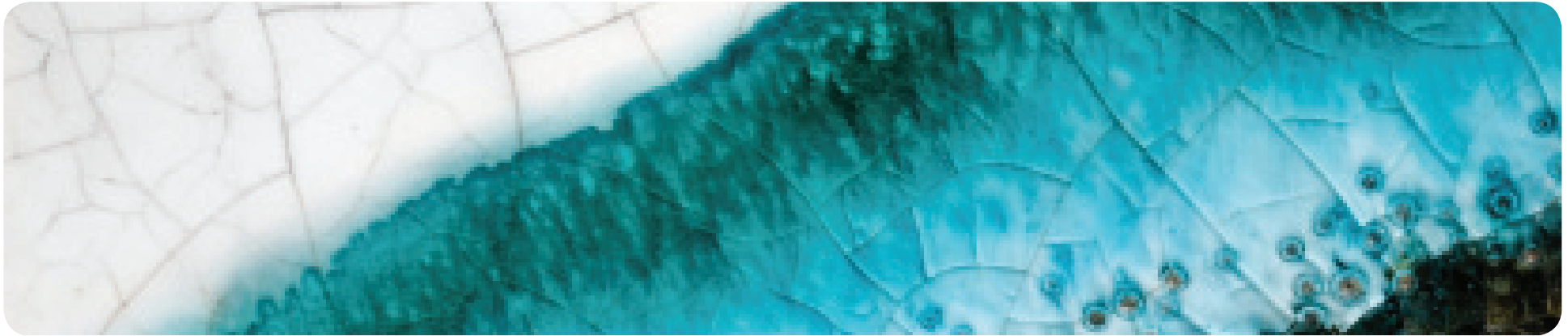




ENGAGING BYSTANDERS

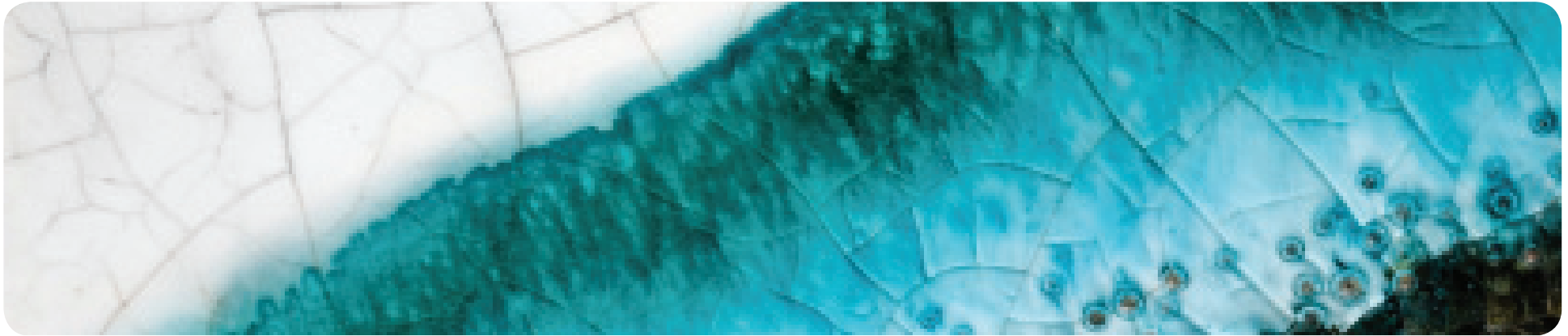
in the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence



Introduction to This Course

This course will support you as you apply bystander engagement theory to your work in sexual assault and domestic violence prevention. It assumes that you are familiar with the basic theory and practice of the bystander approach, and understand general concepts related to primary prevention. To get the most from this course, we recommend that you review the documents in the [Prevention Overview](#) course before beginning.

The overall goal of this course is to support you in applying bystander engagement into your prevention practice, through the following educational and skill objectives:



Engaging Bystanders in the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence

Educational Objectives

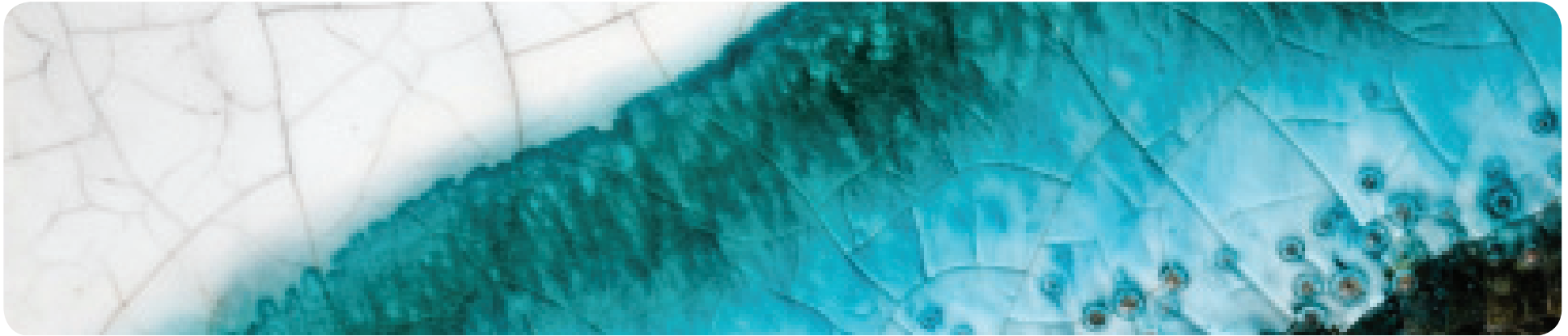
Be able to describe how the bystander intervention model is applied to primary prevention.

Identify how successful prevention programs have adopted the bystander model.

Skill Objectives

Be able to incorporate the bystander intervention model into general social-ecological theory.

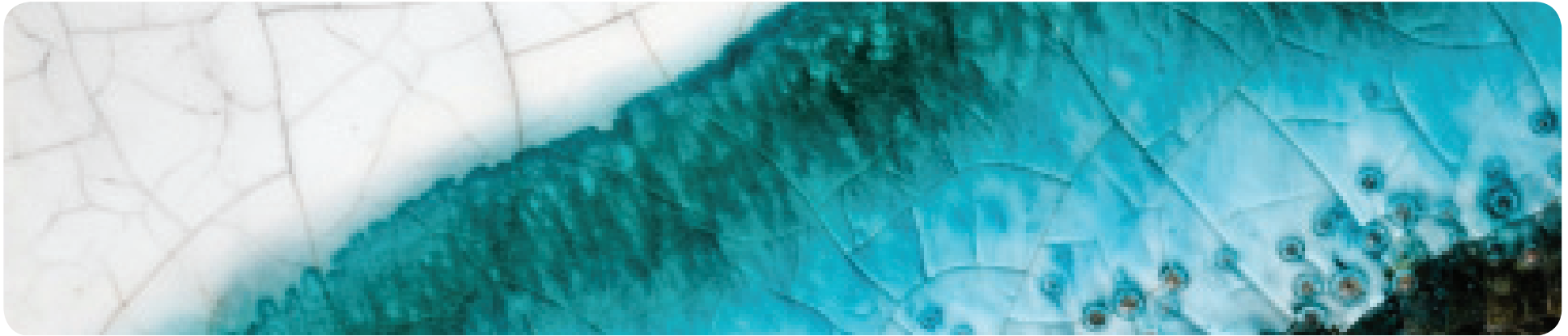
Develop local strategies that hold promise for prevention, based on your community's demographics, organizational goals, and community assets.



Introduction to Bystander Intervention

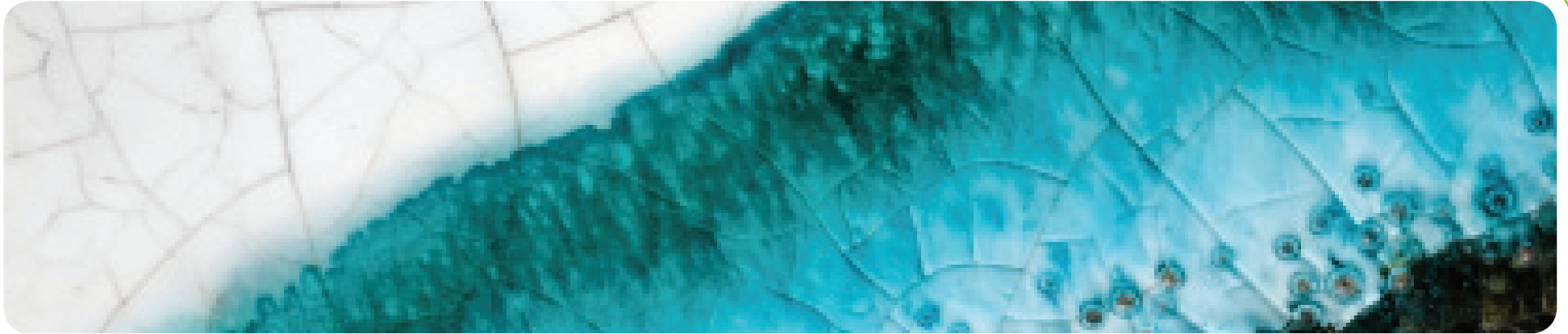
The concept of bystander engagement is based in sociological models that help us understand why people do or do not take action in a bystander situation. This might mean stopping at the scene of an accident or helping someone who is struggling with a medical condition. In the case of sexual assault and domestic violence, bystanders are the people around both the potential victim and the potential perpetrator. On a broader level, every person has the potential to act and interrupt activities and conditions that condone sexual assault and domestic violence. In that view, each and every one of us is a bystander.

Bystander engagement work aims to inform and motivate bystanders while giving them the skills and options to intervene where they see potential risk of violence. The overall aim of bystander intervention is to build communities in ways that simply do not support sexual assault and domestic violence. By recognizing that everyone in a community is a bystander, everyone has specific roles in contributing to



prevention efforts. It is an approach that goes beyond general education and raising awareness to help people understand the incidence, dynamics and impact of sexual assault and domestic violence. Built on a foundation of raising awareness, bystander engagement is the next logical step as it answers the question “how can I help?” by providing specific skills and support in intervening.

Bystander engagement offers everyone a role in preventing sexual assault and domestic violence. It also offers the hope that, by combining every bystander’s efforts into a community, that community can be organized toward ending sexual assault and domestic violence. While many prevention efforts might promote involvement in volunteer programs or community events, bystander intervention can be encouraged in every situation where the potential for violence occurs in everyday life.



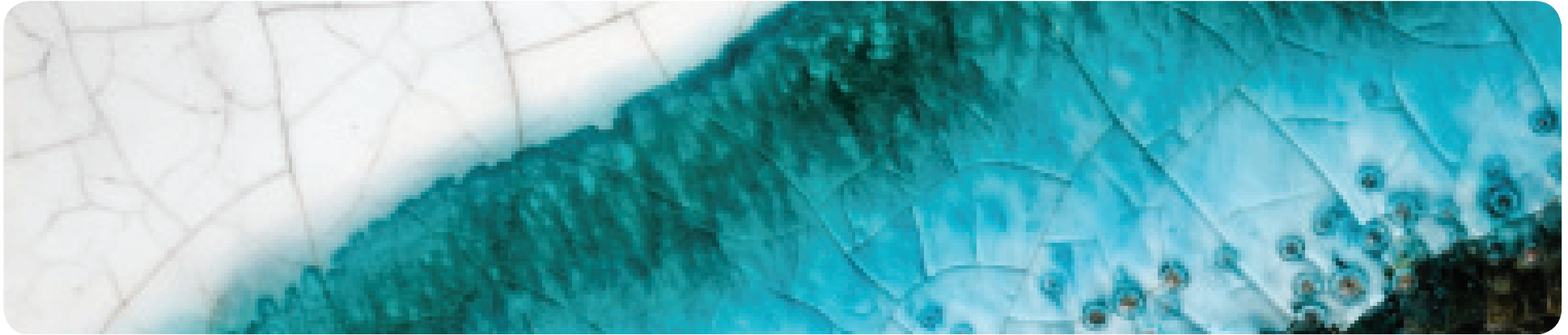
Let's talk about some of the strengths of the bystander approach. As we do, consider your own community or organization, to think of other strengths in your particular case.

The bystander approach:

Discourages victim blaming,

Offers the chance to change social norms, and

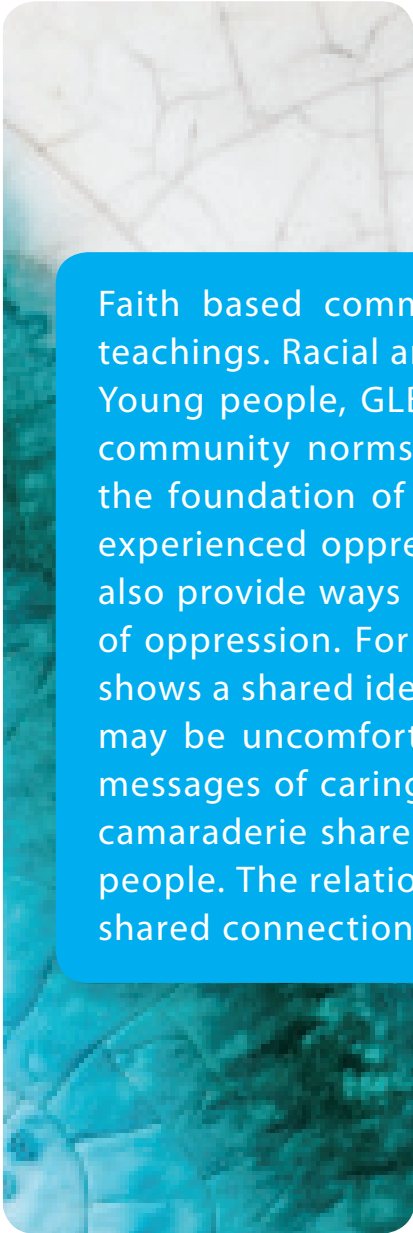
Shifts responsibility to everyone in the community.



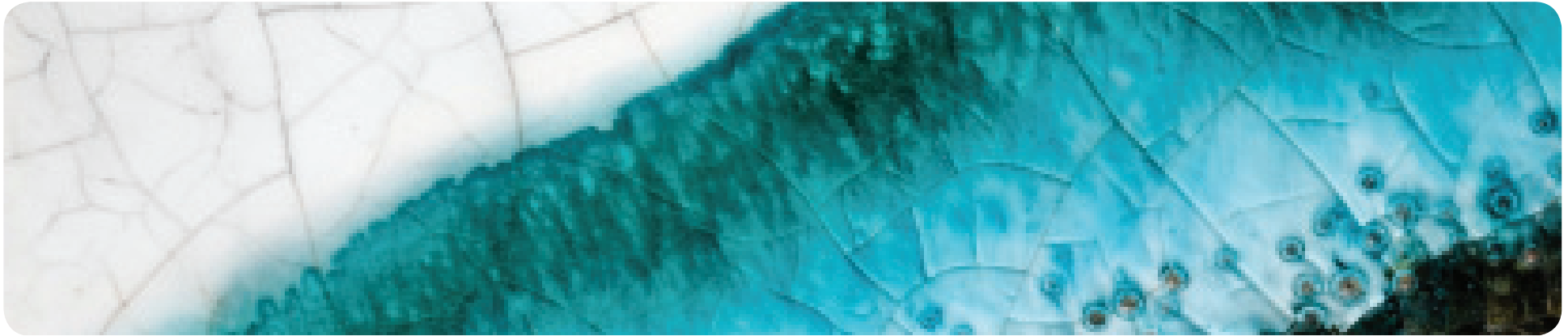
Bystander Engagement from a Multicultural Perspective

Your bystander intervention strategies will be stronger and resonate more with your targeted community when you incorporate culturally relevant messages and strategies. Bystander engagement in your particular community will take on different approaches that are rooted in the cultural, religious, social, or political experiences of your community.

As you draw on your understanding of the shared cultural traditions among your audience, you will naturally find the ways in which each community reinforces the messages of caring for others. These cultural norms offer an important base of strength, and will be invaluable as an asset in of your bystander prevention strategy.



Faith based communities often get messages of caring and activism through religious text and teachings. Racial and ethnic groups often express shared community values in response to oppression. Young people, GLBT communities, people with disabilities, and immigrants all may be influenced by community norms of unity and solidarity. These experiences and community values are essentially the foundation of promoting the bystander approach. Many communities, especially ones that have experienced oppression, have developed cultural norms that are both community building tools and also provide ways to cope with and draw strength from their shared identity in the face of the impact of oppression. For example, the tradition of placing rainbow or pink triangle stickers on car bumpers shows a shared identity and sense of community for GLBT folks, where openness in mainstream society may be uncomfortable or dangerous. Many people of color draw inspiration from religiously based messages of caring, compassion and social justice as a counter action against racism. There is often a camaraderie shared within a community among people in poverty, including homeless or mentally ill people. The relationships formed by with shared struggles and oppression become a shelter of sorts, a shared connection with someone else who has or is experiencing similar struggles.



Connecting Bystander Engagement to the Social Ecological Model of Prevention

Bystander engagement can be applied to every level of the social-ecological model of prevention. In fact, the strongest and most effective efforts are the ones that identify and implement strategies at every level. Policy development and public media campaigns are often designed to reinforce or change the behaviors only at the individual and relationship levels. Making those shifts at the individual and relationship levels is easier when they are accompanied and supported by related community and societal level changes.

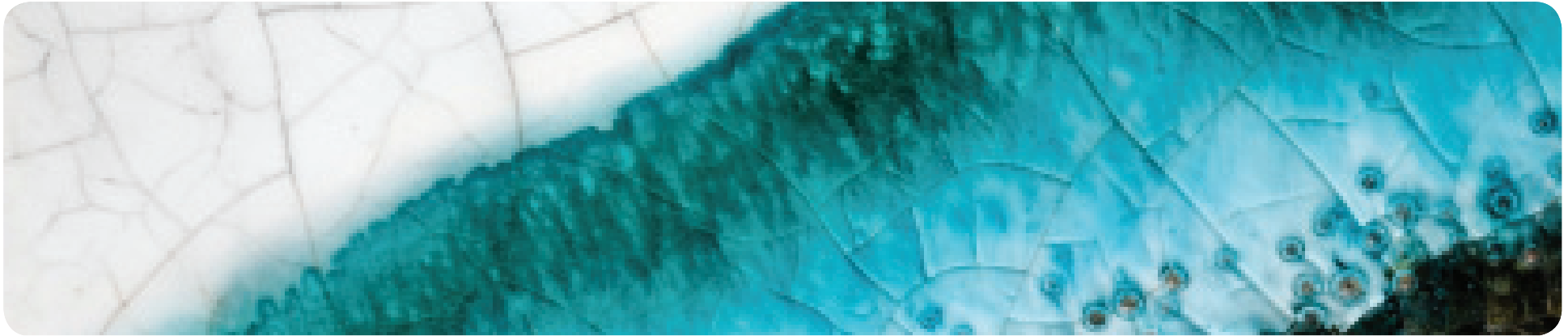
Indeed, cultural norms with regard to sexual assault and domestic violence run deep. They are often confusing and contradictory. For example, most people have heard that it's never okay to hit a woman, yet domestic violence is one of the most pervasive forms of violence in our communities. In a bystander

approach, participants would see and identify this contradiction and build on the cultural norm behind the message that “it’s never okay to hit a woman” regardless of circumstance.

In the next section we will identify some strategies to consider when designing or enhancing your bystander engagement programs. These are explained within the context of each level of the social ecological model.

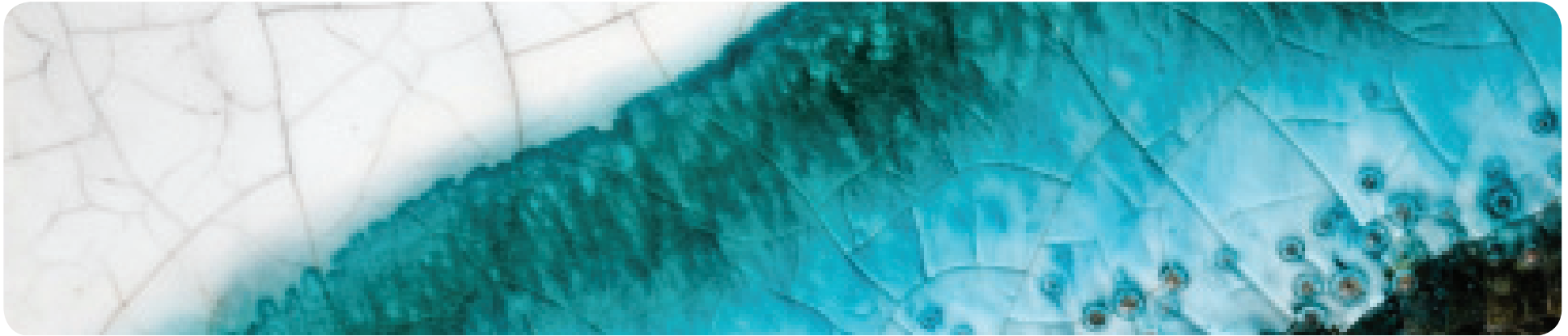
An Individual’s Role in Bystander Prevention:

Individuals who make a commitment to be bystanders in prevention need to be open to seeing and naming the contradictory messages about sexual and domestic violence. For example, while the vast majority of people think that rape is harmful and wrong, some have yet to apply that thinking to their own behavior and relationships. In other words, while rape is widely held as a negative behavior, many people do not understand the true nature or definition of rape, especially if the potential perpetrator knows the victim. Society’s myths about sexual violence are deeply rooted in relationships, media, and even in childhood games and stories. In order for individuals to go through the necessary decision-making process that leads to intervening, he or she needs to be equipped with a strong understanding of society’s confusing messages about rape so that inappropriate and potentially dangerous behaviors can be named and contradicted.



Individual

At the individual level, the goal of bystander education is to teach and motivate individuals to take a pro-social role in reducing violence against women. Consider incorporating elements that motivate individuals, increase the “cool” factor, and give people specific options and the opportunity to practice and discuss them. It is important to emphasize that intervention does not mean putting oneself in a dangerous situation between an assailant and a potential victim. It does mean interrupting the jokes, behaviors, and attitudes that are pervasive in a culture that largely accepts some level of sexual and domestic violence as normal behavior.



Questions to Consider When Working on the Individual Change Level

Choose and describe your “target population”. Most bystander approaches focus on a specific community or group that shares common characteristics. Develop a clear understanding of your target population based on these questions:

What are the characteristics of this population?

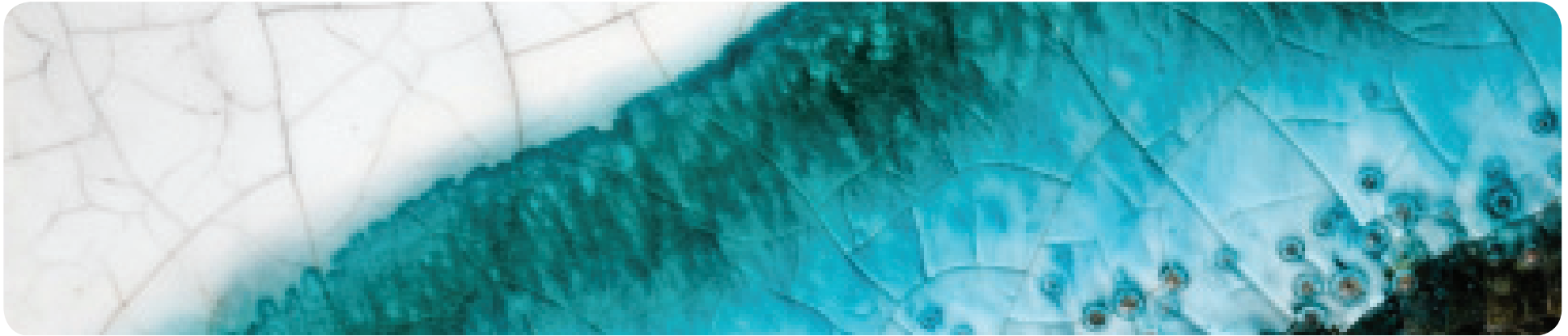
What do they have in common?

How would you describe the diversity of this population?

How are the issues of sexual and domestic violence operating within this population?

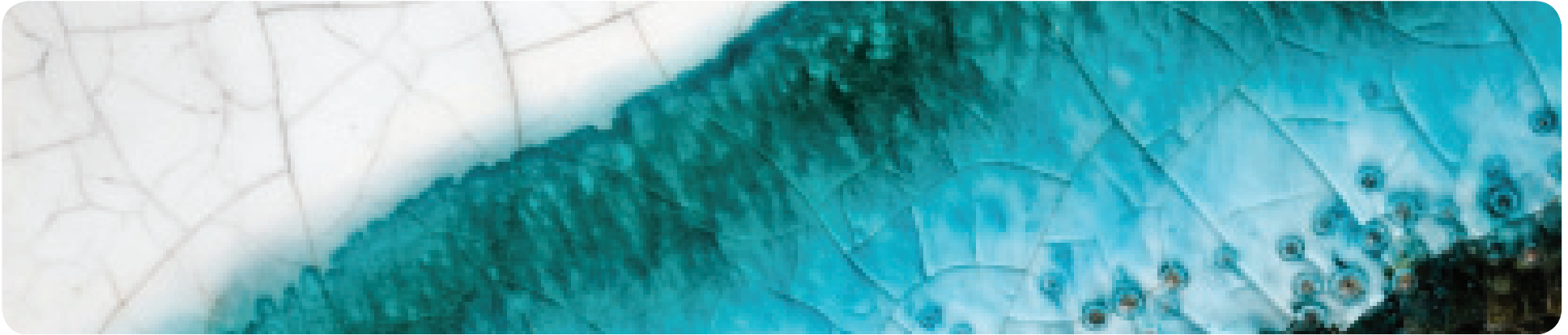
What motivates people as part of this population?

What new or improved community norms would decrease the risk of sexual or domestic violence in this population?



Relationship

Bystanders working at the relationship level incorporate prevention messages into their own relationships and social networks. A common victim prevention message has always been to use a buddy system among women when going to a party, walking at night, or attending an event, as a strategy to reduce personal risk. The buddy system has traditionally been a risk reduction strategy for potential victims. This same buddy system idea could be incorporated in a bystander intervention approach with regard to potential perpetration as well. For example, men could use a version of the buddy system, agreeing to check in with each other about their intoxication level or intentions with someone they meet. The bystander approach acts on the context of relationships. Develop and practice scenarios that build the skills required to approach friends and acquaintances who are showing questionable or dangerous attitudes and behaviors. The most effective bystanders in these situations have learned how to skillfully and respectfully engage in conversation that might help someone change their attitudes and behaviors.



Questions to consider when working on the relationship level.

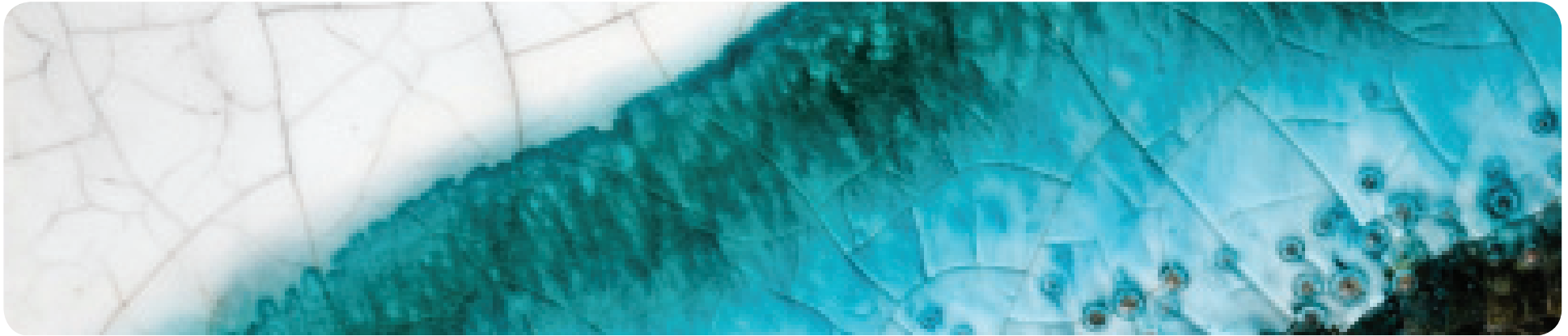
In the bystander approach, relationships contribute to the education, change in behavior, and accountability needed to change community norms. Try this exercise to help you focus on relationships:

First, for the population named in your bystander engagement effort, name the important relationships that many members of the population have.

Then, think through the specifics about each relationship:

- What constitutes the relationship?
- Is there a purpose to the relationship?
- What does each person bring to the relationship?
- What does each person receive and how do they grow through the relationship?

Finally, decide how the relationship can enhance education, accountability, and support.



Community

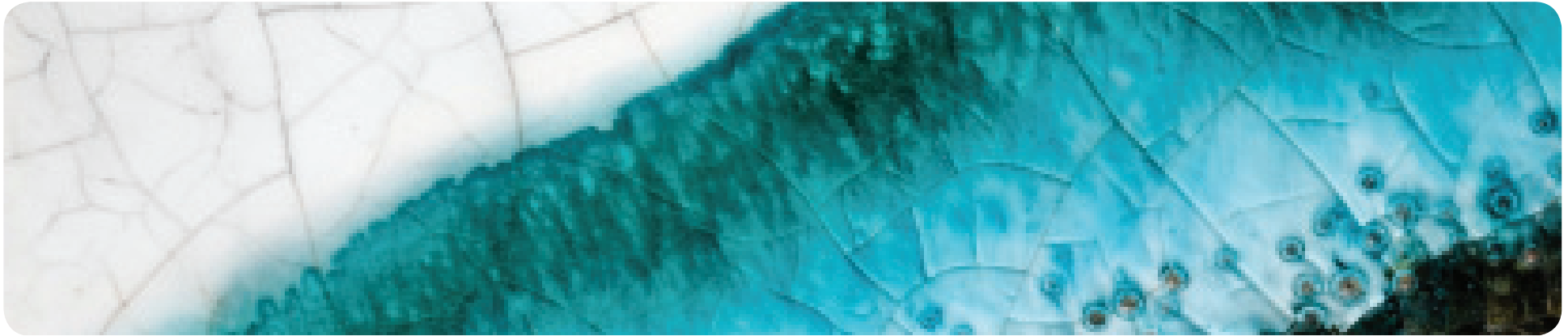
It is critical to support individual- and relationship-based intervention with changes in community norms. Confronting someone on their attitude is difficult when there are strong community supports for their attitude. People often think that they benefit from holding on to their attitudes when the community reinforces them through prestige, status, and privilege and discourages intervention by demeaning those who want to create change. This is why it is essential to incorporate a change in community norms as part of a bystander intervention approach. Specific prevention activities that work to increase community receptivity to prevention messages ultimately increase the likelihood that community members will take an active role.

Specific strategies may include the use of media campaigns or social marketing. Some great examples of media campaigns that can be adapted and used in your bystander strategy include [Know Your Power](#), [Greendot Etcetera](#), [MyDuty](#) for the Department of Defense and the [Strength Campaign](#) from Men Can Stop Rape.



An Example of Changing Community Norms:

Most colleges and universities have student activities functions, with approval processes for use of student activities fees and other funds. To host a social event on campus, a group generally needs to go through some type of review, getting approval for spending funds, security, food, and use of campus facilities. A proactive community norm change might be to require campus groups to clearly identify the strategies they intend to use to prevent sexual violence. This might include making bedrooms in a dorm or fraternity off limits during a party, choosing to serve food that would help counter the effects of alcohol, posting people to watch dynamics and check in with women or men who appear intoxicated or who are behaving in sexist or oppressive ways. By implementing this type of policy, the governing body would provide strong leadership as bystanders. By holding a group accountable to specific community level conditions that work to prevent sexual and domestic violence, prevention theory can be put into practical application.



Societal

Changing public policy and social norms are essential to supporting individual and relationship change. In fact, most prevention models now acknowledge that work on the policy level is essential to fully integrating and supporting prevention messages and actual social change. A comprehensive bystander strategy will include efforts to change organizations, institutions, government, and society as a whole.

System reform connected to intervention can be promoted with prevention goals in mind. By understanding and supporting your area's efforts to manage sex offenders and identify high-risk perpetrators, you play a role in enhancing victim safety. By engaging in these policy-level initiatives, participants become bystanders as they think through policy level interventions. Changing policy related to sexual and domestic violence requires people to think like bystanders, by imagining the problems and solutions and how they would impact potential victims and/or perpetrators.

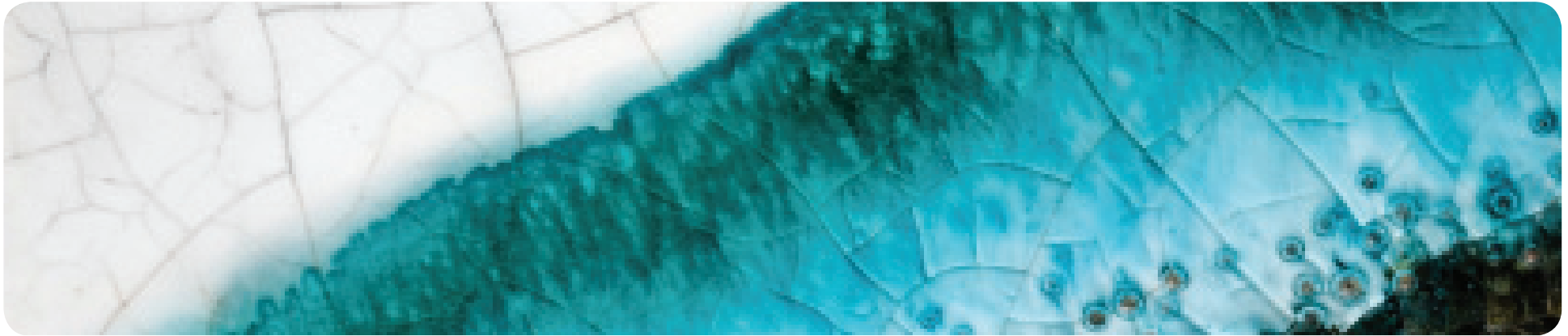
Policy work that involves people who have committed to being bystanders is a positive and helpful way



An Example of Effective Bystander Intervention at the Policy Level:

In one state, the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program, which had been operating for more than 15 years, was suddenly at risk for massive cuts that would have effectively ended the program. A coalition of survivors, friends, family members, health care workers and other committed bystanders quickly formed with the specific goal to stop the funding cut to the program. They developed a shared understanding and talking points, scheduled key legislator visits, and organized a public rally and speak-out. They also strategically utilized social media, specifically a Facebook page, to keep supporters informed and motivated. As a result, they were able to retain the funding for the program. A key factor in the final decision was the obvious widespread support, not only among service providers and SANE nurses, but more importantly, among interested citizens who were serving as bystanders to the issue. This became a powerful message, one that even the more fiscally conservative legislators acknowledged. Organized bystanders made the difference in this effort. They were effective in showing broad based community support and interest in the program and in the needs of survivors and communities related to sexual violence.

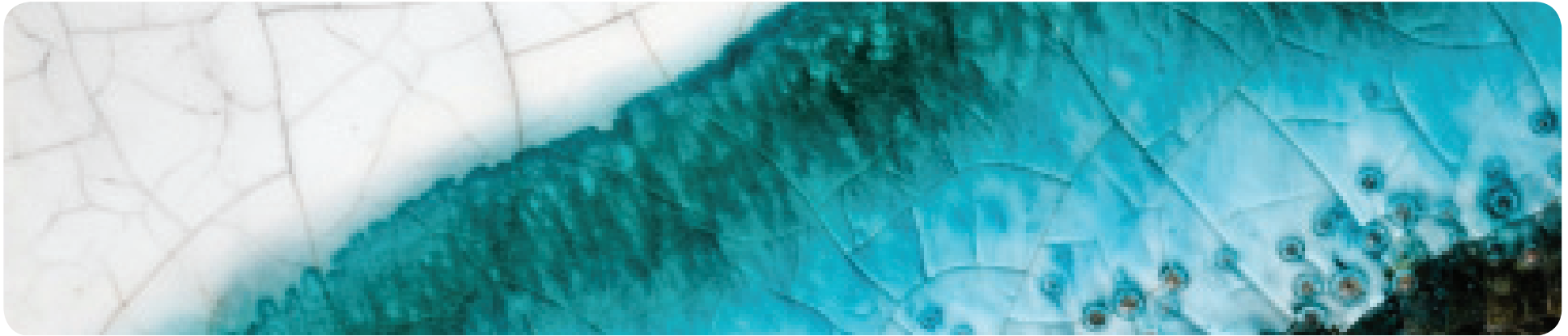
to keep people involved in the work and to utilize their combined energy and interest. Bystanders who have made a decision to intervene can be organized as supporters of budget initiatives and legislative change. Their experiences at the community level can be tracked and utilized to make the case for increased funding, better policy and system change.



Steps to Take when Introducing a Bystander Engagement Approach

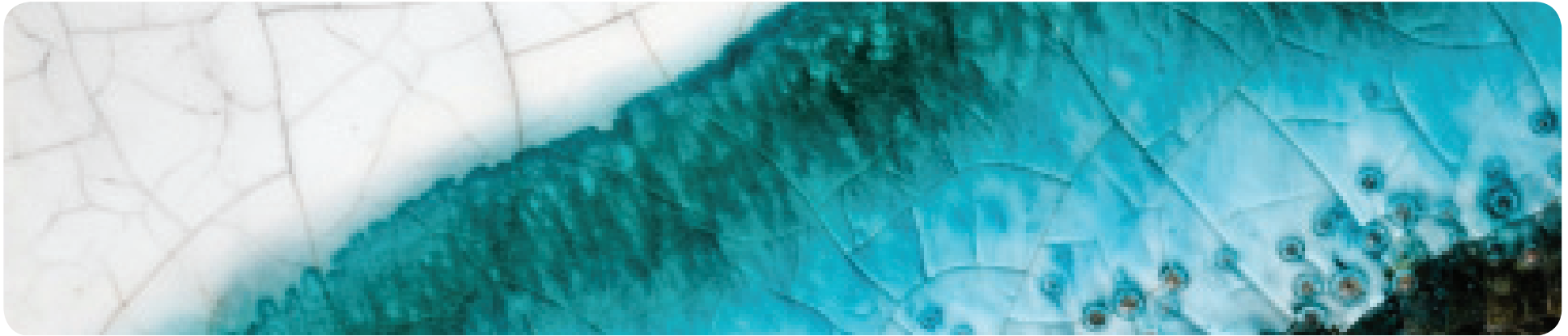
The following are some steps to consider if you want to develop a bystander engagement approach in your prevention work.

1. Assess your organization's mission and structure. How does prevention fit into your work? Do you have the necessary organizational supports and resources in place? Are there collaborations that you need to develop in order to get started? Assess where your organization is in terms of prevention and then strategize the next steps.
2. Choose a population for your initial focus. We suggest that you focus your efforts on a specific group or population, especially as you begin. This will help you recruit participants and identify the cultural and community norms in place and in need of change. For example, you can focus on

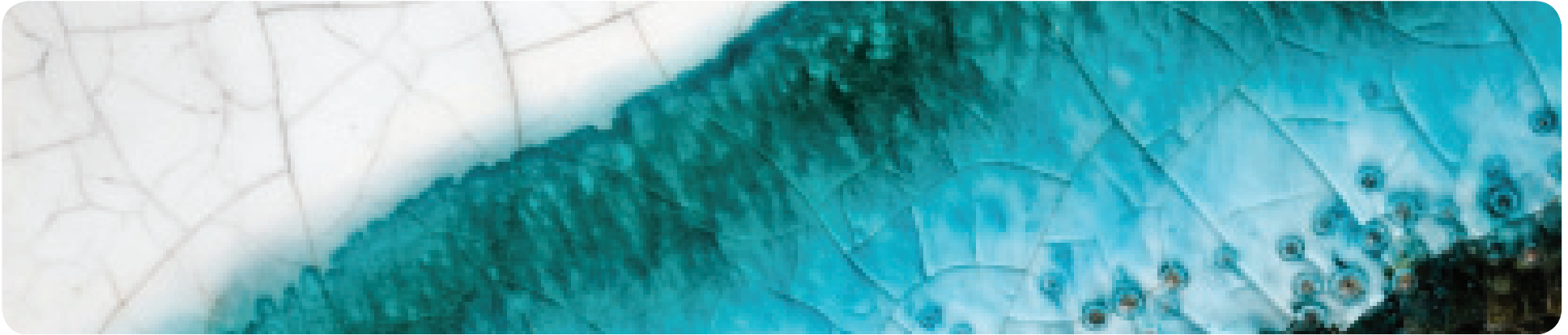


a high school or college in your area, a culturally specific group, a neighborhood, an after-school program or teen center, or a specific faith-based community.

3. Assess the level of awareness of this population. This can be done formally by reviewing research findings or informally through interviews or conversations with members of the community. Bystander engagement builds on a foundation of basic awareness, so if you find that most members of the population have little to no awareness of the issues, you may decide to start at the awareness stage before introducing bystander engagement.
4. Decide whether you plan to utilize a curricula or develop your own approach. Some excellent curricula exist that may be a good starting point for your own work. You can also develop a locally specific approach utilizing the general bystander engagement concepts. If you utilize a curriculum developed elsewhere, become familiar with the requirements for using the materials. You may be required to get training, purchase the materials, or both.



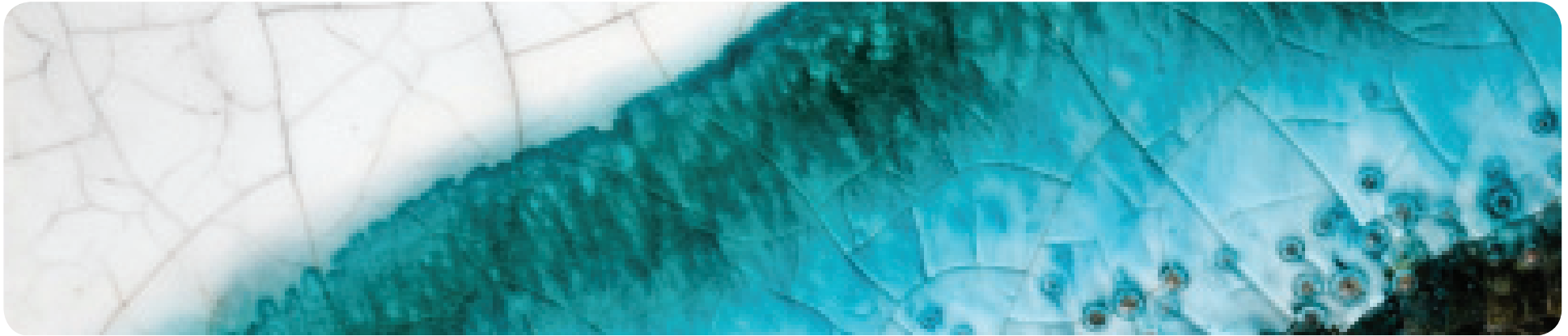
5. Identify community leaders in your target population. These may be elected or appointed officials, organization leaders, faith-based community leaders, or resident assistants on a college campus. Don't overlook informal leaders, the people who are seen as the mentors, leaders and supporters of community members. This can be a group of parents who participate in a high school PTO, community volunteers, or guidance counselors. By building a relationship with people in community, you will find out who the "go-to" people are and engage them in your work.
6. Form a team. This can take many forms, but essentially you will want to work with a group of people who can commit their efforts over a period of time. You may need to provide incentives or reduce barriers by meeting at convenient locations, providing transportation or childcare, or providing food and snacks at meetings. If you have the resources, you might consider providing stipends for group members, especially those who have limited time.
7. Set up some ongoing discussions toward developing your bystander engagement project. You will want to have enough discussion so that the group can develop as a support network for each



other while developing a solid foundation to the work, while at the same time it should be focused in a way that moves the work forward. If the discussion and development phase is too short, people may not feel prepared to engage as bystanders. Likewise, if it is too long, you may lose people over time if they start to feel that the work is all talk and no action. Some topics to discuss in your leadership group are:

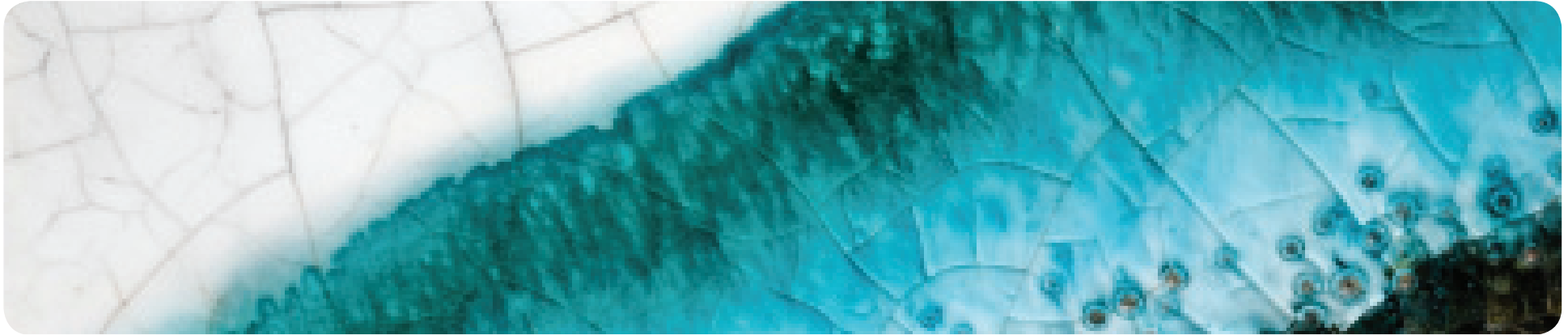
- What do we know about sexual assault and domestic violence?
- What are the general characteristics of our community?
- What are the community's strengths and assets?
- What are the factors that may promote sexual and domestic violence?
- What factors would discourage sexual and domestic violence in our community?
- What can bystanders do at each level?

8. Build a bystander engagement practice. If you are using an existing curriculum, help your team become familiar with the approach, tools, materials, and skills. Once your group understands what will be required of bystanders, it's time to develop some possible scenarios. Spend some



time doing practice and role playing and then utilize group support and feedback. This will help everyone in the group feel more prepared and grounded in the approach. Remember, you will be asking people to act as leaders, to introduce conversations that may be uncomfortable or new at first. They will benefit from having a support network and some practice.

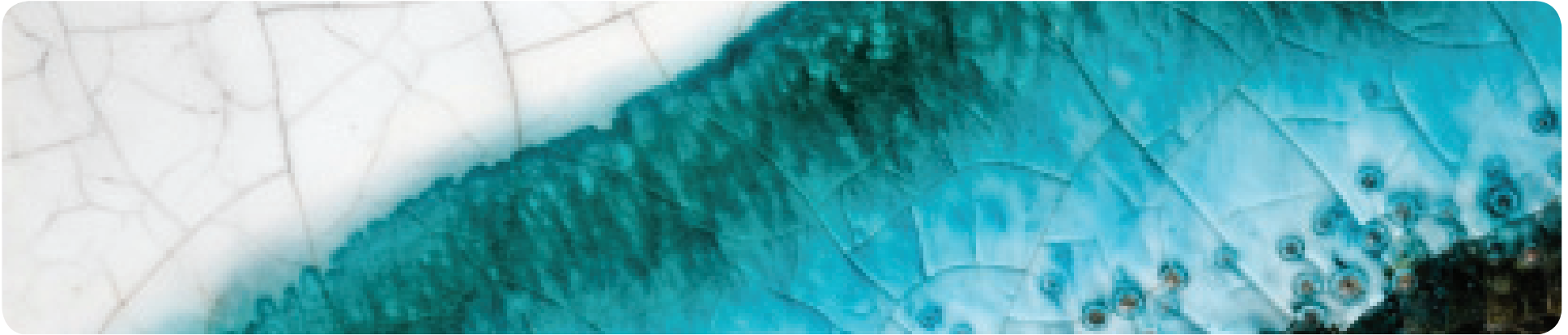
9. Build in ways for the group to keep in touch. Schedule regular gatherings, events, parties, or shared meals. These can be combination social and report back gatherings, or opportunities to talk about what is working, what's difficult, and to share strategies.
10. Build in an evaluation method. This can take many forms from a formal research project, to a more simple anecdotal method. Stay focused on the change you'd like to see in individuals, relationships and the community. Decide for yourselves what indicates success and how you will use your results to inform your work.



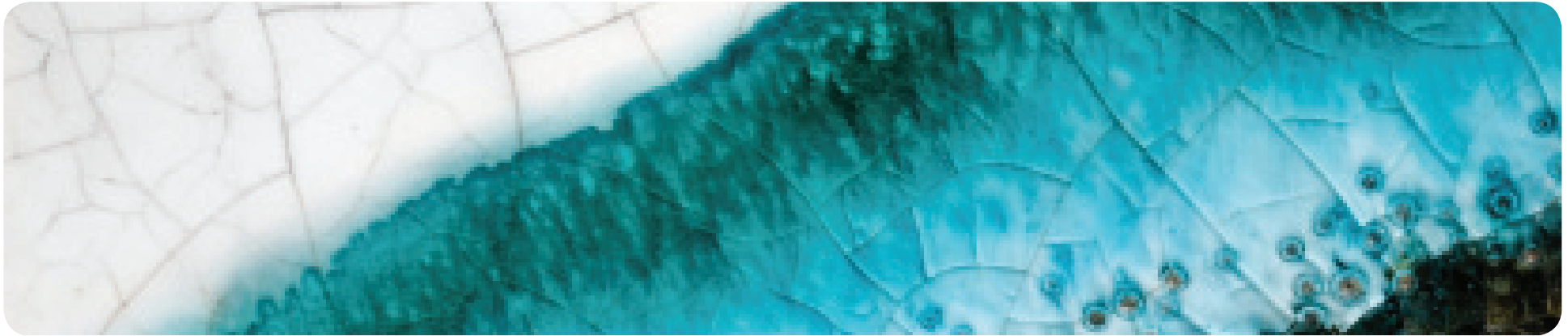
An Organizational Perspective on Supporting Bystander Engagement

Bystander engagement must be supported at all levels of an organization including the board, managers, staff, direct service staff, and prevention staff. If only the prevention staff focuses on a bystander approach, it will likely fail. However, it is often the prevention educator who is the first in an organization to be educated about this model.

1. You may be the one to make the case to the organization by sharing the materials and background theory. Your first step may be to help organization leaders understand that this is an opportunity. Once a bystander engagement approach is implemented, the organization could develop complementary consulting and training, perhaps with the possibility of enhancing revenues.

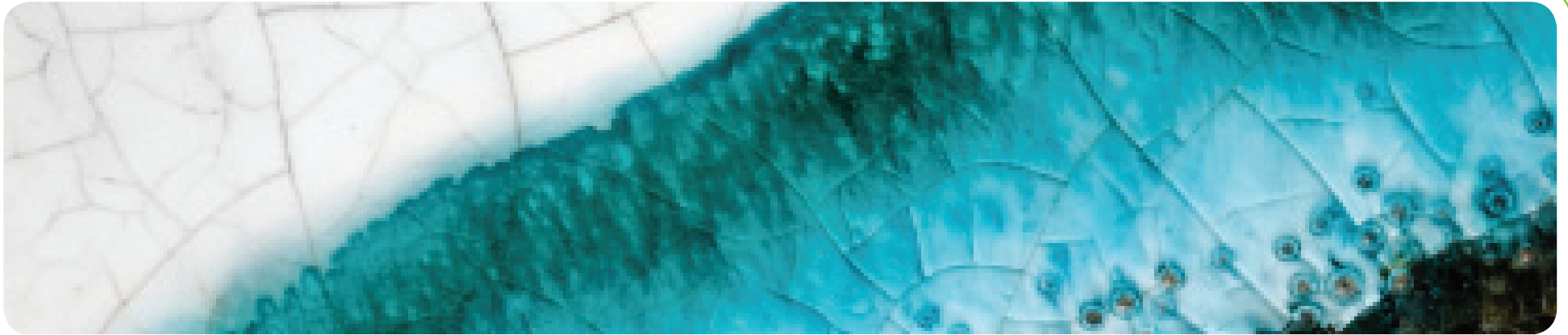


2. A bystander approach has a different focus than the survivor service model. It may require an organizational shift resulting in a broader understanding of prevention and how it works to enhance and amplify a survivor service model. This shift requires a reexamination of how an agency sees its role. Bystander approach places the community in the center of efforts to prevent sexual assault and domestic violence.
3. It is important that a bystander approach becomes part of your organization's communications strategy. The organization can feature the bystander approach in newsletters, blog posts, or on their website. It can also develop specific materials and posters, or adapt media campaigns already in existence to reinforce the work.
4. Work to incorporate concepts of bystander intervention into your agency's mission and vision statements. Most organizations understand that prevention is a community-wide effort. Introduce the bystander model as a way to frame individual actions throughout the community.
5. Develop a policy level plan of action as an effort that will support the other levels of the prevention strategies.



Now It's Your Turn

Each organization and community has different needs and social norms. Likewise, your efforts to implement a bystander intervention approach to prevention are related to your organization's capacity to support it. This workbook was designed to help you think through the steps you want to take in implementing a bystander approach. Use it as a tool with your prevention team or in supervision.



Sources and Citations

Tabachnik, Joan. (2008) Engaging Bystanders in Sexual Violence Prevention, National Sexual Violence Resource Center.

About the author

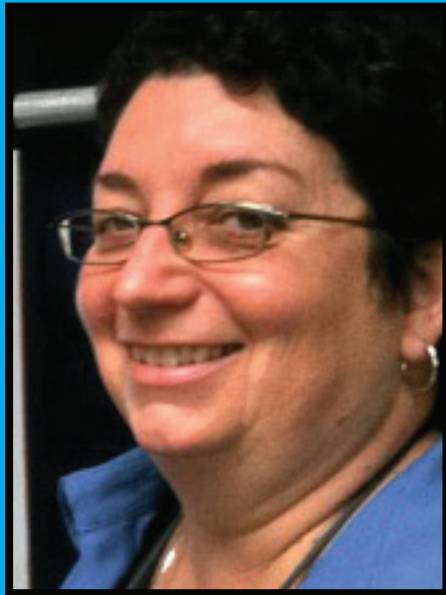
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Marianne Winters has been an advocate and activist in movements to end violence against women for more than 25 years. She currently serves as the Executive Director for Safe Passage, Inc. in Northampton, Massachusetts. She has served as an advocate, counselor, and leader in local, statewide and national organizations and has expertise in the integration of sexual and domestic violence work and organizing in multicultural communities. She also serves as Project Diva for Graphix for Change, a website and design firm that helps social change organizations accomplish their goals using Web 2.0 technologies.

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