



## Using Our Influence (UOI) Shifting the Culture of Violence and Abuse



## Our Collaborative History

Using Our Influence (UOI) is a collaborative of women leaders in the Annapolis Valley and Tri Counties of Nova Scotia who are passionate about shifting our dominant culture of violence and abuse, especially in the lived experience of rural women and girls. Our membership is fluid as people change jobs, change focus and relocate with our current core group including women working in mental health and addictions, post-secondary education, women's transition houses, women's resource centres, and youth health.

Current membership includes representatives from: Chrysalis House Association, South West Nova Transition House Association (Juniper House), The Women's Place Resource Centre, Nova Scotia Community College, and Mental Health and Addictions, Nova Scotia Health Authority. If you have questions, would like more information about our work or to engage us for facilitation, please contact us at [uoi@chrysalishouse.ca](mailto:uoi@chrysalishouse.ca).

### May 2011: *Using Our Influence: Let's Talk*

Two day forum with 140 participants held at a local Community College Campus with participation (multiple stakeholders including concerned citizens) from all over Nova Scotia Canada

- Led by Joan MacArthur-Blair; roles for the collaborative included planning, table facilitation and event management
- The development of the UOI Collective and this initial forum are featured in the publication "*Appreciative Inquiry in Higher Education*" (2012); MacArthur-Blair and Cockell.

#### *Provocative Topic:*

- "How are we at our best when we use our influence living and working with the issues of alcohol, drugs, gambling, violence and abuse that face rural women and girls"

#### *Interview questions:*

- *Best Experience:* "Tell me a story of when you: -- *were at your best using your influence living and working with the issues of alcohol, drugs, gambling, violence and abuse that face rural women and girls.*"
- *Values:* "What do you value about yourself and your contributions in this story? What do you value about using your influence?"
- *Three Wishes:* "If you had three wishes for *using your influence living and working with the issues of alcohol, drugs, gambling, violence and abuse that face rural women and girls* what would they be?"

### 2012-2013: *Leadership for Change Project*

Our Collective engaged in a year long process with a group of young women over the course of a full year. We targeted young women from the ages of 16-25, who exhibited leadership qualities and a passion for change. These young women were not necessarily leaders of student council or volunteers in a formal way, but rather were young women who lead their communities in non-traditional ways.

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### *Activities for this project included:*

- Collaborative mentoring of a group of young women over the full year. Participants were invited through an informal system of identification (we used our contacts to identify young women who might be interested in participating and arranged for school permissions to attend these sessions).
- Providing funds (left over from another grant we had) to seed future activities for the young women. (Which included mentoring grant writing and report of project activities to the Collective)
- Provided opportunities to connect communities to spread awareness of the supports and services available to spin a web of acceptance of individuality and diversity
- Three Appreciative Inquiry facilitations occurred (a 2 day workshop was held at Camp Brigadoon, a local Nova Scotia campus, while the other two one-day were held at a local Campus of the Community College).
- The first event was co-led by Using Our Influence collaborative, Joan MacArthur-Blair and Jeanie Cockell. As the events progressed, the collaborative took a more prominent facilitation role.

### *Provocative Topic:*

- “We are life Changers and we embrace our inner strength to make a positive difference”

Our Collective’s Provocative Statement after the first facilitation was

- **“We have the courage to stand up, the courage to hold on and the courage to let go”** It is notable that this statement has stayed with the Collective throughout the course of our work together.

## **September 2013: Annapolis Community Model of Response to Sexual Violence**

The Collective gathered community stakeholders to develop a funding proposal for a community response to sexual violence. Appreciative Inquiry principles to facilitate this planning meeting, and the proposal writing was executed by the collaborative

Stakeholders included:

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|--|---|
| ✓ Annapolis Valley District Health Authority       | ✓ Kings County Volunteer Resource Centre        |
| ✓ The Red Door - Youth Sexual Health Centre        | ✓ Kings RCMP                                    |
| ✓ Nova Scotia Community College                    | ✓ L'Arche                                       |
| ✓ Acadia University                                | ✓ Survivors SOAR                                |
| ✓ The Portal: Youth Drop In                        | ✓ Military Family Resource Centre               |
| ✓ Annapolis Valley First Nations                   | ✓ Valley Youth Project                          |
| ✓ Annapolis Valley Regional School Board           | ✓ Women's Place                                 |
| ✓ Chrysalis House                                  | ✓ Acadia University Student's Union             |
| ✓ Department of Community Services - Child Welfare | ✓ Glooscap First Nation Health & Healing Centre |
|  | ✓ Kentville Police Department                   |

This proposal resulted in a two year grant through the Department of Community Service Sexual Violence Strategy (Feb 2014). The Collaborative was extensively involved in the management team for this project which included hiring and supervising a project manager throughout the project.

### **Oct 2014: *Using Our Influence to Diminish Sexual Violence in the Annapolis Valley***

This 2 day forum engaged partners associated with the above project along with any other community members who were interested in an exploration of how to better work with each other. This forum was held in a town hall in New Minas, Nova Scotia.

- We collaboratively planned and managed this two day forum, including table facilitation and co-facilitation with Joan MacArthur-Blair

*Provocative Topic:*

- “When have we been part of creating a space of safety and connection where experiences of sexual violence against women and girls can be prevented, heard or healed?”

### **September 30 2016: *Shifting the Culture of Sexualized Violence Together***

Participants from Annapolis and Kings County (And beyond in NS) were invited to a gathering in Bridgetown, Nova Scotia to explore:

“Our communities are on a journey to shift the culture of sexualized violence. Together we are building community resilience and pathways to resistance. Join us to take the next steps.”

- The Collective planned, managed and facilitated this day

Questions used included:

- *What our/your community looks like with no sexual violence?*
- *What your relationships look like with no sexual violence?*
- *What you (as a person) look like living in a community/culture with no sexual violence?*

Together we designed, and dreamed our preferred futures by the:

- creation of Women of Possibility, Resilience, Resistance and Destiny

### **Nov 3-6, 2015: *3rd International Women’s Shelter Conference***

We were excited to have an opportunity to share the work of the Women of Influence Collective with others from across the globe at **the 3rd International Women’s Shelter Conference** (The Hague, Netherlands)

- 3 members of the Collective offered a presentation of the work of UOI using an Appreciative Inquiry lens in a workshop offered as part of this international conference.

### **June 2 2017 & October 27 2017: *Strengthening the Safety Net***

This project involved community engagement with the ultimate goal of creating a tool that can be used by individuals impacted by dementia, intimate partner violence, and caregiver stress.

Exploring the intersection of domestic violence, dementia and caregiver stress to enhance our capacity to provide support

- Collaboratively sought funding, planned, managed and facilitated events
- Facilitation of two forums

**May 2018: *Peer-reviewed publication***

Three UOI members co-authored *Learning Leaders Inspiring Community Action through Appreciative Inquiry: Changing the Culture of Violence and Abuse with Rural Women and Girls* in a special edition of the peer-reviewed *AI Practitioner: International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry*: May 2018 Vol 20 Number 2

The article highlighted the work of the Using Our Influence collective and the development of Critical Appreciative Inquiry.

**March 19-22, 2019: *World Appreciative Inquiry Conference***

Three members of the Collective presented the workshop *Critical Appreciative Inquiry: Changing the Culture of Violence and Abuse with Rural Women and Girls* at the World AI Conference in Nice, France.

