The Wakanheza Project:

A Public Health Approach to Primary Prevention of Family Violence

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Abstract

Family violence is a well-documented phenomenon. The Wakanheza Project, grounded in the

prevention principles of public health, is a community based violence prevention initiative

designed to reduce harsh treatment of children in public. The Wakanheza Project is not a

program or curriculum. It uses principles that involve individuals and organizations in learning

sessions to rethink why challenging situations occur and ways to ameliorate these challenges.

Qualitative research methods explore the impact on three diverse organizations in an urban

county. Ideas for replication and research toward the primary prevention of violence are

discussed.

Key Words: violence prevention, family, community, public health, The Wakanheza Project

In 2002 a toddler was beaten by her mother as she was being placed in a car seat. The woman and her daughter had just emerged from shopping at a department store in the United States. The beating was caught on tape and played on national news. The video was a shocking display of family violence in a public space. While this particular story made dramatic headlines, the problem of family violence is quite widespread. In their literature review, Smith Slep and Heyman (2008) found that 90% of families report physical aggression in the previous 12 months and severe parent-to-child violence occurs in 5% of American families.

There is general agreement that primary prevention holds the most promise to end family violence, as by definition it is designed to prevent problems before they occur. However, identifying and agreeing upon the elements of primary prevention of violence is challenging. Multiple variables cause violence to occur, suggesting multiple strategies need to be employed to effectively prevent violence. There is recognition that the incidence of family violence can be reduced in part by the promotion of healthier communities (Zimmerman & Mercy, 2010). In addition to addressing the interpersonal dynamics of family violence, social strategies are essential to changing behavioral norms and ultimately preventing violence.

This paper describes and analyzes apparent impacts of a violence prevention effort called The Wakanheza Project, built around the Native American Dakota word for child, which in English translates as "sacred being". The Wakanheza Project has shown strong anecdotal evidence of effectiveness through implementation in multiple settings including, but not limited to, schools, faith communities, libraries, social service agencies, clinics, shelters and museums over the past decade in an urban area (Saint Paul – Ramsey County, Minnesota, USA). A

previous article on The Wakanheza Project in schools identified applications in educational settings (Erickson, Lee and Mattaini, 2009). Through the use of qualitative interviews in three large and diverse community organizations, this next phase of research sought to identify effective practices and observable impacts of The Wakanheza Project in organizations, and consider applications for other community settings.

<center>Public Health Efforts Towards Violence Prevention</center>

Violence impacts families and children throughout the United States. In 2007 5.8 million children were referred to public child protective service agencies (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Common efforts to reduce the incidence and impacts of family violence have largely focused on interventions in identified families. However, it is impossible to detect all cases of family violence, and the data show that family violence is a common phenomenon nationally and worldwide. Moreover, motivations to keep family violence private are strong (Smith Slep and Heyman, 2008). These challenges point to the limitations of present systems to detect and intervene in cases of family violence. Public child protection programs see only a fraction of the families who experience violence, and this is only after the violence has occurred and the damage has been done (Zimmerman & Mercy, 2010). Further, if child protection reached all offending families, intervention systems would be quickly overwhelmed (Smith Slep & Heyman, 2008).

Public health entered the arena of violence in 1985 when then Surgeon General of the United States, C. Everett Koop convened a workshop on violence and public health, encouraging public health workers to respond (Dahlberg & Mercy, 2009). Public health brings a strong preventative perspective to interpersonal violence, along with a commitment to developing

strategies that are attentive to the community conditions in which the strategies are offered and address all levels of society (Mercy et. al., 1993). Public health is appropriately suited to address this multi-systemic problem having had proven success in preventing and reducing other public health issues in the United States, such as changing social norms regarding smoking. Local public health departments that do not address the problem of violence towards children are missing a critical opportunity (Zimmerman and Mercy, 2010). As an added benefit, public health efforts are also multi-disciplinary, inclusive beyond the borders of public health professionals and engage non-professionals as partners in the work. Social workers, working and influencing communities on various levels are important partners in this work. Social workers have also developed strategies to prevent violence (Beck, Ohmer and Warner, 2012; Mattaini et al., 2001). Identifying the cross-disciplinary approaches and sharing proven strategies will hopefully lead to a decrease in family violence.

> A successful public health approach will weave together programs, policies, and people. Such an approach would entail engaging a host of partners from other service systems (e.g., early education, schools, police, health care, parent education, and family support), as well as community-based resources (e.g., faith-based organizations, neighborhood leaders, libraries, recreation centers).

(Zimmerman and Mercy, 2010, p. 6)

Identifying steps to prevent violence from occurring is the foundation of the public health approach. Working with the community, the public health approach is designed to identify root causes and triggers of violence along with immediate plans for resolution (Mercy et. al., 1993). The first step defines the problem that is occurring. This step in this approach is to go beyond identifying the people who are part of the violence, and includes reviewing temporal, spatial, and contextual factors. The second step of the pubic health approach identifies risk factors - who,

when, what, where and how of the incidents of violence or potential violence. The third step is to

develop prevention interventions based on what was discerned from the previous two steps and

to test these strategies. The final step is to implement and assess whether strategies are working,

and modify as appropriate to enhance effectiveness. As described in the pages that follow, The

Wakanheza Project is built around these steps to achieve sustainable change, engaging

individuals, organizations and communities collectively in the work of preventing family

violence.

The Wakanheza Project

In 1990 the Board of Ramsey County Commissioners (Minnesota, USA) directed Saint

Paul – Ramsey County Public Health (SPRCPH) to develop strategies to prevent family

violence, including domestic violence and child abuse. For the past 25 years SPRCPH has

partnered with a wide range of organizations and individuals to develop and implement strategies

to achieve this purpose through The Initiative for Peaceful Families and Communities in Ramsey

County (The Initiative, http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/ph/hb/violence_prevention.htm.) The most

long-lasting and effective of these efforts is The Wakanheza Project. The name of the project

was inspired by the words of a local Native American leader: "Wakanheza literally means sacred

being. It is the Dakota word for child, reflecting for all of us what children really are and should

be considered to be: sacred beings." (Strong, 2002).

The Wakanheza Project was designed to help people and organizations develop and

implement tangible, doable strategies to create more welcoming environments, and thereby

reduce stress for parents, children and teenagers in public places. The premise of The

Wakanheza Project is that reducing challenging situations in public settings could prevent harsh

treatment of children and feelings of isolation among teenagers in those public places, and potentially prevent subsequent acts of child abuse and violence that may have been incited by these often embarrassing and shaming public interactions. The immediate impacts of this approach, i.e. whether or not parents escalate toward harsh treatment of their children and teens act out in public places, can be observed and described. More challenging, and not resolved to date, is how to ascertain whether immediate, positive impacts observed in participating public settings might prevent later acts of family and community violence.

Utilizing the public health approach of science to action described above, SPRCPH facilitates Wakanheza Project learning sessions with staff of organizations that serve families, children and youth. Learning sessions typically last from one to two hours and begin with an introduction to The Wakanheza Project and discussion of its six principles (see Table 1). Then, participants are asked the question: can you identify recurring points of stress or challenges that occur predictably for people in your organization? Once stressful situations are identified, participants work together in small groups to create prevention strategies based on Wakanheza Project principles that are doable, have little or no cost, and involve all employees in being part of the solution. Common stressful situations identified have included waiting in line, program intake, and points of transition. Examples of prevention strategies have included providing toys and activities for children, encouraging all staff to intentionally make a positive and genuine connection with everyone they work with or serve, and using distraction and redirection when mothers, fathers and caregivers appear stressed and their frustration escalates. Because strategies are developed and implemented by the organizations themselves, they have a cultural fit within

the organization and community served, and are sustainable, often resulting in a new organizational culture.

Since its development in 2002, the principles and strategies of the Wakanheza Project have been used in faith communities, family service agencies, and schools, in addition to the library system, shelter and museum described in this article. Many of these efforts resulted in anecdotal evidence of success. Therefore, the authors decided to more rigorously identify and describe Wakanheza Project impacts and processes in the hope that it could be replicated in additional organizations and communities. Qualitative research was used to identify prevention strategies developed and to understand the mechanisms of how The Wakanheza Project works in facilitating their creation and implementation.

<div align="center">Methods</div>

Participants

Qualitative methods were chosen to help the researchers contextualize and understand The Wakanheza Project in three large, urban community organizations. The organizations represent diverse community settings: a city public library system, a domestic violence shelter, and a children's museum. This purposeful sampling of agencies allows for comparison of The Wakanheza Project across diverse settings (Creswell, 1998). Agencies were asked to participate by the second and third authors because of their commitment to and use of The Wakanheza Project principles and strategies. At the time of data collection, each of the agencies had voluntarily participated in The Wakanheza Project for the previous two to six years. A fourth non-profit agency was also included in the initial sampling, but was removed due to low turn out for the focus group

Procedures

One focus group was held per agency, facilitated by the first author, and ranged from 60 to 90 minutes and ranged in size from four to six participants. Focus group participants included executive directors, managers, front line workers and volunteers who were selected at the discretion of the agency. Focus groups were structured with seven questions (Table 2). Questions were developed by the authors to clarify the perceptions and experiences and provide a framework so that people can respond in a way that represents the understanding of the organizational members involved in implementation (Patton, 2002). The aim was to gather specific information about what was implemented, effort involved, and impact. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

After reviewing the transcripts, a provisional start list of codes was developed and agreed upon by the authors. The verbatim transcripts were then coded individually by the first and third authors. After the first coding, and joint review and consensus between the first and third authors, refinement of the definitions of the codes was needed. Clarifying definitions helped coders separate ideas that seemed to have overlap into more than one code. The researchers also agreed upon two new codes to capture data that could not be coded into the original start list. A final coding was completed by the third author and reviewed by the first and second authors. The final list of codes and their definitions are identified in Table 3. As the three authors worked with this coded and separated material, it became clear, through multiple meetings, that the richness of the story was lost in the separation of data into coded themes. Experimentally, the authors reassembled the coded data into case studies of each organization – still separated and identified by the salient codes developed earlier in the research process. The final analysis,

presented here, is the reassembled data, first coded for major themes, and then organized into case studies. Using this qualitative case study method allows the data to demonstrate the backdrop and development of each organization's understanding and implementation (Creswell, 1998) of The Wakanheza Project. Case studies have been used in various disciplines, with one or more cases, and in qualitative and quantitative research (Hamel, 1993; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1989). The authors agreed that the case study presentations revealed the richness of the data in ways not possible when separated by code. Language of the participants is in quotations and used to enhance the case studies. What follows are case studies of The Wakanheza Project in three large institutions in Saint Paul, Minnesota: The Minnesota Children's Museum, Women's Advocates Inc. (a domestic violence shelter), and the Saint Paul Public Library (a 14 branch system).

Findings

Minnesota Children's Museum

Initiating Event

Each year Minnesota Children's Museum (MCM) receives over 400,000 visitors, including families with small children, classroom field trips, and boys and girls clubs. Staff periodically observed parents or other adults treating a child or student in a harsh or seemingly neglectful manner. Staff feeling "I wanted to help but I didn't know what to do" prompted a call to Public Health to request additional training regarding abuse and neglect.

Initial Implementation

SPRCPH staff in partnership with the Ramsey County Child Abuse Prevention Council, and a community volunteer worked with MCM to develop a team focused on The Wakanheza

Project. With the support of SPRCPH, MCM created learning opportunities and materials to facilitate discussion of the principles of The Wakanheza Project with all museum staff and volunteers.

Impacts/Changes to Physical Environment and Organizational Culture

One of the first outcomes of The Wakanheza Project was MCM adding volunteer positions called "funstigators" and "playologists" to keep children engaged while waiting in line, appearing to reduce stress levels for parents and meltdowns by children anxious to enter the museum.

Core Learning

Staff members at MCM built a richer language to use as tools in a variety of contexts while interfacing with families at MCM. As one staff member stated, "We don't necessarily always know the solution for every problem for the visitors when a family has a meltdown or there is a difficult situation, but we are able to talk about it with the language we have learned through Wakanheza, and we can put it into context to know the parameter of the situation so we know where we can find the solution and learn from those situations."

Strategies and Practices for Sustaining The Wakanheza Project

The Wakanheza Project has been systematically "ingrained" in training and orientations throughout the museum, and is now seen as a core component of museum customer service. MCM also provides reinforcement of the principles and ensures that The Wakanheza Project is a priority in day-to-day management and practice: "the staff find lots of ways to keep it alive... it's kind of like part of the culture, but it also has been systematically ingrained on purpose."

Individual Impacts and Changes

Staff spoke of how Wakanheza Project principles carried over into other parts of their life, using the principles outside of work; "I guess I didn't anticipate how people would just take a hold of it and not only use it here in their job, but also in their personal life as well. We hear stories all the time from staff, I was in line at the grocery store, I was at the restaurant, and I used Wakanheza."

In recognition of MCM's Wakanheza Project efforts, the museum won two international awards from the Association of Children's Museums in 2006 and 2007 which included resources for MCM to promote The Wakanheza Project as a best practice nation-wide, resulting in museums across the country incorporating The Wakanheza Project as a core practice.

Women's Advocates, Inc.

Initiating Events

Women's Advocates is identified as the first shelter in the nation to provide temporary housing for women and their children who are leaving abusive relationships. The staff of Women's Advocates felt The Wakanheza Project could help them navigate the difficulties faced by women and children coming into and living in a domestic violence shelter. As one staff person stated, The Wakanheza Project has helped in "finding the balance between understanding and support for them, and yet, holding them accountable for their actions and choices."

Initial Implementation

The shelter's management and key staff formed an internal team to focus on implementing The Wakanheza Project at the shelter. The team determined early on that all staff would engage in Wakanheza Project discussion sessions in order to identify changes in the

shelter's procedures and environments that could potentially prevent or decrease the incidence of problems between residents and/or staff.

Impacts/Changes to Physical Environment and Organizational Culture

Implementing The Wakanheza Project led to significant changes in the physical and social environment at the shelter, reflected through enhancements in the building as well as policies and procedures. For example, they re-thought their commitment to maintaining a "really clean environment", moving from the practice of limiting areas for toys, to having toys and books available for children in locations throughout the shelter. Intake procedures were changed from filling out paperwork immediately for women and children entering the shelter, to focusing on creating a sense of safety, comfort and being welcome. Historically, only family advocates stepped in to prevent difficult situations from escalating. "Now all of the staff —with the (Wakanheza) training—have the ability to step in and maybe just de-escalate it for that few minutes, and then an advocate is able to step in and talk about the whole situation."

Core Learning

Transformative learning came from The Wakanheza Project discussion sessions where, for example, staff role-played in order to experience what it would be like to be a woman and her child(ren) arriving on the shelter's doorstep. Building empathy for what that crisis moment would be like led the organization to reassess "every question asked, every form filled out as well as the language that you use and the attitude that you come to the conversation with… an effort to help."

Strategies and Practices for Sustaining The Wakanheza Project

The Wakanheza Project has been incorporated as an ongoing part of the shelter, and helping staff accomplish their everyday work. SPRCPH staff continues to provide Wakanheza Project discussion sessions and materials for new staff and refresher sessions as needed for the entire staff.

Individual Impacts and Changes

Staff describe The Wakanheza Project "not like a shelter philosophy, but a life philosophy." Staff have observed that "By them (the women) seeing us role-modeling it, they are now doing it with each other. Wakanheza may not be the word that's attached to it, but that is what they are doing." Staff hope that if and when residents choose to be in another relationship, "…they have already been practicing these skills and they could carry forward in their daily living outside of here."

Saint Paul Public Library

Initiating Events

Library staff were seeking a resource to assist them with youth who revealed "extremely personal or dangerous" situations in their lives as well as how to best respond to reoccurring challenges for families with young children. Staff found The Wakanheza Project useful, implementing the principles and strategies "seemed a perfect combination of proactive and reactive response to stressful situations" for teens as well as young children. Looking back on the initial interest in The Wakanheza Project, one library staff noted, "I realized the way I was handling things was probably escalating the situation. I think we have calmed the police down too, they don't escalate."

Initial Implementation

A core team of library and SPRCPH staff began working to create tools and learning opportunities to incorporate The Wakanheza Project into the library's culture, built into mandatory training for all staff, including "….custodians, security guards, library clerks, and people in our offices". All Saint Paul Public Library staff now participates.

Impacts/Changes to Physical Environment and Organizational Culture

In one library location, the tough behavior of young people and gangs had resulted in a revolving door of young people being asked to leave the library, or calls to the police, leading to the unfortunate reputation of that library being an "epicenter of crime." Their wish was to instead be seen as an "epicenter of peace." Library staff now approach their work with young people and other patrons as "starting with this wonderful basis that everybody is a sacred being". That belief has led to a variety of changes designed to enhance the experiences of families with young children, including: "Saying hello… approaching in a friendly manner can just break that ice and make it a positive situation; Having stickers or coloring crayons or diversions for kids that aren't able to sit there and read; "Here comes trouble" doesn't necessarily come to your mind as much as "oh boy, I wonder how this child's day was" or "I wonder if this child got to eat today."

Core Learning

Staff cite changes in philosophy and practice which have helped navigate challenges that can arise on a daily basis: "We can take the philosophy and we can look at our courage level that day and what kind of conversation we are willing and able to have, and feel comfortable to have, and do it**."** The Wakanheza Project has also been used to enhance interactions with teens, as reflected in the following quotes, "Sometimes we expect our teens to act a certain way and I think The Wakanheza Project helps us learn to see the other side of them and work with them

and see a presence that is positive." When a teen or parent with their child is having trouble, library staff now feel equipped to respond, and are less punitive in their reactions, "You create the support, rather than starting with the police".

Strategies and Practices for Sustaining The Wakanheza Project.

Sustaining and institutionalizing The Wakanheza Project has been intentional, with a desire to "keep the flame going, sustain the conversation and be part of how we get ready for work". Library management has been deliberate about incorporating the principles and strategies into performance appraisals, making them formal employee expectations: "We try to break it down so they have some behavioral keys, like greeting people and smiling".

Individual Impacts and Changes

Library administrators see working with The Wakanheza Project as an opportunity to enhance the experience of patrons and staff at their libraries, and also recognize the potential for larger, community-wide impacts: "I would like it to be so deeply ingrained in this organization that you don't think of it as just a tool that you use with children and families – that it is a tool that we use with each other. That it is a tool that we carry home and use with our families. … if we can apply these things to ourselves, because you know, we are sacred children also… we can learn from what we are teaching".

<div align="center">Discussion and Implications</div>

Ending family violence is a universal imperative. Focusing only on intervening with offending individuals or families is an option that is unlikely to achieve this important goal. Ecological theories explain family violence toward children, as well as domestic violence, through a nested system of socio-cultural levels, from individual and family levels to

community. Community level prevention strategies are important in building our understanding of how multi-modal interventions can be implemented, measured and sustained.

Research suggests that effective, sustainable prevention approaches will require large scale, affordable, and easy to implement efforts that can reach a broad range of individuals, organizations and communities (Fawcett, 1991; Fawcett, Mathews, & Fletcher, 1980). To have such a large-scale impact, practitioners must consider collective efficacy, the ways in which individuals create and transform the environments in which they operate (Bandura, 2000). Focusing on a community and building collective efficacy allows for the prevention effort to reach a critical mass, making the intervention more effective. "Enough people who naturally interact with each other must be touched by the intervention so that the participation of others helps support the benefits to each individual" (Smith Slep & Heyman, 2008, 520). In using The Wakanheza Project approach, staff develop collective efficacy as they create their own strategies and system changes, building cultural fit, personal involvement, and an institutional commitment to preventing violence. This tailored approach makes it difficult to specifically articulate and describe a Wakanheza Project program, as by design it looks different in every organization. There are, however, several common themes that can be drawn from the organizations in this study.

All three organizations had initiating experiences in which they felt ill equipped to handle challenging public interactions between parents, children and young people that would sometimes arise. All cited disappointment with the effectiveness of their previous responses and protocols in response to family stress, such as reporting to child protection (the museum), enforcing rules that inadvertently exacerbated stress (the shelter), or calling the police (the

library). None of the organizations expressed comfort with these responses to family stress, or their associated outcomes for the family. In important work on rethinking what environment means for professional helpers, Saleeby (2004) identified the importance of small changes; building on the work of Barker (1968) and Schoggen (1989) who identified "behavioral settings", areas in which we engage in mutual interaction, Saleeby suggests that adjustment to these settings should include adaptations for interaction. Public spaces create the possibility of individual and community ownership, and are possibly an important key in successful strategies for primary prevention of violence. After Wakanheza Project learning sessions, each organization formed a small working group to begin implementing Wakanheza Project principles to prevent these initial problems from occurring. Each organization implemented changes to their environments demonstrating that children and typical childhood behaviors are welcome. The museum began using "funstigators", the shelter incorporated children's play areas, and the library included coloring books and stickers to occupy children.

Core learning tended to focus on empathy for the parent, and the difficult situations they are placed in, giving staff new perspective on the experience and behaviors of people who used their facility. Studies on the prevention of anti-social behaviors provide evidence that small efforts can create significant changes. Recent studies inform practitioners on the use of "kernels" – small units of intervention that impact behavior (Embry, 2004, 2008). Examples of kernels include such small practices as verbal praise and pleasant greetings (Embry, 2008). Embry suggests that these small units of behavior can be combined, possibly in multiple forms, to create "behavioral vaccines" that can be widely dispersed to prevent anti-social or violent behaviors. Community-level projects built upon these kernels and vaccines can have a wide impact, partly

because they are so easily implemented. We suggest that The Wakanheza Project is an example of the application of kernels, by various agencies, in multiple community formats. The sources of these kernels are the agency and staff themselves, as they develop and implement changes in response to repeated stressful situations identified in their organization. For example, the library focused on greeting young people with intention, the shelter changed the order in which new clients were provided intake, and the museum began using new language to describe family meltdowns. While the kernels developed by the agencies in conjunction with Wakanheza Project principles may not have empirical evidence of effectiveness, they fit agency culture, are accepted by employees, and have a sense of ownership by the organization, all important elements for community change work.

In regards to sustainability, a difficulty for any community change effort, all of the organizations implemented The Wakanheza Project into their routine orientation and staff training, creating greater likelihood for sustainability despite staff turnover. Moreover, each of the agencies reported a spillover effect: staff using Wakanheza Project principles and strategies beyond the walls of their organization and in their personal lives, i.e. stressful family situations in grocery stores, on airplanes, and other public settings.

The ease in which an organization can implement The Wakanheza Project is part of the appeal. The information is freely available for use, and adaptations and participation can be done by nearly anyone in a helping profession. And since intervention can be applied nearly immediately, formative evaluations are readily possible. Strategies for preventing violence utilizing detailed programs, educational modules, or specific projects for only specific populations each present their own challenges. They may require fidelity to a specific

programmatic regimen that may not fit within the setting of the organization, can be difficult to implement from a practical stand point, and may not fit culturally within any given community.

Risks and limitations do exist for the project. There is the potential for the principles to be used in ways inconsistent with its original intent due to its flexibility and the desire for community ownership. Organizations must continue to recognize that the safety net to intervene in family violence, mainly the police and child protective services, are still important parts of an overall strategy to end family violence. The project does require a commitment to participation by all staff, making the largest resource required to be time. Despite this, notably absent from all of the focus groups and interviews were issues of implementation fidelity, cost, or time, which are typical barriers in wide scale prevention efforts. While the research did not specifically probe for problems, one can assume these topics would have emerged through the course of the interviews. Reduced barriers are an important contribution of any replicable prevention effort. Future research will need to probe for broader and deeper findings on organizational change, barriers to implementation, and impact on community. A mixed-methods approach in future projects, including baseline data with larger numbers of community agencies, will strengthen our understanding of the strategies and impacts of The Wakanheza Project, leading to greater opportunities for replicability of proven strategies.

The Wakanheza Project provides an easily applied, and affordable alternative to these frequent barriers, representing a violence prevention approach that with intention and commitment can be used in multiple settings, leading to observable and sustained change in individuals and organizations. Wakanheza Project principles have facilitated the development and implementation of strategies based on the unique needs of each organization that appear to

reduce seemingly inevitable points of stress for families, youth and communities. There are no monetary requirements. All needed resources can be accessed through The Wakanheza Project website. No special credentials, educational degrees or extensive/expensive training sessions are required.

The Wakanheza Project is not an educational program to reduce violence within families, nor is it a parenting program. The Wakanheza Project seeks to shape the context of a community, reducing the chances for violent behaviors to occur between adults and young people. In social change initiatives, there is a need to balance individual change and the context of the community in which human interactions occur. Strategies to help individual families reduce or end violence must be complemented by strategies that affect the larger community environment. The reciprocal relationship between individual behaviors and contextual, community experiences demonstrates great potential for effectively preventing violence. The Wakanheza Project is an example of a replicable project aimed at intentionally impacting these contextual experiences, and in so doing complements the work in changing individual behaviors that is done by families, teachers, social workers, and public health workers everyday.

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For more information on The Wakanheza Project:
    http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/ph/cp/wakanheza.htm

Table 1

Principles of The Wakanheza Project

Judgment: It is inevitable that we will have judgments and make assumptions about the behaviors of others, especially in regard to public treatment of children. Rather than asking participants to stop judging, try to put those judgments and assumptions aside and consider whether they might be able to offer understanding and assistance.
Culture: Participants are asked to consider that it is largely impossible to know another's culture unless they are intimate friends; in public interactions we can put aside our assumption of difference and agree to try our best to be kind to people regardless of perceived cultural difference.
Powerlessness: Most acts of violence arise out of a sense of powerlessness, isolation and shame (May, 1998; Gilligan, 2001). While parents objectively hold power over their children, subjectively their experience with a screaming child in a store surrounded by judging adults may be very different
Empathy and Respect: These practices allow people and organizations to find it within themselves to help; de-escalating situations that previously seemed inevitable and intractable.
Environment: People are responsive to human and physical environments, and small changes in these environments can increase or reduce stress, impacting people individually and collectively.
The Moment: This final principle allows people and organizations to identify simple, doable,

transformative actions that can be taken to de-escalate and improve situations in the immediate

moment.

Table 2

Focus Group Questions

1) Why were you originally interested in participating in The Wakanheza Project? Probe: Was something occurring that you thought The Wakanheza Project could address?
2) How has your agency implemented The Wakanheza Project? Be as specific as possible.
3) What impacts have you observed?
4) How has staff responded to implementing The Wakanheza Project?
5) Have clients of your organization been impacted? If so, how?
6) What resources or support were required for implementation?
7) Do you plan to continue to implement The Wakanheza Project? If so, why? how?

Table 3

Codes and Definitions

Initiating Events/Initial Interest and Contacts - The story of how and why The Wakanheza Project was implemented. **Initial Implementation -** Commitment to the project as displayed by intentionality and planning. **Impacts/Changes to the Physical Environment and Organizational Culture** - Structural changes in the agency including organizational practices that aim for sustainability, reflected through time and resources. **Organizational Climate shift** - A shift in culture as defined by the agency. Includes shifts in how the agency views itself or outside parties view the agency. **Core Learning** - Transformative learning for the individual or the organization. **Strategies and Practices for Sustainability**- Extension and impact of The Wakanheza Project to clients and customers. **Individual Impacts and Changes -**   Where is this definition? Likely is: Personal changes expressed by individuals.