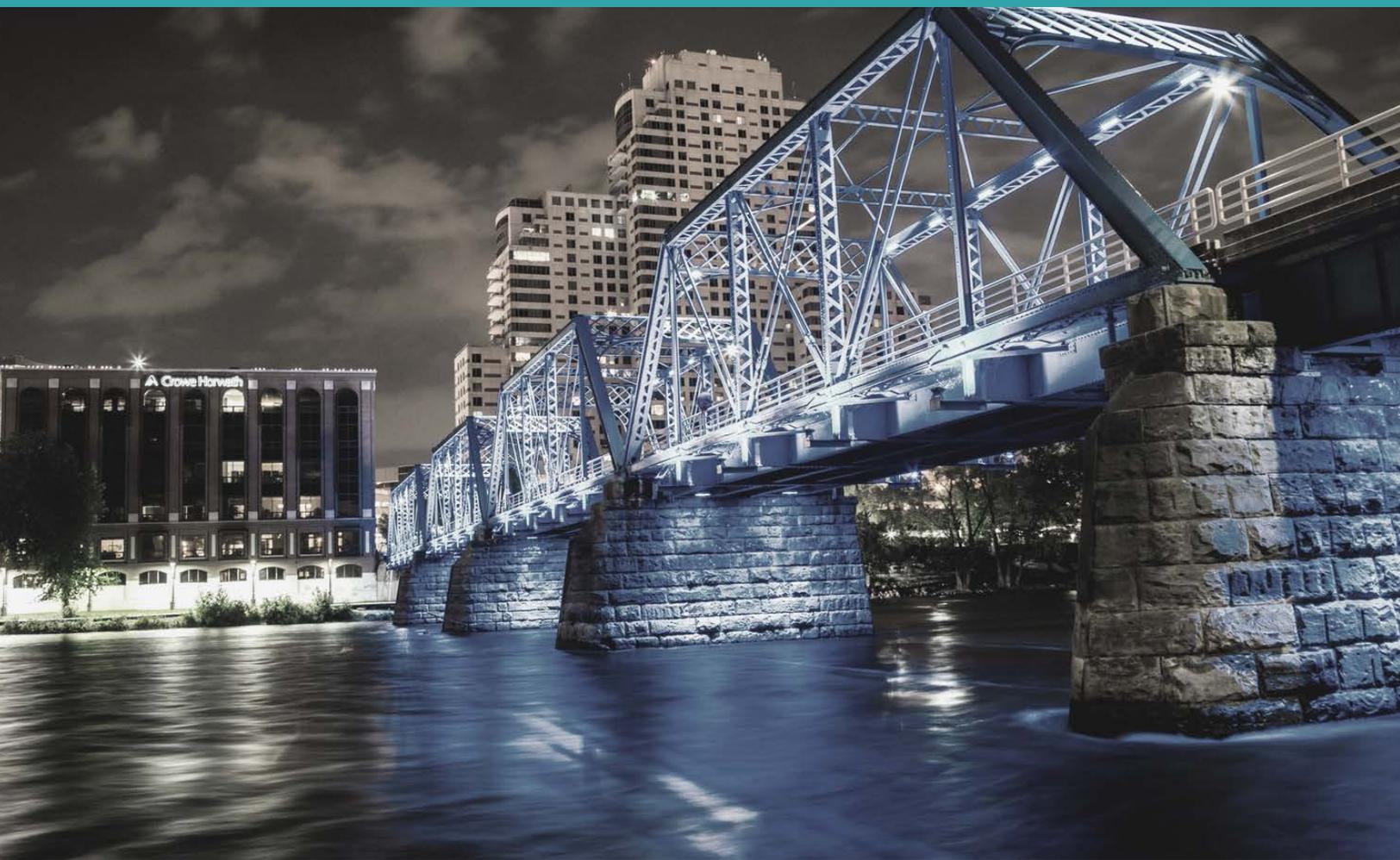


2019 SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH NEWSLETTER

KENT COUNTY SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION ACTION TEAM



INFORMATION FROM...

YWCA WEST
CENTRAL MICHIGAN

KENT COUNTY
HEALTH
DEPARTMENT

PLANNED
PARENTHOOD
OF MICHIGAN

GRAND VALLEY
STATE UNIVERSITY

APRIL IS SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH

ABOUT THE KENT COUNTY SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION ACTION TEAM

The Sexual Assault Prevention Action Team (SAPAT) is a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to the elimination of sexual assault in Kent County, Michigan. Composed of a diverse team of professionals and community members, SAPAT brings passion and energy to the primary prevention of sexual violence.

SAPAT COLLABORATES, EDUCATES, AND CREATES HOLISTIC CHANGE TO ELIMINATE SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN KENT COUNTY, MI.

SAPAT combines the expertise of individuals from many Kent County organizations to provide the community with resources to better understand the dynamics of sexual assault and how as a community, we can prevent sexual assault from occurring altogether.

By focusing efforts on preventing the perpetration of sexual assault, SAPAT helps communities foster environments that are supportive of pro-social youth development, survivors of abuse, and keeps individuals accountable for their actions.

VISIT [SAPAT.ORG/GET-INVOLVED](https://www.sapat.org/get-involved) TO LEARN MORE!

Community involvement is essential to the success of preventing sexual violence. SAPAT is thankful to be a part of Kent County- a community rich in resources, supportive neighbors, and individuals passionate about creating a just and better world. There are many ways to support SAPAT. Become an active participant in preventing sexual violence today!



TEACHING CONSENT: WHY IT'S IMPORTANT AND HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT WITH YOUR CHILDREN.

AARON TOFFOLI, CSP-R | PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATOR
KENT COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT



We hear about consent often in the adult world, but it's not just about sex. A common definition of consent is permission for something to happen, or an agreement to do something. Understanding consent helps children better understand boundaries and that their actions affect others. Consent and empathy (the ability to understand and share the feelings of another,) go hand-in-hand. Studies have shown that children with an understanding of empathy go on to be more successful and well-adjusted adults.

Begin teaching the concept of consent in age-appropriate ways at 2 or 3 years of age. Understanding and practicing consent develops and progresses all the way from how to properly share in early childhood to how to navigate potential sexual situations as young adults. Having a full and rich understanding of consent helps us more easily navigate these often intimidating and nuanced situations. Because we know our kids best, parents are the best people to teach these concepts. To better understand consent yourself, familiarize yourself with these characteristics.

- **Clearly communicated:** you fully understand what you are agreeing to
- **Enthusiastic and freely given:** you agree to do something because you want to, not because you are being forced, controlled, manipulated or just because you think it is something you should do
- **Specific:** saying "yes" to one thing does not mean you are saying "yes" to anything else
- **Reversible:** you have the right to change your mind at any time, for any reason
- **Based on now:** consenting to something in the past does not guarantee consent in the future

Let's use sharing a teddy bear as an example of consent. If your child wants to play with their friend's teddy bear, the friend must understand what that means and only allows your child to play with the bear if they want them to, without coercion (clearly communicated, enthusiastic and freely given). Allowing them to play with their teddy bear doesn't give your child permission to play with the friend's baby doll (specific). If at some time during play, the friend decides they want the teddy bear back, your child must return the bear (reversible). Just because the friend allowed your child to play with the bear last week doesn't mean they can automatically assume they can play with it now (based on now). As you can imagine, these important concepts of sharing and consent are not easy to teach. In fact, many of them may seem counter intuitive and may be different from what you were taught as a young child. However, effectively teaching and modeling these concepts (along with a lot of persistence) will pay off.

Here are some everyday scenarios that you can use to teach your young child consent in age-appropriate ways:

- Teach them to ask permission: whether it's to play with a toy or to give a hug.
- Allow them to make choices: which pajamas to wear and what book to read at bedtime.
- Allow them to change their mind.
- Teach them that they have control over their body: their body is theirs, and another person's body belongs to that person. For example, if they ask someone to stop tickling them, the person should stop. Also, don't force your children to hug or kiss you or others.
- Teach your child to recognize body language. Go over specific examples, such as "this is the way someone looks when they are happy, mad, scared, etc."
- Model these behaviors: kids learn a lot by just watching you, more in fact than listening to you

Helping your child understand these concepts will allow them to transfer the ideas to future situations as they age, including sex.



WEAVE

OF KENT COUNTY

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS CLASSES: THOUGHTS FROM A SELF-ADVOCATE

Melissa | WEAVE Self-Advocate & Facilitator

People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) have long been left out of having a say in what happens in their own lives. Historically, people with I/DD have been isolated, segregated, and discriminated against in almost all areas of their lives. Self-Advocacy is a movement of people with I/DD standing up for themselves to exercise their rights, represent themselves, and have a say in decision making in all areas of their daily lives and in public policy decisions that affect them.

WEAVE is working to center the voices of Self-Advocates in our work to prevent sexual assault of people with I/DD and promote accessibility of sexual assault resources to survivors. WEAVE works to promote self-advocacy through the Healthy Relationships curriculum. Healthy Relationships is an eight-week course for adults with I/DD that provides information on healthy relationships and sexual safety. We spoke to Melissa, a Self-Advocate and Co-Facilitator of the WEAVE Healthy Relationships class, to hear her experiences participating in WEAVE's Healthy Relationship classes.

Why did you want to take Healthy Relationships classes?

To benefit others, and learn more about healthy communication. Before I took the class, I knew a lot about this stuff, and I wanted to come to the group to learn some more and help others.

What are your favorite topics to teach now?

Sex stuff because most people don't know about that. Now I know more about it and how to protect myself. Another one is consent because most people don't know what that is. People need to know that you have to ask. The videos we use help to teach that because they make it real, so people can think about it in their real life.

What are the most important things people need to know to be safe?

Don't be afraid to say how you feel because if you don't do that your partner won't know; if your partner isn't liking this or not liking that. Don't be afraid to ask first when you want to do something. Both men and women can ask "Can I hold your hand?"

What is important for survivors of sexual assault and dating violence to know?

The YWCA is a safe place you can go to get help. The YWCA will encourage them and be there for them. Believing them is the most important!

How have you supported survivors of sexual assault who are in our class?

Tell them I'm here for you. I'm sorry what happened to you. I care about you and want you to be safe. You are not alone and you can do this!

What do you think are messages people with intellectual and developmental disabilities get about relationships and sex?

- If you decide to have a kid, they will get taken away and you are not able to be a parent.
- Also, your partner will stay with you if you have a baby.
- Silence.
- Don't do it (sex) and don't do it before marriage.
- Abstinence is the best. You are judged if you are not abstinent.

What are the signs of a healthy relationship?

Consent is number one and also communication. Knowing when you want to say yes or no. In a relationship, you know you can always say yes or no. Honesty and respect for each other. Also having a safe person like family involved in your relationship. Having someone you trust think the person is good for you. In a good relationship, you both trust each other and support each other. You tell each other how you feel and can talk about what you want to do and where you want to go

What do people who do not have disabilities need to know about supporting people with I/DD?

We are not different. We are just like you and we can do the same things you can! We are people! I have a dating relationship and am really happy and its fun! Relationships are supposed to be happy. Sexuality and relationships are natural and can be safe if done the right way. Sexuality and safety are for everybody!

SUPPORT FOR IMMIGRANT VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Jina Lee, PH.D | School of Criminal Justice | Grand Valley State University

Regardless of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, sexual assault can happen to anyone. However, immigrant groups have been largely excluded from the discussion on victim support and empowerment. Being an immigrant means living in an environment that is socially, culturally, and often linguistically different from where someone is from. With fear, confusion, and anxiety, newly arrived individuals are particularly vulnerable to not seeking help for cases of sexual victimization. It becomes even harder for these individuals to seek assistance, if they face post-migration challenges, such as living without family and/or close friends. Below are some barriers to help-seeking experienced by some immigrant victims of sexual assault.

Lack of cultural competence may result in immigrant victims vulnerable not asking for help. Victims' fear and confusion about the U.S. criminal justice system and laws can make it challenging for them to contact law enforcement to report. Not surprisingly, many immigrants perceive that they are not eligible recipients of the U.S. victim services. Also, lack of knowledge of the health care system and lack of insurance are other barriers to finding help from social service agencies.

Traditional patriarchal beliefs and gender norms that ascribe a high value to "purity" or "virginity" may discourage immigrant victims from disclosing sexual assault this is frequently due to perceptions and experiences with discrimination and victim-blaming associated with sexual assault. They may be worried about being blamed, rejected, or disbelieved by their family and friends as well as victim service agencies.

Language barriers may discourage disclosure and lead to under utilization of help. Immigrant victims may not be able to fully describe the sexual assault incident to law enforcement and victim service agencies. They may not be able to fully explain to health providers the symptoms and injuries caused by the sexual assault. Lack of language-specific services or resources is another challenge to help-seeking.

Legal vulnerability may place restrictions on immigrants' help-seeking activities because in general, they do not have permanent immigrant status when they arrive to the U.S. It takes time to obtain permanent immigrant status that is, by and large, dependent on either school sponsorship, job sponsorship, or marriage. As a result, many victims are worried about their visa status or deportation if an investigation of their sexual assault case is reported to the police and an investigation begins.

Sexual assault can have far-reaching consequences on the victims, their families, and the community. As Kent County continues to grow, it attracts more people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In order to better serve our community members and support immigrant victims of sexual assault, culture and language-specific victim service initiatives should be implemented, such as:

- Mobilize ethnic/cultural organizations
- Collaboration between criminal justice, social service/health care agencies and ethnic, cultural organizations
- Provide training, education to help immigrants increase their cultural competence
- Provide language services to immigrant groups
- Promote community awareness of victim services and availability
- Support research to explore the scope and nature of sexual assault in immigrant groups

BISEXUALITY AND CONSENT



**EL BOYNTON & CAITLYN CUBBERLY | GAYLE R. DAVIS CENTER FOR WOMEN & GENDER EQUITY
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY**

Bisexuality is defined as “a person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender, or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree” (Human Rights Campaign, 2019). In other words, a person who identifies as bisexual is not exclusively romantically or sexually interested in a specific sex or gender identity. In 2011 in the United States alone, about 1.8% of the population identifies as bisexual (Gates, para. 2, 2011). This statistic, however, does not account for the individuals who fear identifying themselves as bisexual, due to the lingering stigma surrounding it. Since early 2011, statistics of individuals identifying themselves have been steadily rising through the years (Gates, 2011).

Consent can be defined as **“informed (knowing); voluntary (freely given); and, active (not passive), meaning that, through the demonstration of clear words or actions, a person has indicated permission to engage in mutually agreed-upon sexual activity and the consenting person is not incapacitated as defined by this policy” (Grand Valley State University, para. 2, 2016).**

Identifying oneself as bisexual is not the only issue that bisexuals face in the United States. Studies show a disproportionate amount of people who identify as bisexual are victimized by sexual assault at much higher rates than people who identify as straight (Flanders, Anderson, Tarasoff, & Robinson, 2019). Moreover, people of color who identify as bisexual are targeted at even higher rates, noting that most violence against people of color goes under-reported, if it is even reported at all (Love, Michele, Giakoumidaki, Eva, Lukera, & Cartei, 2017). While there is no one explanation of why this happens, there are many factors that play into this situation of violence.

For example, there is a stereotype that people who identify as bisexual are seemingly more willing to have sex, as they are sexually attracted to two or more gender identities and sexualities (Burke & LaFrance, 2016). Another stereotype that society has placed on bisexual individuals is that they are “indecisive” when it comes to their sexuality. Studies have found that even some within the LGBTQIA+ community, those who identify as gay/lesbian as an example, believe this stereotype (Dyar & Feinstein, 2018). These stereotypes contribute to what is commonly known as bi-negativity, the stigmatization of bisexuals. This leads to the necessary and crucial conversation of consent.

The need for educating society on the topic of consent is pressing, especially for those who identify as bisexual. Reducing stigma surrounding bisexuality would help to address the above stereotypes as well as helping to reduce rape culture. When creating consent education, it is critical to be inclusive of a variety of lived experiences, including the experiences of those who identify as bisexual. With intentionality of programming and prevention work, we can better meet the needs of this population.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ALCOHOL AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE: A PROMISING FRONTIER FOR PREVENTION IN BEER CITY U.S.A.

Half of all sexual assault perpetrators are under the influence of alcohol at the time of the assault, with estimates ranging from 30% to 75%. There are many explanations for this. For one, cultural beliefs about alcohol are exceedingly powerful. We live in a culture that glamorizes alcohol consumption by linking it to sexual performance and desire, and this has continued to have dangerous consequences. Some perpetrators have ideas about how alcohol impacts their aggression and sexuality that make them more inclined to engage in sexual violence. Many perpetrators also carry the misconception that intoxicated women are more sexually promiscuous and use this to justify targeting these women for sexual aggression.

Whatever the explanation for the staggering co-occurrence of alcohol consumption and sexual violence, it does not diminish the responsibility of perpetrators for their actions. Simply put, alcohol does not cause sexual violence. However, the frequent use of alcohol as weapon or an excuse to perpetrate violence cannot be ignored.

We know that sexual assaults in which the perpetrator was drinking are more likely to occur in spontaneous, unplanned social interactions such as at a bar or club.

The Nurse Examiner Program at the YWCA West Central Michigan has collected data that supports this and further substantiates the connection between alcohol and sexual assault. Based on our most recent data, of the individuals that received services at the YWCA after an assault:

- **41% of 20-40 year old reported using alcohol prior to the assault.**
- **21% of the 20-24 year old reported being at a bar before the assault happened.**
 - **20% of these assaults happened inside of a bar**
 - **20% happened in the parking lot or right outside of a bar, and 40% happened after leaving a bar.**

Unwanted sexual attention and harassment is commonplace in bars and clubs, but some perpetrators actually use alcohol-serving establishments as places to select, isolate, and incapacitate their targets. Again, we must be clear that alcohol does not cause sexual assault and no one should be the victim of sexual assault, whether intoxicated or otherwise. We also do not want to cast blame onto our local bars and clubs. In fact, bars, clubs, and breweries are an integral part of the culture and development of Grand Rapids and its nightlife- something that should be celebrated. Considering the strong presence of these establishments within our community, we already have a wealth of opportunity and capacity to combat this issue, as these businesses are uniquely positioned to interrupt violence before it happens.

**Jake Carter | Prevention Specialist
YWCA West Central Michigan**



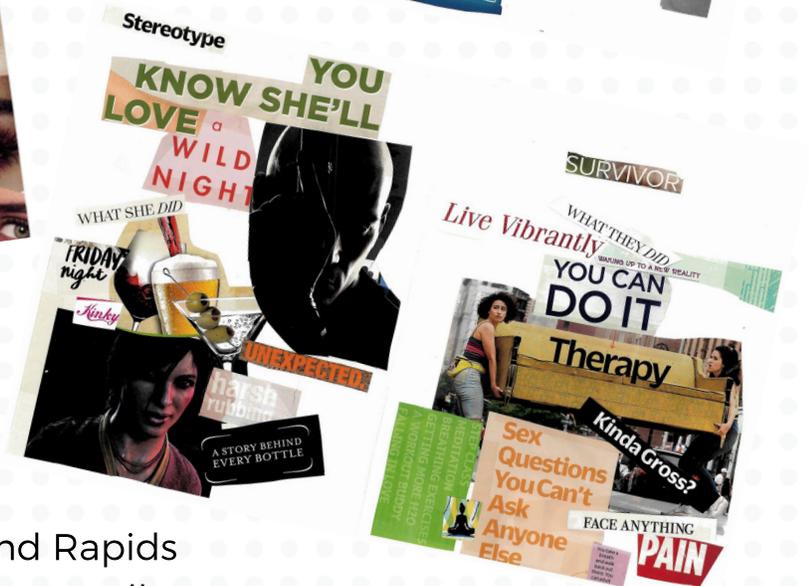
Prevention and Empowerment Services of the YWCA is looking to harness this potential with the development of a program primarily focused on working alongside these establishments to identify what can be done to keep them safe and free of sexual violence. Bystander intervention trainings for bartenders and door staff can provide knowledge about identifying dangerous situations and empower them to effectively intervene. This is but one of the potential components being considered as we embark on the creation of this program.

Ultimately, we have a collective responsibility as a community to look out for one another and keep each other safe. The interruption of cultural norms about alcohol and the cultivation of sexual violence prevention initiatives that intentionally and effectively confront the connection between alcohol and sexual violence are essential strategies to honor this responsibility. The YWCA West Central Michigan is looking forward to forging partnerships with the bars, clubs, and breweries of our city to foster a culture in Grand Rapids that is committed to preventing sexual violence and prioritizes the safety of this community.

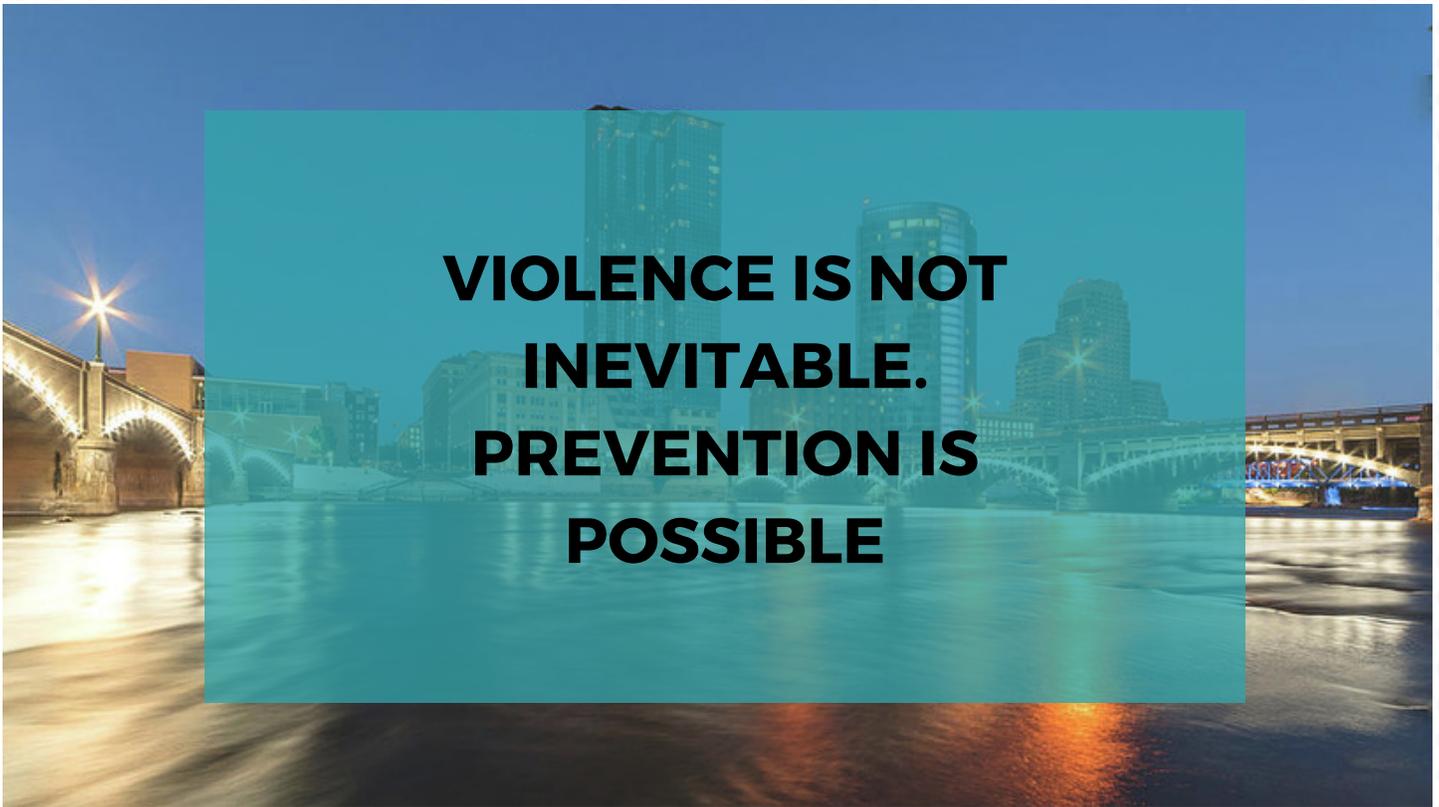
If you are an owner, manager, or staff member of a local bar, club, or brewery and would like to learn more or get involved in these early stages of developing our program, contact Jake Carter at jcarter@ywcawcmi.org

- Abby, A. (2008). Alcohol and Sexual Violence Perpetration. Harrisburg, PA: VAWnet, a project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence.
- YWCA West Central Michigan 2017 Nurse Examiner Program Data

PLANNED PARENTHOOD PEER EDUCATORS MOOD BOARDS



Members of Planned Parenthood's Grand Rapids Peer Educators group were asked to create collage pieces which show some of the complexities of the physical, mental and emotional toll that experiencing sexual violence may have on a person.



**VIOLENCE IS NOT
INEVITABLE.
PREVENTION IS
POSSIBLE**

WHAT IS NEXT FOR SAPAT?

At this time, SAPAT is conducting a community climate survey, in collaboration with GVSU's School of Criminal Justice, to assess Kent County's current understanding and readiness for sexual violence prevention. The information obtained through this survey will help to inform SAPAT's collaborations and direction for future projects. The survey will be out in late April 2019.

SAPAT is currently looking for individuals and organizations to join our team in our mission to end sexual violence in our community. If you are interested in joining SAPAT or would like to learn more, please contact:

Hannah Nelson | hnelson@ywcawcmi.org
or
Aaron Toffoli | aaron.toffoli@kencountymi.gov

SAPAT is also developing a parent engagement program to better understand and support parents as they communicate challenging topics with their children. This program is slated to begin June 2019.



Sexual Assault Prevention
Action Team of Kent County