

Revive Program Evaluation:

Partners of People Who Have Offended Sexually

Partners of Survivors of Sexual Harm

*Wellness Retreat: Self-Care Retreat for Sexual Trauma Survivors
and/or their Intimate Partners*

August 8, 2017

Introduction

The Revive Program at CJI strives to create safer communities using a Restorative Justice framework, advocating a collective and collaborative support system which addresses the needs of individuals, families, and the community. The Revive *Mission* is to “support people who are struggling with unhealthy sexual behaviours and/or who have offended sexually in making healthy (sexual) choices moving forward. As well, to support male and female survivors of sexual trauma and their intimate partners.”

In October 2016, Revive received funding from Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) to pilot two new educational/peer support groups - one group for intimate partners of people who have offended sexually (PWOS), and one for intimate partners of survivors of sexual abuse. This pilot project was meant to develop an evidence base as to whether or not the peer support model is effective in supporting both partners of survivors and partners of offenders, and to assess overall effectiveness in:

- decreasing social isolation,
- increasing a sense of belonging and connection to the community,
- increasing a sense of personal safety,
- enhancing understanding of relationship dynamics.

New Programming

Peer support groups are a well-used model in Revive programming, with a strong history of success in preparing both community volunteers and group participants in their readiness to participate in the program. Trained Revive volunteers facilitate programming in order to create a supportive environment for people who have caused/experienced sexual harm in their healing journey. The purpose of peer support groups, as outlined in Revive’s program logic model, is to create an environment that:

- helps participants connect with others who have similar experiences in order to create a sense of social inclusion,
- emphasizes finding healthy and effective ways of making and sustaining a plan for healthy relationships and sexuality,
- cultivates a safe, non-judgemental and supportive place to share, listen, and learn.

Experience with this style of program facilitation is in line with the overall goals outlined in the OTF grant application.

The branching out of Revive group programming to include partners of PWOS and partners of survivors is a rational extension of program logic in the need to strengthen support for the natural support systems that occur for people who have caused or experienced sexual harm. The Revive program articulates that this new programming is a way of strengthening existing bonds in support systems for both offenders and victims in order to limit the consequential impact on family, friends and the community.

Methodology & Limitations

As a pilot program, this evaluation is based off of a limited number of participants and rudimentary data collection tools.

Survey tools were designed by Revive staff and given , and provide quantitative feedback as to program efficacy through simple Likert scale questions that were often followed up with an open ended opportunity for participants to give qualitative feedback.

Group program evaluations were collected at the end of each ___ week group session block, with data collection occurring in: November/December 2016 and April/May 2017 for the Partners of PWOS group, and December 2016 for the Partners of Survivors group.

The Partners of PWOS group received a total of 9 completed evaluation surveys. A limitation occurred in survey data through the re-development of the evaluation survey between the two data collection points. This caused some loss of data and difficulty in aligning information between both surveys.

The Partners of Survivors group received a total of 3 completed surveys. Based on anecdotal information provided by Revive staff, some difficulty occurred in engaging participants for this group. This is reflected in the group's overall outcomes (as explained further below), as well as the decision to host a Wellness Retreat geared towards survivors and their partners instead of facilitating another very small group. While this does not directly align with the original OTF objective, the Wellness Retreat relied on similar programming to peer support models that still help to provide an evidence base as to how it was received by participants.

In general, as a rudimentary evaluation, the data collected during this grant does not scientifically or explicitly describe *effectiveness*. As no pre- or post- surveying was completed, or a baseline for participants established, this data cannot be used to explain cause and effect between program model and behaviour outcomes or knowledge growth. However, data collected does offer a significant insight into how participants *perceived* group programming, and offers program staff information regarding continuous quality control of the program material, staff, and volunteers.

Sample Sizes and Program Outcomes

<i>Partners PWOS</i>	• 4 new clients	• 18 participants
• 6 new clients	• 0.5 indirect service hours	• 7 person staff/volunteer coordination team
• 0.5 indirect service hours	• 21.5 direct service hours	• 18 completed evaluations
• 140 direct service hours	• 3 completed evaluations	
• 9 completed evaluations		
<i>Partners Survivors</i>	<i>Survivor Wellness Retreat</i>	

Analysis

Three key themes emerged across all programming evaluated (Partners of People Who Offended Sexually [PWOS], Partners of Survivors, Survivor Wellness Retreat):

- Self-care as an invaluable tool in facilitating healing
- Communication skills as a key element in programming and developing healthier relationships
- A decrease in feeling socially isolated from the broader community.

These themes directly align with Revive's OTF objective of assessing peer support as a way of decreasing social isolation/increasing a sense of belonging and connection to the community, and enhancing understanding of unhealthy relationship dynamics.

Below follows findings relevant to each program.

Partners of PWOS Group

All participants in the Partners of PWOS Group reported a strong satisfaction with the programming offered through this group, often remarking the relevancy of the content and facilitation of staff/volunteers. Group participants reported a high level of agreement (3 or 4 out of 4; or Yes with Yes/No option) that the program met their expectations, would be recommended, and met their needs. Group participants from both samples (November/December 2016, and April/May 2017) explained the meaningfulness of the program in open ended qualitative questions:

“The support and encouragement offered by this group is invaluable!” - Partners of PWOS Participant, November 2016

“So happy this group is offered, it really helps and makes things bearable.” - Partners of PWOS Participant, May 2017

The first iteration of the Partners of PWOS evaluation survey asked directed questions about self-care. When asked if this group helped “you understanding the importance of self-care and support systems?” all 4 respondents answered “Yes”. In qualitative feedback, respondents all suggested the importance of the Group as a way of learning about self-care, being provided with examples of self-care, and a way of actually practicing self-care. As one participant explained, *“Practically speaking, the group provided concrete examples of self-care ideas as well as validating the necessity of practicing self-care. On a personal note, attending group has become an integral part of my own self-care repertoire because of the support and encouragement I receive while participating.”* In the second iteration of the Partners of PWOS evaluation survey, a participant responded to how the group met their needs by explaining, *“Group continues to be a source of support and encouragement each week.”* This further illustrates the group model as an important avenue for many participants to practice self-care.

While self-care here is linked to a sense of social inclusion through the support/encouragement they received, it was also linked by a different participant to strengthening their family. The participant explains, *“...without looking after ourselves [through self-care], how will we be able to stay strong for ourselves and those who are close to us.”* As this participant links self-care to the wellbeing of their family, the logic of the program model as a way of strengthening family units is demonstrated, as well as the importance of supporting family as a protective factor in limiting harm on the support systems of those who have caused sexual harm. This was reiterated by a different participant who explained, *“By providing a safe space to express and work through my own feelings, I am better equipped to offer emotional and practical support to my partner on his own healing journey.”*

As part of the curriculum offered in the Partners of PWOS Group, communication was a key theme in developing healthier relationships for participants. In the November/December 2016 iteration of surveys, participants particularly identified communication as a key element in rebuilding relationships with their partner. Answering whether the group had been beneficial for you or beneficial in your relationship with your partner, one participant explained, *“The group helped open me up some more and able to talk more openly with my partner.”* Data regarding communication is helpful in understanding participant perceptions of understanding unhealthy relationship dynamics.

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By far, the strongest theme that was presented through all participant responses was that of a decrease in social isolation - notably, the priority outcome for this OTF pilot project. These responses are the strongest indicators/evidence base in helping to understand whether the peer support model is useful in supporting partners of PWOS. By increasing social inclusion through the community connections made within the Group, participants' often reported a sense of support and encouragement. This sense of social support is articulated in a variety of ways. Most simply, many responses (4 of 9) articulated clearly that the Group helped remind them they are *"not alone"*. This reduction in isolation was also explained through responses that highlighted the space as being safe, full of compassion, understanding and non-judgement as a key reason they felt supported, as well as having access to personal stories of healing from other people along varying points in their own journeys.

Some participants explained that the Group support helped to navigate difficult situations, *"Some of the encouragement and support I have received from group has helped me navigate difficult personal and community interactions successfully, which has been beneficial to both my partner and myself."* Other participants explain the Group as integral in allowing for a place to explore feelings around milestones as relationships move forward, *"...[Group] helps to validate my feelings as we [partner and I] face challenges and celebrations particular to our situation."*

A significant evidence base is built by these responses as to participants' perception of the group peer support model as an avenue for supporting partners of PWOS. As these families have often faced significant stigma due to the nature of their partner's crime, allowing for safety in exploring their emotions and strengthening the natural support system of the family.

As part of the funding provided by OTF, Revive was able to publish a short information video explaining one Partner of PWOS Group participant's story. This participant sums up much of the evidence provided by the Partners of PWOS Group Evaluations, demonstrating the importance of peer support (and support for partners of those who have caused sexual harm more generally) as a model for increasing social inclusion and promoting self-care.

"In some ways my husband was getting a lot of support through therapy, seeing a psychologist, but there really wasn't anything for me. First time sitting in the group and really feeling like, "I'm not alone. I'm not by myself. I'm not the only one who is dealing with this." And just being so overwhelmingly grateful that there is someone who could just listen and acknowledge how hard it was. There was no judgement. There was no shame. There was no 'you should be doing this/you shouldn't be doing that'. There was just a 'wow, thank you for sharing your story'...Being able to have this safe place that is separate from everything else in my life, really just provides me with the opportunity to process things the way I need to." - Revive Digital Story, 2016

Partners of Survivors Group

One iteration of Group Evaluation surveys was implemented during this project, and were completed by 3 individual participants in December of 2016. Similar to the Partners of PWOS Group, all evaluation responses (3) expressed satisfaction with the program, staff/volunteers, and material covered by the Partners of Survivors Group and that Group met their overall

expectations. Although low enrolment made for a discontinuation of the Group in favour of a one-day Wellness Retreat, all 3 evaluation participants expressed an interest in continuing their participation in the Group should it be offered in the future.

Interestingly, the same three themes presented by the Partners of PWOS Group evaluation were consistent with the Partners of Survivors, however more emphasis was placed on communication and healthy relationships than on social isolation and self-care by participants.

Regarding self-care, participants were asked if the Group helped “you understand the importance of self-care and support systems?” to which all 3 responded “Yes”. In qualitative feedback, participants explained *why* self-care had helped, 2 responses indicating increased understanding of communication/healthy relationships, and 1 indicating the value of self-care as a support provider for their family, explaining, “*I have to take time for myself if I want to be able to help my family.*” Similar to Partners of PWOS Group participants, the importance of providing support for the family as a key protective area from future trauma and harm is demonstrated here.

The importance of asserting personal boundaries within their relationships was explained by participants of the Partners of Survivors Group, and will be echoed again below in the Wellness Retreat Evaluations. For these participants, self-care became about changing relationship patterns in order to be a stronger support for their partners. Two participants explained:

“I am making more decisions in my life to put me first. Not consistently, but more conscious. It’s the transitional journey.”

“It [self-care] helped me understand that automatic response I had to helping my partner that was struggling. It helped me realize that I was in a ‘caretaker’ role in my relationship without knowing I was doing it.”

All 3 participants continued to highlight the importance of the Group for helping them to develop healthier relationships when answering the question “has your participation in this group been beneficial for you, and/or beneficial in your relationship with your partner”. Notably, these responses also highlighted the value of the group in providing a safe, confidential and judgement-free space to exercise participants’ own self-care and allow for processing.

“...I understand I can’t be 100% responsible for my partner. After group I was able to talk to him about my feelings without worrying that I have said too much...”

“I can’t say at this point that it [my relationship] has improved because of where my partner is in her healing journey. It has helped me which has a ripple affect on my wife.”

“Participation has definitely been beneficial. I think it has helped me become more of myself, and also I think it has helped me have less of a codependent relationship with my partner.”

All 3 participant responses indicated feeling a reduced sense of isolation through the support of other group members. As previously suggested, having a group space that was safe, support, and judgement free was critical to the success of creating a sense of social inclusion for group

members. As one participant explained, participation in Group meant to them “*Safety, a way to talk about things I can’t tell anyone else.*” As evidenced previously in the Partners of PWOS Group, creating a space for people to talk about similar experiences allowed for a reduction in feelings of isolation and loneliness. One participant explains, “*I realized that other people were sharing the similar struggles in their relationship.*” While Partners of PWOS Group members tended to highlight Group participation as a way of countering the stigma they experienced by being a partner of someone who has caused sexual harm, the Partners of Survivors Group participants have highlighted the value of a space in which they can assert their own needs while remaining a support for someone victimized by sexual harm.

Wellness Retreat: Self-Care Retreat for Sexual Trauma Survivors and/or their Intimate Partners

The Wellness Retreat was created as a way of engaging a wider-audience after limited enrolment in the Partners of Survivors Group. The event evaluation surveys were completed by 18 participants. The event was regarded highly by participants, with consistent positive feedback regarding location, content, hospitality, and staff/volunteer facilitation, with all completed answers (17 of 18 responses) indicating they would attend a similar event if it was offered again. Regarding the event coordination team, all responses remained positive with a high level of trust in the quality of the facilitation, demonstrating the quality in both staff and volunteers involved in the Revive Program. One participant helped to explain why having a coordination team of high quality was so imperative,

“Having a central organizer who clearly outlined activities and, I believed would be able to handle any situation that may have arisen, set me at ease. The thoughtful support members who quietly kept an eye out for the participants wellbeing, also worked well. You knew they were there to assist, but you didn’t notice them. Clearly the team members are well trained and good at what they do.”

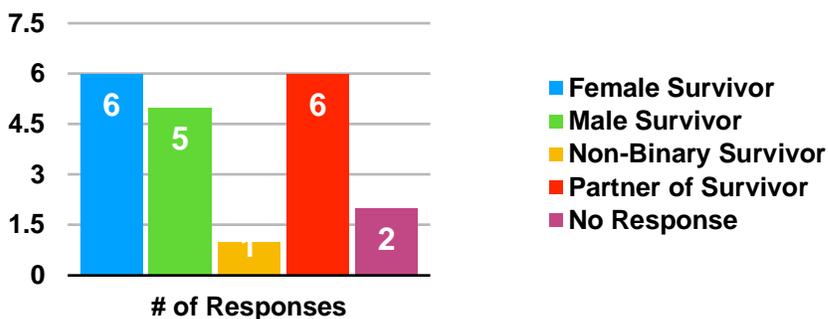
As this event was arranged around a self-care theme, questions from the evaluation focused on perceptions of activities as useful to understanding and practicing self-care, learnings regarding skills/tools that were from participating in the event, and (if attending with/as a partner) how the day was experienced. Linking the theme of self-care to the quality of the day itself, one participant eloquently explained,

“The theme of the event ‘self-care’ made the event more approachable to me. This was my first foray into the world of group therapy. The structure of the activities allowed me to engaged at a measured pace. The atmosphere of the event, while respectful and professional was also pleasant and not overwhelming with heavy emotion.”

Representation of the event was higher among survivors than their partners, with some people indicating they were both a partner and a survivor.

When asked why participants had chosen to attend the event, several themes emerged with the highest number of responses indicating attendance was: to improve their skill; as a way of supporting their partner; as a way of linking to new resources/services and trying a new experience. A clear sense of wanting to connect with others experiencing a similar situation also

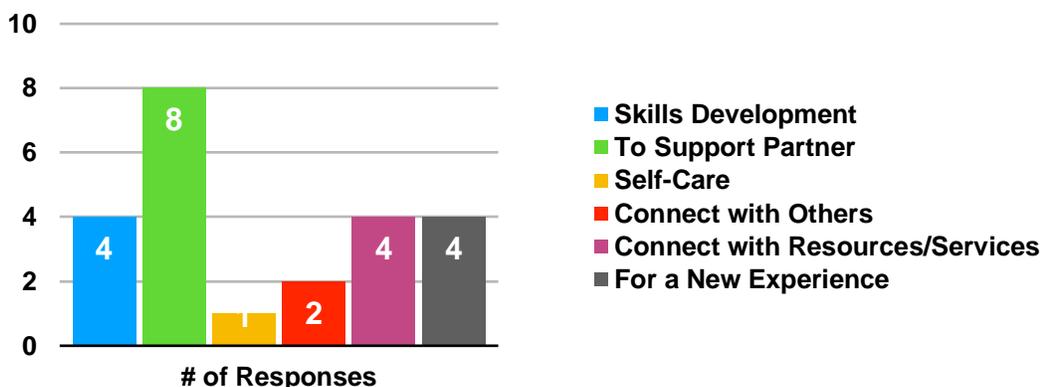
Identification of Wellness Retreat Attendees



emerged from this question, indicating a desire for participants to become socially included in a safe space promoting healing. As one participant explained, *“To learn new coping methods and meet others who are engaged in the same journey.”*

The value of creating an event where both the survivor and partner of the survivor could attend together was acknowledged as an unusual and welcome option for participants. One participant

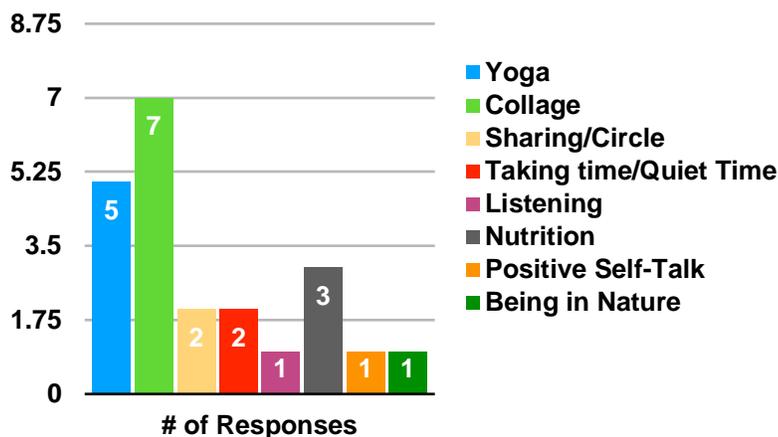
Why did you attend the Wellness Retreat?



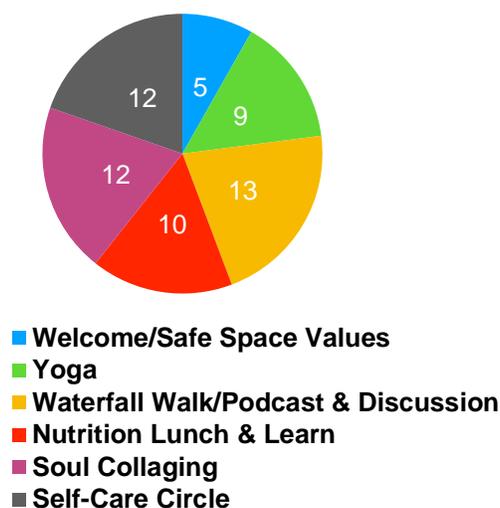
suggested, *“There are very few options out there for couples (partners of survivors and partner) to attend.”* Considering its positive reception, this helps demonstrate the need to create programming for partners, but also the local service gap that a joint partner and survivor event helped to fill. As well, the use of a shared event helped to increase social inclusion for both partners and survivors. When asked what they learned from the event, one participant explained, *“Seeing that I am not alone. There are partners who help loved ones who suffered the same thing.”*

People who attended the event with a partner were asked to explain their experience of the event as a couple. Of the 11 responses, 10 participants expressed a positive experience overall, with particular emphasis placed on the importance of having each other as support, as facilitating connectedness between the partners, and as a chance to see their partners

Which tools/skills will you utilize to assist in exercising self-care after the event?



Which of the activities did you find helpful?



differently. As one partner of a survivor explained, “We both came together and knew that we were both here to help our relationship.”

Participants at the event were asked to choose which activities were helpful and what skills/tools they would be able to use to exercise self-care in the future. All participants found at least 1 activity meaningful, helping to demonstrate the diversity of content and engagement of participants. All participants (excluding two blank responses) were able to articulate different activities and skills learned throughout the day as tools to apply in their own self-care practices in the future. As well, many participants (8 of 15 completed answers) acknowledged the need to develop stronger self-care practices, or to implement self-care more consistently in their lives.

As with previous assessments of both Partners Groups, the importance of using a peer support model is consistently highlighted in all evaluation responses received through the connection of people with similar experiences and a reduction in social isolation for participants. This was perhaps most succinctly explained by a Wellness Retreat attendee who identified the use of sharing as key in the early development of their self-care practice,

“Mostly, the sharing from others is what I’ll carry forward with me. The self-care circle was very helpful for me. Listening to others share their thoughts and their ability to articulate their feelings, feelings and thoughts I was also experiencing, helped me understand what I can do to care for myself.”

Conclusion & Recommendations

This evaluation has discussed early results coming from the Revive program’s pilot projects for partners of people who have survived sexual harm, and for partners of people who have caused sexual harm. The two groups implemented, Partners of People Who Offended Sexually [PWOS] Peer Support Group, and Partners of Survivors Peer Support Group, as well as the Wellness

Retreat, were rated highly by participants. Three key themes emerged from all of the programming evaluated, highlighting self-care as an invaluable tool in facilitating healing, communication skills as a necessary piece of developing healthier relationships, and a decrease in social isolation. Although these results are not scientifically causal, it is clear that participants perceive the peer support model as an important avenue for creating community connections that increase a sense of social inclusion.

As previously explained, this study cannot evaluate the *effectiveness* of the Revive program, but has demonstrated the logical connection of the programming and intended outcomes to the perceptions articulated by participant evaluation surveys. In this way, a clear demonstration of increased social inclusion, including belonging and being connected to the community, as well as an enhanced understanding of healthy relationships is consistently demonstrated by this pilot project. More evidence is needed to understand whether an increase in a sense of personal safety is attributable.

As the Revive Partners programming continues with stable funding, several recommendations can be made to ensure the evaluation process matures alongside the project.

1. The project should continue to implement regular data collection in its effort to establish a strong evidence base
2. If the project desires an understanding of whether personal safety and community safety is related to the programming, clearer connections need to be made between how a peer support model helps to facilitate safety. A literature scan regarding how the support and wellbeing of partners of people who have caused sexual harm/experienced sexual harm contributes to community safety is needed.
3. Related to recommendation 2, should funding permit, new evaluation material for volunteers that aids in linking volunteer learnings to community safety, would be an asset in articulating the value of a Restorative Justice model and how community involvement through volunteerism has impact.
4. Finally, the next evaluation of stable programming would benefit from a larger sample size of participants and a redevelopment of evaluation material. In order to begin to assess efficacy, a larger evaluation budget would be needed to develop baseline data and pre-/post- Group evaluation material.