



COMMISSION

ON SEXUAL & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Inspiring and coordinating our community's efforts to address sexual and domestic violence



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• History

- ❖ The DV Commission was formed in 1998 by a joint resolution between Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham.
- ❖ In 2006, Ordinances of Support were passed by each of the additional municipalities of Whatcom County.
- ❖ In 2019, Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham voted to expand the mission to include sexual assault.



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Mission

- ❖ To inspire and coordinate our community's efforts to address sexual and domestic violence.

Goals

- ❖ **Connect institutions, stakeholders, and communities** to collectively increase understanding and effectiveness of community responses for sexual and domestic violence
- ❖ **Transform systems** to ensure best practice prevention and responses for sexual and domestic violence
- ❖ **Foster safety, justice, and well-being for survivors** and communities



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Government representatives:

- Bruce Van Glubt
- Dave Reynolds
- Regina Delahunt
- Sheriff Bill Elfo
- Eric Richey
- Starck Follis

Community appointments:

- Michele Zlotek
- Riannon Bardsley
- Christina Kobdish
- Michael Parker
- Garret Shelsta
- Moonwater



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- **Local government funding**

- ❖ Whatcom County

- ❖ City of Bellingham

- ❖ City of Ferndale

- **Grants, US Department of Justice,
Office on Violence Against Women (OVW)**

- ❖ Safe Futures for Children & Youth

- ❖ Improving Criminal Justice Responses to Sexual Assault

Whatcom County Sexual Assault Audit

quotes from survivors of sexual assault

“If nothing else were to change, it is that you need to tell the victim what is going on.”

“There are so many missed opportunities by many people in power to even acknowledge harm done, to offer condolences.”

“Sometimes the way agencies respond, or don’t respond to you ends up actually being worse of an experience than the incident.”

Whatcom County Sexual Assault Audit

- Data collected in 2017 and 2018 by multi-disciplinary team
- Data collection activities included:
 - Focus groups & interviews with survivors
 - Focus groups & interviews with professional stakeholders
 - Mapping of systems responses
 - Text analysis (agency policies and procedures, police reports, prosecution files)
 - Observations (trial, emergency department processes, MDT meetings)

Whatcom County Sexual Assault Audit

Findings – Themes:

- Societal myths and misconceptions about sexual assault
- Implicit bias and oppression, particularly impacting Native survivors

Findings – Gaps:

- Delays
- Lack of follow-up and communication
- Over-focus on survivor credibility
- Lack of criminal accountability & serial offenders
- Lack of expertise trauma-informed responses

Whatcom County Sexual Assault Audit

- Recommendations

- Policy, procedure, protocol, and practice – develop and/or update with best practices
- Professional training
- Multi-disciplinary response specific to sexual assault
- Resources

- Implementation

- Agency action plans and timelines
- Sexual assault response team
- Trainings for advocates, nurses, law enforcement, and prosecutors



BIG CONSENT EVENT

IF IT'S NOT CLEAR, IT'S NOT CONSENT.

“With the girl who was raped there was a lot of victim blaming and gossip from the peer community. It wasn't anything with the perpetrator, it was her friends taking sides.”

– Local high school staff

“I think we need to develop tools and skills for bystanders.”

- DV survivor

“I think for today's youth a lot of [information] is found online and a lot of it is inaccurate and for young queer people it's really hard to navigate that.”

– Whatcom County youth



BIG CONSENT EVENT

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Youth Summit for high school youth groups with an adult mentor
Friday, March 1, 2019

Who participated?

- 145 students
- 24 adult mentors/team leaders
- 8 high schools, Juvenile Detention, home school, Nooksack youth program
- Groups included: sports teams, prevention clubs, QSAs
- 74% identified as female, 18% as male, 8% as non-binary
- 44% of students identified as LGBTQ+



BIG CONSENT EVENT

IF IT'S NOT CLEAR, IT'S NOT CONSENT.

82 students completed evaluations (57% response rate)

What did they learn?

- 99% learned how to define consent
- 96% learned how to recognize consent
- 89% learned about new resources
- 95% felt energized to take action

Restorative Justice Learning Series

quotes from survivors of domestic violence/sexual assault

“I just want him to acknowledge what he did, to say he’s sorry and he understands that it was wrong.”

“I just didn’t want him to do it to someone else.”

“I know that it was messed up, and I wish he’d own up to that, but I also don’t want him to go to jail.”

Restorative Justice Learning Series

Goals:

- Develop a common understanding and definition of restorative justice framework
- Explore how a restorative justice framework could be applied to our community response to sexual and domestic violence
- Develop shared community values for considering restorative justice to address domestic violence and sexual assault

Restorative Justice Learning Series

About:

- Co-hosted with the Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center
- A series of six 2-hour learning sessions conducted every 2 months over the course of a year
- Participants should plan to attend all sessions of the learning series
- Initial session will be at the annual meeting of the Commission on Sexual & Domestic Violence on Thurs, May 23rd from 8 – 10am at the Mt. Baker Theatre



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Questions or comments?

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