities that can lead to abuse stands out, not just among Memorial’s staff, but in the message of the ads as well. A large focus of many of the radio spots is to encourage people to talk about problems they may have, or speak out on a child or family’s behalf. Recognizing the natural challenges every family faces, the ads then go on to promote healthy outlets to resolving frustrations.

The Process

Once the campaign was introduced in South Bend, the idea of offering the program to other areas came quite naturally. Hospital President, Philip Newbold said, “We hope this campaign will be implemented all over the country. The message is universal and we’re pleased to offer a first step for organizations that want to take a stand against child abuse.”

Any hospital or corporation interested in sponsoring the campaign in available markets simply contacts Memorial. Three camera ready print ads, one pre-recorded radio spot, and billboard artwork will be shipped for a \$40 duplication and shipping fee. Through their experience with the project, the hospital also shares suggestions about launching a child abuse prevention campaign:

Getting the Buy-In

Diane Stover, Vice President, recognizes that the Child Abuse Prevention Campaign in South Bend originated with the people at the heart of the hospital’s mission – doctors, nurses, and other staff who were dealing directly with cases of abuse. This support helped the initiative to drive itself in many ways. Considerations for other communities looking at a similar campaign would include investigating how to involve people close to the issue. Getting this involvement not only creates a well-informed and diverse team, but spreads support of the campaign. It lets people sense too, the broad concern surrounding the issue, a topic that’s easy to generalize as something no one wants to talk about.

Members of Memorial’s staff have also been involved in the Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect, a group of agency, community, and medical representatives who have come together around the common goal of reducing incidents of abuse and neglect against children. Dr. White, a Task Force member, cites participation as a productive way to look at the issues and avoid turfism. A neutral group that meets in space provided by the hospital, staff involvement in the Task Force has added perspective to the fight against child abuse and strengthened commitment to the Memorial’s campaign. Most importantly, it has continued to fuel larger prevention and

education efforts that help families.

Campaign Kick-Off Tips

Considering kick-off events to launch your ad campaign and add to its support base from the onset:

Invite news media to preview the materials before the campaign starts officially

Consider holding a reception that might include your organization's board and administrators. Invite professionals in the area who deal with child abuse issues such as: law enforcement agencies, politicians, child protective agencies, school officials, etc.

Consider a special speaker to review local concerns before unveiling the actual creative materials.

Campaign Funding Tips

Approach local radio, newspaper, and outdoor vendors about the possibility of supporting this campaign as a public service announcement.

Offer co-sponsorship positioning throughout the materials for those who are willing to assist in funding the media plan.

If you are unable to negotiate completely free placement, you may be successful at gaining additional exposure by requesting two for one arrangement, etc.

Campaign Tracking Tips

A telephone referral number is invaluable to offer people a chance to find help and prevent child abuse as soon as possible. In South Bend, the number advertised connects callers to the Community Resource Center, an agency that has operated an area helpline for years. The helpline's staff and volunteers were given specific information about how to handle callers wanting information or assistance with issues of child abuse. In our experience, the Community Resource Center was a local asset already in place to support the Child Abuse Prevention Campaign, but every community might design aspects of its campaign differently. Calls could be received in a department in your hospital, or another local agency that is trained to field child abuse inquiries and make connections to child protective agencies, law enforcement, or counseling centers.

Whoever does handle phone inquiries should attempt to log information that may be helpful for programming later on: number of calls received during the campaign; type of call; sex of the caller; zip code, and other information that might be useful as your campaign evolves.

Issues of confidentiality should always be considered when tracking information. In some cases, not all information that would be beneficial for planners to know can be obtained.

The Results

The challenges in quantitatively assessing the results of a child abuse prevention campaign are numerous, and in some cases, insurmountable. Dr. White and others admit to such difficulties as deciphering what an increase in reporting might mean (more actual cases or simply more awareness?), or trying to measure public awareness or education. If the campaign is truly one of prevention, then there will never be a way of showing how many families were held back from incidents of abuse because of the ads.

The call volumes have ranged from 10 - 40 per month with some callers reporting that they themselves have been an abuser. Diane Stover commented, "We never had any goals for call volumes. We only hoped that even one call a year would make the entire effort worthwhile."

Dr. White points to a priceless benefit of the campaign among staff: "...As much as anything else this program has provided people who work at the hospital a feeling that we are not helpless, that we are not just going to be seeing the same scenarios over and over again. It's very psychologically beneficial [for staff] to know that the hospital and community are trying to do something to change this. And I think it makes all of us feel better as a community too, to know that we're not standing by watching the slaughter of our children without trying to do what we can. Maybe it's just lighting one candle against the darkness for the time being, but I do think it's something that will grow on itself in the course of a generation."

And in the course of a next generation, Dr. White anticipates, levels of public awareness about child abuse will increase. Changing attitudes is a slow process, but ultimately, its generations of many children who will own that benefit.