



SVS Prevention Innovation Fund 2017-18 -- FINAL REPORT

Pink Snowsuit Project Reflection/Evaluation

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What We Did

We created three resources: a discussion guide that was modified for different groups, a Simple Rules guide, and an online resource bank.

We organized and/or facilitated 11 groups with 6 community groups:

- Native Council
- Emotional Labour
- Pop-up at Second Story
- Petite Riviere
- Better Together Family Resource Centre
- Fathers
- Gender Diversity Group
- Grandparents
- Zine Workshops
- "Parenting in the Digital Age: Public Forum"

We organized 6 kinds of groups:

1. **Peer groups who were already known to each other.** The project was based on assembling groups of 5-8 parents in kitchens and living rooms. These groups tended to be more intimate than the others.
2. **Groups who met within another community organization.** Two groups met in host organizations. The Native Council hosted a day-long session, and Better Together used our materials to inform a conversation into the regular programming of their father's group. Both of these organizations were willing to work with us, but also very busy with their own programming and meeting the specific needs of their organizations.
3. **Groups who assembled around a specific issue.** Some parents were easier to organize around a specific topic such as gender diversity, grandparenting, or emotional labour. This gave the groups some focus as well as a more open texture as people were welcomed based on interest in the topic.

Challenges in organizing busy parents, prompted additional strategies to engage parents:

4. **A Public Forum.** A forum, Parenting in the Digital Age allowed us to respond to parents' anxiety about social media and screen time. The online response and the high rate of attendance was very positive.
5. **A Pop-up Group** was organized to bring together parents who had shown interest but couldn't be incorporated in other groups. They were advertised as open to anyone who was interested, during the day, in a space that was child-friendly. Though conversation was engaged, this group only met once.
6. **Zine Workshops.** Responding to how significant a role technology plays in family life, these hands-on zine workshops offered parents time to learn and create along with their children, prompting rich conversations. An inter-generational sharing of experiences about gender stereotypes was also productive when we were making our collages. Conversation was laid-back and light-hearted, which participants seemed to enjoy.

Reflection

Through observations, discussions with group leaders, and survey responses, I offer these thoughts:

Successes:

1. **Parents want to talk** about gender stereotypes and gender-based violence. In general, they felt satisfied by the time they spent in our meetings.
2. **Several parents noted that the conversations improved communication in the home**, either with their children or their partner. Most parents also demonstrated an increased ability to articulate the issues and share their experiences, ideas, and strategies with others.
3. **When groups really ‘clicked’, parents felt a deep level of sharing and fellowship.** Several friendships and feminist ‘squads’ have formed as a direct result of this program. This kind of program has the potential to create networks of support and better equip communities to respond to crises when they arise.
4. **Some parents are already having conversations and sharing resources beyond the bounds of this program.** We have helped parents become more confident talking about these issues, and they have reported that they are bringing them into other public spaces, social networks, and institutions.
5. **Despite the difficulties organizing men, some conversations did happen.** Though the men did not meet in the way we had envisioned (with at least one meeting facilitated by our coordinator) two groups have been activated.
6. **The zine workshops have jump-started the community-art practice of a local artist.** Flavia Testa Nasrin will continue to spark feminist conversation in the community with zine workshops, probably with the help of an art therapy student, whom she met through our workshops.

Challenges:

1. **Parents are busier than we anticipated with the project design.** It was very difficult to organize parents to take time out for these discussions. The project was competing with many other commitments including sports, music lessons, vacations, jobs, care work, and commitments to other community issues. It is worth pointing out that several key parents who had intended to host conversations were struggling to keep their school open, staff their school library after funding cuts, sustain a community art space, advocate for reproductive services, or take care of an ill parent, often while holding down multiple jobs and/or taking care of children. Millennial parents are highly stressed and over-burdened in the current socio-economic climate.
2. **Some parents found the subject intimidating.** The fear of judgement may have given some parents pause in prioritizing the sessions. One parent talked on social media about the anxiety created by society’s high expectations for mothers. Another parent said that a barrier to participation was ‘opening up.’ It is important to note that this was feedback from men and women who were very interested in the topic.

Though it is clear that many parents/guardians need supportive peer relationships, creating or sustaining them through a charged topic can be intimidating. One potential host confided feeling like they *should* have conversations about parenting and gender but worried about compromising friendships that were important and knew that talking about their children’s behaviour was risky.

3. **The frame of the project was overwhelming.** The high turnout at the forum on parenting in the digital age demonstrated in part that parents are willing to attend sessions about high-priority concerns. The pink and blue (gender) frame, which asks parents to pay attention to everyday interactions may have felt too big, intractable, unrealistic and unrelated.
4. **Serving parents/guardians of children of all ages was ambitious.** Concerns and needs of parents/guardians differ vastly according to the age of their children. Anticipating and meeting the concerns and needs of parents/guardians of children of all ages was one reason that groups were complicated to organize. That said, feedback from surveys, as well as observations, suggests that multi-age groups were satisfying and generative for parents.
5. **The part-time/short-term nature of the project.** Given the nature of many women's home responsibilities and work lives, piecing together many part-time jobs, it took more time than expected for communications back and forth with hosts and community organizations.
6. **Organizing men requires different strategies.** Many women in groups asked whether men were also 'doing the work' and why the groups were divided by gender. We had made the decision early on to separate male and female identified parents due to BTPI's previous experiences with the volatile nature of mixed gender groups talking specifically about gender. Though I was in touch with men who felt these conversations were important, we were not able to convene men's groups directly under the umbrella of this project. Most said that they wanted to but were too busy, and there may have been some reluctance to engage in topics regarding fathering with a female facilitator they didn't know.

Interestingly, feedback from a fathers group articulated a perception that progress on gender equality mostly happens with women in the lead, with funding for their organizations, with a bias for prioritizing women's issues, to the exclusion of men's issues.