

Talking about Domestic Violence Before It's Too Late: The Women's Center of San Joaquin County's Community Awareness Campaign

Organizational Strengths Grant Case Study

This case study was developed with support from Blue Shield of California Foundation, through the Strong Field Project, to share the story of the Women's Center multimedia campaign with the larger domestic violence field. It is informed by interviews with Women's Center leaders and materials published by the Center.

"It really was these very strong, visionary women who thought we need to have a place where all women could come together to talk about issues of interest to them. It wasn't a victim-focused organization initially. It was more focused on job preparation and self-esteem."

- Joelle Gomez

Organizational Background: From Modest Beginnings to a Key Community Resource

In 2010, the Women's Center of San Joaquin County (Women's Center) was awarded a two-year Organizational Strengths Grant (OSG) through Blue Shield of California Foundation's Strong Field Project (SFP). The Women's Center received the grant to develop a multimedia campaign that would increase the community's knowledge of domestic violence and involvement in ending it. By increasing awareness and focusing on hard-to-reach populations, the Women's Center also hoped to reduce the incidence of violence and increase the number of victims accessing services.

The Women's Center of San Joaquin County opened its doors on March 1, 1976. The Center evolved out of the initiative, planning, and dedication of eight local women who realized there was no central place in the community where women could turn for information, encouragement, and support. Beginning with a budget of \$275, the eight founders opened a drop-in center in the basement of a local church. The original efforts of the Women's Center emphasized workforce development for low-income women through a job preparation program. Women living in the surrounding area were invited to bring in their children and attend seminars, readings, and other group projects.



Shortly thereafter, the Women's Center joined forces with a local rape crisis center. Consequently, violence against women became a primary focus point early in the organization's history. In 1980, the Women's Center received a start-up grant from the San Joaquin County Commission on the Status of Women and established the Domestic Violence Project, which was designed to assist battered women. By the early 1980s, the Women's Center had become the county's main resource for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, a role it would continue playing in subsequent decades.

On July 1, 2012, the Women's Center of San Joaquin County merged with Family and Youth Services (FAYS) to become a new organization: Women's Center—Youth & Family Services.¹ As a result of the merger, the Women's Center acquired two shelters for runaway youth and an additional office where services are provided.

Prior to the merger with Family and Youth Services, the mission of Women's Center was "to provide a wide range of supportive, educational, and crisis intervention services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, enabling them to regain control of their lives." After the merger, the Women's Center updated its mission to include children and youth: "to build a stronger community by fostering the strengths in adults, children, youth, and families and by acting as a catalyst to end violence and youth homelessness."

Currently, the Women's Center—Youth & Family Services has 75 staff members providing services at eight program sites throughout San Joaquin County. The agency continues to be the sole certified provider of crisis intervention services for victims of domestic violence and sexual

1. Because the Women's Center's merger occurred after the OSG grant period, the pre-merger name is used throughout this case study (Women's Center of San Joaquin County, or Women's Center).

assault in San Joaquin County, and operates the only undisclosed emergency shelters for battered women and their children. In addition, the Women's Center offers a wide array of supportive services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault and to homeless and runaway youth. These services include not only shelters and crisis lines, but also counseling, support groups, parenting classes, assistance with restraining orders and legal information, case management, therapy and referrals, mentoring, life skills classes, job readiness training, and meeting of basic needs (food and clothing). In addition to providing direct services, the Women's Center offers prevention education, which primarily involves delivering presentations to educate children, teens, and adults about the effects and prevention of domestic violence, sexual assault and other forms of social violence.

Since its inception, the Women's Center has significantly increased and diversified its funding sources. During the 2011–2012 fiscal year, the Women's Center's fundraising efforts led to 33 percent of the agency's income coming from donations, private grants, and United Way. Due to its merger, the Women's Center–Youth & Family Services now has a combined budget of \$3.7 million—a significant increase from the pre-merger budget of \$2.3 million.

Readiness and Vision for Change

Prior to receiving the Organizational Strengths Grant (OSG), the Women's Center of San Joaquin County had used various tools to develop a high level of awareness of its own strengths and challenge areas. It had access to a business profit analysis tool through the Nonprofit Finance Fund and had made use of an internal Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis and the Core Capacity Assessment Tool (CCAT) tool.

These tools provided different types of information about the organization's strengths and weaknesses. The CCAT, in particular, revealed that the agency needed to upgrade its technology systems. The CCAT assessment also revealed that the agency was in need of a succession plan and consistent leadership development. Chief Executive Officer Joelle Gomez noted that the CCAT results enabled the agency's leadership to justify to the board which areas required attention. Ms. Gomez emphasized that increasing awareness of the agency's strengths and weaknesses was a critical aspect of preparing for the OSG grant and positioned the Women's Center well. Staff members also recognized that the agency needed to improve its efforts to reach culturally and linguistically isolated populations in the community. Toward that end, the primary motivation for carrying out the OSG-supported multimedia campaign was to broaden the agency's message and reach.

Initially, the Women's Center was very ambitious about what it hoped to achieve under the OSG grant. However, over time, staff members realized the agency needed to scale back the multimedia campaign. As part of this realization, the Women's Center struggled to develop a campaign message that was both inclusive and specific to particular populations.

Organizational Strengthening Process

The scale of the media campaign required the Women's Center to strengthen its connections in the community. This strengthening of the organization occurred during the course of the campaign's many phases, which are described below.

Identifying Key Partners. Women's Center leadership determined that Judith Bueth Communications would be a key partner in developing and implementing the multimedia campaign. Deciding to work with Judith Bueth Communications was instrumental to the effective implementation of the multimedia campaign. The PR firm was committed to the Women's Center mission and had worked with the Women's Center in prior years. Moreover, it was a local firm that was well connected to media outlets in San Joaquin County. Initially, the Women's Center planned to hire a part-time events coordinator to assist with the multimedia campaign. However, staff members later realized that hiring a part-time events coordinator was not feasible, cost-effective, or sustainable. Thus, the agency decided to use these funds to buy more media ads.

“Starting out, the vision was this could [be] a campaign that could reach every corner and every population in San Joaquin County. We had to really scale back and be more realistic and say we have to be really more focused. We can't be everything to everyone.”

-Joelle Gomez

Designing Community Assessment. Community assessment surveys were developed to determine the community's perception of domestic violence, knowledge of the Women's Center services, and community partner concerns. The survey design process involved research, fact-finding, and brainstorming. The Women's Center ultimately developed two surveys. One survey was intended for individuals and clients of local organizations. The other survey was designed for business and organization representatives.

Distributing the Survey. Surveys were printed in English and Spanish and accompanied by a pre-paid return envelope. They were distributed to approximately 30 sites, which included Women's Center facilities and shelters, churches, non-profit organizations, non-profit housing and other agencies, businesses, and other organizations. Each bundle of surveys was accompanied by an attractive covered box identified with the Women's Center logo. A slot in the top of each box allowed respondents a measure of confidentiality in depositing their surveys. Additionally, 7,000 surveys were sent by U.S. mail, e-mailed, distributed by hand, or completed on the Women's Center website.



"Without a doubt, one of the most critical decisions and a good one was working with Judith Buethe Communications. We would not have had the results, momentum, the lasting impact if it wasn't for their expertise and knowledge about community and the agency, but their attentiveness [and] their responsiveness was so available and spot on every single time for us."

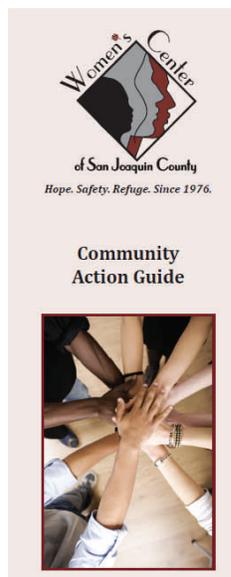
-Joelle Gomez

Analyzing Survey Results. Upon the completion of the community assessment surveys, Judith Buethe Communications analyzed the results. A total of 820 half-page card surveys and 460 longer surveys were completed and returned. The survey results revealed the following: consistent definitions of domestic violence; consistent advice on the need to acknowledge domestic violence; suggestions for how the Women's Center could intervene with programs and support; and statements in language that ultimately led to the agency's campaign messages.

Creating the Message. Following the analysis of the survey responses, the consultant's Program Manager and Creative Director attended a Women's Center Board of Directors meeting and facilitated a group review and discussion of survey results. The primary campaign message resulted from that discussion: *Talk about It Before It's Too Late*. A secondary campaign message was *Take a Stand: We'll Stand with You*. Both messages were based on responses commonly made in the assessment surveys.

Implementing the Media Campaign. After the campaign message was developed, Judith Buethe Communications developed ads that were placed in outdoor media, print media, local magazines, and buses. The Women's Center also worked with Daly Video Services to produce videos and radio commercials. Campaign implementation also involved the development and distribution of a Community Action Guide, which describes Women's Center services, provides contact information, and outlines a "Safety Plan Checklist" for individuals who may need those services. The Action Guide's intended audience was not only victims, but also families, friends, and the community-at-large. Per the advice of Judith Buethe Communications, the Women's Center decided to conduct the media campaign during a non-election year. As a result, the Women's Center was able to secure media ads at a lower price. Moreover, the Women's Center was able to secure several in-kind donations for print, billboard, and radio advertising from Judith Buethe Communications and various media sources, which proved instrumental to the campaign. In addition, The Women's Center was able to secure a state grant for its multimedia campaign and outreach efforts. Overall, the Women Center was able to optimize the reach and impact of its multimedia campaign with a restricted budget.

Although the campaign was successful, it did present a variety of challenges. First, the Women's Center struggled to formulate a message that could appeal to a broad audience while also reaching highly specific sub-populations. Second, the Women's Center had inadequate staffing for project implementation. As a result, the agency relied more than it wanted to on interns and volunteers for tasks such as survey distribution. As the Chief Executive Officer noted, "Depending on volunteers for leg work was precarious." Third, staff members reported that it was difficult to track media impact.



Emerging Outcomes

The Women's Center's implementation of a multimedia campaign led to different categories of outcomes. At the most basic level, project implementation resulted in a number of concrete products—most notably media campaign materials and a community action guide that can be modified and used in the future. Many other less tangible outcomes resulted from the campaign as well.

Partnerships. The Women's Center formed new partnerships with several organizations, including the California Miwok Tribe, the San Joaquin County Optometric Association, and the San Joaquin County Human Resources Association. The California Miwok Tribe was a particularly significant new partnership and represented a population the agency had not previously reached. After being a mailed a community assessment survey, The California Valley Miwok Tribe requested a meeting with Ms. Gomez to further discuss the resources and services the Women's Center provides to domestic violence survivors.



The media campaign also resulted in a partnership with the local faith community. The Women's Center hosted the Mayor's Clergy Breakfast with outreach to more than 200 faith leaders, which led to the mailing of the Action Guide to the faith leaders mailing list.

Culturally-competent practices. The multimedia campaign strengthened the organization's capacity to adopt a more cultural competent approach to its outreach efforts. "I think this project really helped us connect the dots with our approach to cultural competency," said the Chief Executive Officer. "When we're thinking of the messaging, when we're looking at the distribution of the campaign materials, and when we were asked to do presentations—all of that made us think harder about our approach and what we were doing to be appropriate and respectful, and responsive to all our different communities in San Joaquin County."

"I think we realized how much more growing we still had to do and how much more was out there that we weren't tapping into. We had an idea of how well connected we were in the community, but I think we learned so much about where the gaps were and resources that we didn't know were there."

-Joelle Gomez

Visibility and community awareness. The multimedia campaign increased the Women's Center's visibility in the community, and also heightened the agency's awareness of other community resources and opportunities that it could use for greater reach and impact. Examples of greater community interest included an increased number of requests for agency presentations, local pediatrician's offices using the Women's Center's video in their waiting rooms, and several agencies requesting permission to use the Women's Center's campaign tagline. "I think we realized how much more growing we still had to do and how much more was out there that we weren't tapping in to," said the Chief Executive Officer. "We had an idea of how well connected we were in the community, but I think we learned so much about where the gaps were and resources that we didn't know were there."

Online presence. The Women's Center's Facebook page was revived and its website was enhanced by the multimedia campaign videos.

Increased demand for services. After the multimedia campaign launched, program staff members observed an increase in demand for services at the Women's Center. However, staff members were unable to determine if the increased demand was a direct result of the multimedia campaign. Other factors, such as the economic recession, may have also contributed to the increase in demand for services.

Agency resources. Distribution of the community assessment surveys resulted in unsolicited donations.

Looking Ahead

The Women's Center still expects its multimedia campaign to reach a broader audience and realize a greater impact. The Chief Executive Officer met with Rogear Purnell, the principal consultant of Research Design Progress, who is serving as a technical assistance coach for the Women's Center as part of its Blue Shield cultural competency grant. Ms. Purnell made recommendations for how the multimedia campaign materials can be more widely distributed within the domestic violence field for the purpose of potential replication.

The Women's Center plans to continue using its campaign materials and messaging beyond the life of the grant, as the agency has realized that how maintaining consistency will be critical in the future. "Internally, we do plan to keep the message and the materials alive," said Kate Macek, the Marketing and Development Director.

In order to maintain this consistency, the Women's Center has made important structural changes and plans to allocate \$50,000 of its annual budget to marketing and media. "To be really competitive and relevant in your community," noted the Marketing and Development Director, "you have to have a business plan that incorporates marketing and outreach."

Reflecting on the overall organizational strengthening process that accompanied the media campaign, the Chief Executive Officer recommended being realistic with project budgeting and timeline, given grant constraints. She also offered two other concrete tips for others looking to undertake a similar process:

"We know consistency is the key. Even if we only have a handful of media outlets for consistency that would still be ideal."

Find the right PR firm. The positive experience of partnering with Judith Bueth Communications led one staff member to say the following: "Without a doubt—and we really emphasize this in our presentations to the field—finding the right PR consulting company to work with you is a make-or-break kind of deal."

-Kate Macek

Secure buy-in through continuous engagement of stakeholders. Staff members emphasized the importance of involving staff and board members throughout the process in order to facilitate a sense of comfort and ownership and create the level of buy-in needed to move the change process forward successfully.

