
**Report to
The Vermont Legislature**

**Agency of Human Services Report on the Community
Outreach Plan for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention**

In Accordance with S. 13

Act No. 1: An Act Relating to Improving Vermont's Sexual Abuse Response System

Sec. 11: Community Outreach Plan

Submitted to: Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
House Committee on Human Services

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PURPOSE

In November of 2008, the Senate Committee on Judiciary issued the first draft of its 34-Point Comprehensive Plan for Vermont's Sexual Abuse Response System — developed in response to the tragic abduction, sexual assault, and death of 12-year-old Brooke Bennett in June of 2008.

On February 27, 2009, the Senate and House passed S.13 - AN ACT RELATING TO IMPROVING VERMONT'S SEXUAL ABUSE RESPONSE SYSTEM. It was signed into law on March 17, 2009.

The legislative intent of the act is to increase child sexual abuse prevention efforts, enhance investigations and prosecutions of child sexual abuse, provide sentencing courts with the information necessary to devise appropriate sentences for sex offenders, and improve supervision of sex offenders.

Several initiatives in the act involve educating specific groups of Vermonters about sexual violence. This includes children and youth, child care and school employees/volunteers, and parents and other adults. To help guide these prevention-related efforts and ensure a wide range of perspectives, the Department for Children and Families convened a multi-disciplinary, cross-departmental group in 2008 to develop a comprehensive approach (see appendix one for a list of members). One component of this comprehensive approach is the community outreach plan.

SCOPE OF THE OUTREACH PLAN

The Community Outreach Plan (Act No.1, Section 11) aims to educate parents and adults about, and have them take responsibility for, preventing child sexual abuse. It reads:

“The agency of human services shall work with the sexual violence prevention task force and other appropriate groups to raise community awareness about the nature and extent of child sexual abuse, including the role of adults in protecting children, and to create and implement a community outreach plan. The department for children and families is directed to expand its current outreach program regarding reports of suspected child abuse or neglect to assure public awareness of the need to report risk of harm.

The agency shall report on its progress by November 15, 2009 to the senate committee on health and welfare and to the house committee on human services. The report shall include:

- An update of the agency’s ongoing efforts to raise community awareness of the nature and extent of child sexual abuse in the state, including the status of the community outreach plan;
- A list of the community partners, organizations, and programs that work with children, which the agency has identified as part of the outreach plan; and
- A list of specific strategies that the agency has undertaken or will undertake in furtherance of implementing the community outreach plan.”

THE COMMUNITY OUTREACH WORKING GROUP

DCF Commissioner Steve Dale charged the Community Outreach Working Group with the development of the Community Outreach Plan. Members are listed below:

- Co-Chair: Karen Crowley, Child Victim Treatment Director, Department for Children and Families (DCF) and member of the Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force;
- Co-Chair: Lynn Bruce, Marketing & Outreach Coordinator, DCF;
- Priscilla White, Executive Staff Assistant, Commissioner’s Office, DCF;
- Jim Forbes, Special Investigations Unit Chief, Family Services Division, DCF and member of the Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force;
- Kathleen Horton, Communications Outreach Coordinator, Vermont Department of Health;
- Bethany Pombar, Education and Outreach Coordinator for the VT Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence and member of the Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force;
- Linda Johnson, Executive Director, Prevent Child Abuse Vermont and member of the Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force;
- Jennifer Mitchell, Vice President, Child Lures Prevention;
- Rosemary Webb, Program Development, Child Lures Prevention; and
- Cheryl Patch, former case manager for juvenile and adult sexual offenders.

THE APPROACH

Section 11 of Act One addresses the task of increasing public awareness about the nature and extent of child sexual abuse. The Community Outreach Working Group believes that increased public awareness is an important first step to preventing child sexual abuse, but that the public needs to be moved beyond awareness to changed behaviors. Social norms must change, making it not only socially acceptable but expected, for adults to talk openly about child sexual abuse and to address inappropriate conduct when it occurs. The strategies put forth in this plan begin with public awareness and move toward behavioral change, providing Vermonters simple, effective strategies that can be implemented to decrease the risk of harm and increase the protective factors that help keep children safe. Working in collaboration with our community partners, the ultimate goal is for parents and other adults to take responsibility for protecting children and youth from sexual abuse.

UPDATE ON OUTREACH EFFORTS

Development and Implementation of the Community Outreach Plan:

The Community Outreach Working group met several times to discuss the key elements needed in the outreach plan, including the goals and objectives, target audiences, key messages, and outreach strategies. Following these meetings, drafts of the plan were sent to working group members for their comments. Drafts of the plan were also sent to members of the Act One Steering Group, which includes representatives from the Department of Education, Department for Children and Families (DCF), Agency of Human Services, Department of Health, and the Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force.

In April of 2009, DCF submitted an application for stimulus funds under the Edward Byrne Memorial Competitive Grant. This grant would have allowed us to educate 10,000 Vermont adults using Darkness to Light's evidence-based child sexual abuse prevention program *Stewards of Children*[™], in partnership with government and community-based non-profits. Although we have not yet received a letter informing us that we did not receive the grant, we were not included in the list of grants awarded posted on the Department of Justice's website on October 1, 2009. Therefore we have developed a revised plan, based on available resources (described beginning on page six).

Ongoing DCF Outreach Efforts:

In addition to working on the development and implementation of the community outreach plan, DCF has undertaken the following ongoing outreach efforts:

- Community trainings were held across the state to help community partners better understand differential response and the focus on structured assessment and family engagement.
- The 2008 Vermont Child Abuse and Neglect Report was published in June 2009.
- Outreach materials about the Vermont Child Protection Registry were revised to reflect recent changes in statute and practice. Revised materials were distributed to DCF-Family Services Division district offices, as information in mandated reporter trainings, to organizations that requested, and persons who were the subject of registry checks. Information on the DCF website was updated (http://dcf.vermont.gov/child_protection_registry).
- Outreach materials about reporting suspected child abuse and neglect were revised to reflect changes in statute and practice. Revised materials were distributed to DCF-Family Services Division district offices as information in mandated reporter trainings, to schools, child care facilities and other organizations that include mandated reporters. Information on the DCF website was updated (http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/reporting_child_abuse).
- AHS began rolling out its online training for employees designated as mandated reporters on November 1, 2009 (in response to Section 46 of Act One). Each department within the agency has been given a specific two week block of time for completion. Training of all AHS staff is expected to be completed by February 1, 2010.
- The Family Services Division of DCF continues to conduct face-to-face trainings for local and statewide groups upon request. In the 2009 calendar year to date, 53 face to face trainings have been reported to have been conducted with 1359 participants.

THE COMMUNITY OUTREACH PLAN

Target Audiences:

- Parents/guardians of children under 18; and
- All Vermont adults and older youth.

Goal & Objectives:

Overall Goal:

Parents and other adults will take responsibility for protecting children and youth from sexual abuse.

Objectives:

1. Increase awareness and knowledge of child sexual abuse, including the nature and extent of child sexual abuse, the risks (e.g. child sex offenders and the grooming process), and the signs and symptoms of sexual abuse.
2. Provide target audiences with the knowledge and skills they need to recognize, prevent, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse, including specific strategies for increasing child safety, decreasing risk of harm, and reporting both suspected abuse and concerning behaviors.

Key Messages:

- You can help prevent child sexual abuse. We all have a role to play. Taking action is doable.
- Preventing child sexual abuse is an adult responsibility.
- Preventing child sexual abuse helps ensure the safety, health, and optimal development of our children.
- Child sexual abuse is serious and widespread. It is a crime.
- The greatest risk to children doesn't come from strangers, but from people we know and trust.
- Talk openly about child sexual abuse. Silence gives abusers the advantage.
- Trust your instincts. If something feels wrong, pay attention and do something about it.

<p><u>Outreach Strategy 1 – Connecting People to Resources:</u></p> <p>To ensure people can easily get connected to statewide and community resources related to child sexual abuse issues, 2-1-1 will be promoted as the main number to call.</p> <p>Formal work will begin with 2-1-1 staff in December 2009 to make sure they have the information, training, and resources needed to provide this critical service.</p>	<p>Timeline:</p> <p>Training with 2-1-1 will begin December 2009</p> <p>Service begins January 2010</p>
<p><u>Outreach Strategy 2 - Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Website:</u></p> <p>Develop and maintain a website where parents/adults can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get information about how to keep children safe from sexual abuse; • Find out about and link to community, statewide, and national resources; • Learn how to report suspected child abuse, neglect, and risk of harm; and • Download a free guide to keeping children safe from sexual abuse. <p>Distribution Channels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The website URL will be promoted on related outreach materials. • A web banner will be produced and distributed to other websites to drive traffic to the Child Sexual Abuse Prevention website. 	<p>Timeline:</p> <p>The website will be launched in January 2010; additional resources and links will be added as they become available</p>
<p><u>Outreach Strategy 3 - Radio PSAs:</u></p> <p>Produce several 30- and 60-second radio PSAs about child sexual abuse. The goal is to convey the key messages that preventing child sexual abuse is an adult responsibility and we each have a role to play. The PSAs will drive the audience to dial 2-1-1 or visit the Child Sexual Abuse Prevention website for more information about what <i>they</i> can do to keep children safe.</p> <p>Distribution Channels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radio stations throughout Vermont • The State’s Online Multimedia Center 	<p>Timeline:</p> <p>The PSAs will begin airing by March 2010</p>

<p><u>Outreach Strategy 4 - Television PSA:</u></p> <p>Produce a 30-second and 60-second television PSA about child sexual abuse. The goal is to convey the key messages that preventing child sexual abuse is an adult responsibility and we each have a role to play. The PSAs will drive the audience to dial 2-1-1 or visit the Child Sexual Abuse Prevention website for more information about what <i>they</i> can do to keep children safe.</p> <p>Distribution Channels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public and network television stations throughout Vermont • The State’s Online Multimedia Center • Social media sites such as YouTube and Vimeo 	<p>Timeline:</p> <p>The PSAs will begin airing by March 2010</p>
<p><u>Outreach Strategy 5 – Print Articles:</u></p> <p>We will produce a series of six articles about child sexual abuse in Vermont—each from a different perspective (e.g. from state government, a legislator, and an advocacy group). The articles will also drive the audiences to dial 2-1-1 or go to the Child Sexual Abuse Prevention website for more information.</p> <p>Distribution Channels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly and community newspapers throughout Vermont 	<p>Timeline:</p> <p>We will begin disseminating the articles in early March 2010</p>
<p><u>Outreach Strategy 6 – Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Poster & Rack Card:</u></p> <p>Print 10,000 posters and 200,000 rack cards that will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key messages about keeping children safe from sexual abuse; • The number to call for more information and referral to resources (2-1-1); • The URL of the Child Sexual Abuse Prevention website; and • Information about how to report suspected child sexual abuse in Vermont. <p>Distribution Channels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doctor’s offices, health centers, hospitals, • Schools, childcare centers and providers, • Child advocacy centers, and • Parent-child centers. 	<p>Timeline:</p> <p>Distribution will begin in Spring 2010</p>

<p><u>Outreach Strategy 7 - Resource Guide for Parents:</u></p> <p>Print 10,000 copies of a resource guide for parents that includes information about the nature and extent of child sexual abuse; the grooming process and other predatory behaviors of sex offenders; signs and symptoms of abuse; recognizing the dangers of child sexual abuse; strategies for increasing child safety; and reporting suspected child abuse, neglect, and risk of harm.</p> <p>Distribution Channels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doctor’s offices, health centers, hospitals • Schools, • Childcare centers and providers, • Child advocacy centers, and • Parent-child centers. 	<p>Timeline:</p> <p>Guide under development Fall 2009</p> <p>Distribution will begin in Spring 2010</p>
<p><u>Outreach Strategy 8 – Media Education and Training:</u></p> <p>Design and hold a media training event related to covering child sexual abuse issues. Topics will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The nature and extent of child sexual abuse in Vermont; • Sex offenders who target children; • Preventing child sexual abuse; • The various roles people and organizations have in preventing Child Sexual Abuse; and • Taking a story beyond the headlines. 	<p>Timeline:</p> <p>Starting in Fall 2010</p>
<p><u>Outreach Strategy 9 – Community Coalition Building:</u></p> <p>Explore community coalitions as a sustainable strategy for child protection at the community level. The long-term goal is to initiate the creation of community coalitions, tied into existing resources (e.g. Child Sexual Abuse Response Teams, Children’s Advocacy Centers, and Special Investigative Units) that will support the implementation of community strategies for protecting children from abuse and provide ongoing forums for community members to be educated about Child Sexual Abuse Prevention.</p>	<p>Timeline:</p> <p>Beginning in late 2010, ongoing into 2011</p>

APPENDIX ONE

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN ACT 1 PREVENTION-RELATED EFFORTS

- Stephen Dale Vermont Department for Children and Families - **Chair**
- Karen Ault Kids Are Priority One
- Wendy Baker Orange East Supervisory Union
- Sally Borden KidSafe Collaborative of Chittenden County
- Georgia Cumming Vermont Department of Corrections
- Wendy Davis Vermont Department of Health
- Sheila Duranleau Vermont Department for Children and Families
- Kathy Ferguson Cambridge Elementary Guidance Counselor
- Jeff Francis Vermont Superintendents Association
- Susan Harritt Agency of Human Services, Attorney General's Office
- Linda Johnson Prevent Child Abuse Vermont
- Sally Kerschner Vermont Department of Health
- Chuck Laramie Therapist
- Tammy Leombruno Therapist
- Anne Liske University of Vermont, Anti-Violence Partnership
- Deb Lyons Kids On The Block Vermont
- Donna McAllister Vermont Department of Education
- Jennifer Mitchell Child Lures Prevention
- John Nelson Vermont School Board Association
- Karen Newman Kids On The Block Vermont
- Robin O'Neal Wright Hyde Park Elementary School Nurse
- Jennifer Poehlmann Vermont Center for Crime Victims Services
- Jody Racht Agency of Human Services Attorney General's Office
- Susan Roche University of Vermont, Social Work Department
- Gary Schaedel Vermont Department of Health
- Karen Tronsgard-Scott Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence
- Jan Walker Department for Children and Families
- Rosemary Webb Child Lures Prevention
- Priscilla White Department for Children and Families