

AFTERTHOUGHTS OF JUST DESSERTS
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THE TRANSITION

Stepping into the shoes of the previous Prevention Specialist responsible for YOUTH CONNECTION this last November has proven to be a humbling task that I had not foreseen. I was so very proud to finally be working in the field of acquaintance rape and sexual assault prevention, a task very close to my heart.

I had read the “ONE VOICE” script when I came on board and it instantly blew me away! I was in awe of the way that the script told many different stories of acquaintance rape, and yet each actor in the play ended their monologue with a sentence that began another person’s story to let the audience know that the pain, the shame and the fear were shared by all. My head was swirling with, what I thought, were wonderful, fresh ideas that I could not wait to share with the youth actors. As I had met all of the actors before, I felt as though I had my foot in the door enough to dive in and pick up where my predecessor had left off.

Boy, was I in for a surprise!

A SLICE OF HUMBLE PIE, PLEASE?

My first night with the actors proved to be very frustrating. As I was driving to rehearsal, I reflected on the six years of working with teens that I had under my belt. I remember smiling to myself and thinking, “this is going to be a glorious piece of cake, sister!”

I walked in to find that three of our key players were not in attendance and eventually learned that they were never coming back. The actors that remained were not eager to work that night and I was met with either lost, blank stares or unbridled sarcasm in every attempt that I made to connect with them.

I was stumped! I felt like a substitute teacher trying to lead class the day before summer break is set to begin...the new Darrin, trying to rehearse lines with a sea of unimpressed Samanthas. I had big shoes to fill.

AND THEN IT DAWNED ON ME

By the third rehearsal, I had lost one more player. I tried to get the remaining actors to focus on the “ONE VOICE” play but their hearts were not in it.

I called for a group meeting and asked everyone to sit in a circle and express his or her thoughts. Slowly but surely, they all began to speak in sentences that began with, “no offense, Tracey, *but...*”

They missed the Prevention Specialist before me. They were frustrated because the other actors had quit the group when they all had promised each other that they would stay and carry on their role as peer educators. It was during this discussion that I saw the passion for rape/sexual assault prevention burning in each pair of enormously creative, yet saddened, young eyes.

Their hearts were in the right place. They just needed one thing from me that I had yet to develop with them...*trust!*

MISSION MIDDLE SCHOOL IS BORN

During the next several weeks, I set the “ONE VOICE” play aside to focus on allowing the cast and I to get to know one another. We played loads of theater games and continued with the effective “group circle.” I asked the actors to focus on our goals as a team and encouraged them to bring all of their creative visions to the table and show me what they wanted their theatre group to look like. The actors all agreed that they wanted to develop a middle school play that focuses on youth who have committed sexual assault or acquaintance rape in order to reach those who have the potential to do so. The actors also said that they wanted to do their best to help squash the acquaintance rape myths, as they all stated that it was during the middle school years that they watched negative relationship patterns develop with their friends, or even themselves. One actor even said, “In middle school, most of my friends and I learned about sexual communication through talking to each other or from watching MTV ...from what we saw in videos, it seemed okay to slap a girl on the butt if we thought she was cute or call her a ‘ho’ for no other reason but to say it...the guys in the videos were doing it, and the girls were smiling so we thought it was normal...*now* I know better, but in middle school, you don’t really ask questions, you just watch, listen and follow along.”

I cringed as the rest of the cast agreed and added that because they do not see their parents as sexual beings, any advice coming from mom or dad is heard, but that the opinion of a friend, peers, or a video star is usually modeled.

A mission was born.

AND NOW?

Here we are, nearly four months later. The cast has definitely begun to welcome me into their close-knit tribe and we have recently begun to work on the “ONE VOICE” play, once again. The cast and I plan to continue our work on the middle school play once school is out for summer session and we are hoping to have it ready to go when school resumes in the fall.

The talent of this young cast continuously inspires me and I am so proud of their powerful dedication. Each actor strives to develop the best possible way to reach their

peers and serve their community by raising acquaintance rape and rape/sexual assault awareness.

I was right; my new job *is* a glorious piece of cake.

Not because it is easy, but because it is rich, satisfying and it leaves me feeling full.