

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF
EDINA

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE POSITION UPDATE

PREVENTING VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

April, 4 2020

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Introduction

Issues of violence permeate our daily lives. Acts of violence seem to be an everyday part of our news cycles — assaults, shootings, bullying, robberies, and the list goes on. Preventing violence and abuse have been a focus of the League of Women Voters for more than twenty-five years. In the early 1990's, the Minneapolis League of Women Voters published two comprehensive reports examining how violence and abuse attitudes are fostered and unwittingly perpetrated in all aspects of our communities including religious, business, legal, medical, educational, civic and recreational organizations. They asked “what needs to be changed?” to prevent violence and abuse and proposed ways to promote healthier families, individuals and community involvement aimed at identifying and rooting out causes of violence and abuse.

The Edina Chapter of LWV (LWVE) has long supported programs within our community to prevent violence and abuse and to serve those who have been victimized. LWVE's position statement **BREAKING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE** endorses educational programs that promote self-esteem, healthy sexuality, problem solving, positive expression of emotions, non-violent conflict resolution and respect for others as a means to prevent violent and abusive behaviors.

About this update

At the 2019 LWVE Annual Meeting, members voted to survey pertinent organizations in the community to gather their present observations and

experiences with the level of violence and abuse in our community today and what actions are being taken or need to be taken to further the goal of lessening levels of violence and abuse in Edina.

Action Steps Taken

A committee consisting of LWVE Members Jane Eaves-Raich (Chair), Barbara Barry and Sheila Bjorklund reached out to the Minneapolis League of Women Voters to obtain copies of their 1990's Studies.¹ After review of these studies, the committee composed an introductory letter, a brief ten question survey and identified eleven community organizations to query.² The committee sent the letter and survey electronically to four religious organizations, the Chamber of Commerce, the Chief of Police and City Attorney, the Edina Schools' Health Services Coordinator, School Board Chair, and Representatives of the Boy Scouts, and Girl Scouts in Edina in early January 2020. One survey was returned. A second electronic mailing and paper mailing was done in early February 2020. Again, there was a minimal response. Follow up telephone calls were made to the non-responding organizations. Four additional responses were obtained. Other telephone calls were not returned.

Responses of Organizations Surveyed

Pastor at Edina Morningside Community Church

Pastor reported:

- There have been fewer incidents of violence in the aftermath of the #me too and #Church too publicity.
- A Safer Church plan was instituted that included using methods that included regular training and background checks for those working with vulnerable populations.
- Suggested that community needs further advocacy in the area of awareness of cultural change until the importance of safer communities and practices that foster them is no longer in question.

¹ Breaking the Cycle of Violence: A Focus on Primary Prevention Efforts; LWVM, April 1990 and Policy Report Update April 1995.

² See Letter and Survey attached. See List of community organizations contacted.

Reverend at St. Albans Episcopal Church

The Reverend was reached by phone and indicated there have been no issues of personal violence that he is aware of in their faith community. He did express concern about a few recent instances near the church of breaking of car windows and theft of contents.

Father of St. Patrick's Catholic Church

Father was reached by phone. He indicated that he has only been in the parish for 8 months but in that time has not been aware of any instances of violence or domestic abuse in his faith community.

Chief of Police Edina

The Chief was reached by phone. He indicated generally that violent crime has not really been on the increase in Edina in recent years. A little more specifically, he noted:

- Domestic and assault calls – There has been a small increase over the last 10 years, but it has not been growing a lot.
- Drug overdose – Not an issue of violence, but included here since he noted it. Edina saw 1 heroin overdose in 2018 and 4 in 2019.
- Mental health crisis calls – The Chief spent much of our conversation noting that these types of calls have increased significantly in recent years. He said his officers have had training in de-escalating such circumstances and have been doing a good job at it. He noted three concerns with the increasing number of this type of call. One is the amount of staff resources required - it takes 2-4 officers going together and usually takes several hours per call. Second is that, while officers are well-trained, they are not mental health professionals and that a crisis mental health response team may better serve these situations. He said Hennepin County now has a few such teams for the entire county. He sees a need for the County to allocate more resources to begin ramping that up. And third, he expressed a concern that more facilities are needed for people in crisis.

Issues with this update

1. Responses to the survey were slow. Initial surveys were sent electronically in early January 2020. Additional surveys were sent both electronically and by mail in early February. No additional surveys were returned. Follow-up

telephone calls were made in March. Messages were left explaining in detail the purpose of the call. Four calls were returned. Six calls were not returned.

2. Identifying a contact person in some of the community organizations was more difficult than expected. It was hoped that the initial contact person would refer the survey to a more appropriate respondee if it was not them. It does not appear that that happened

Conclusions

1. More community responses are needed to get a reliable sense of the issues of violence and abuse in our community today.
2. The current national public health crisis may be consuming the focus of persons we were attempting to reach.
3. The topic of violence and abuse seems no less important now than it was in 2005. It may be that the timing or approach of our review was not conducive to a more robust response. We would suggest another attempt to review this position in the future that may include:
 - Review of existing community reports such and police and fire reports;
 - Review of reports by City race relations coordinator;
 - A broader range of organizations to include, hospitals, shelters for victims of violence and abuse, other abuse prevention programs;
 - Continued advocacy and education through programs, forums, etc with speakers knowledgeable in the area of violence and abuse.

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