



Collaboration, partnerships, and changing conditions to prevent sexual and domestic violence (part 2 of 2)

ASHLEIGH: I wanted to go back to Michele, you were talking about the Oregon Alliance to End Violence Against Women. I was wondering if you could share a little bit more about that, just so we have a better understanding of what the Alliance is, how, you know, kind of what the history is around that and those partnerships.

MICHELE: Yeah, and I'm probably going to pass to Sybil because she really is the, I would say, the muscle behind, the magic behind the Alliance and I'll just say that we as the Sexual Assault Task Force, as I've mentioned, are this broad network of multidisciplinary folks who come together to improve Oregon's response to and prevention of sexual violence and we are one piece of the larger puzzle that creates the Oregon Alliance to End Violence Against Women, and Sybil has such a long and rich history with the Alliance.

SYBIL: Are you calling me old?

(laughter from all)

MICHELE: No! Not at all. There's strength in age as well.

SYBIL: So true, thank you for saying that.

MICHELE: Yes, so if you wouldn't mind talking a little about the Alliance.

SYBIL: Yeah, and it, so the Alliance to End Violence Against Women is a grassroots organization that is volunteer, non-profit, in its actually not a non-profit, its just sort of a loose entity that's made up of survivors and system and non-system service providers and advocates and allies. It's sort of a loose network of people who are really interested in enhancing and improving policy related to survivors of domestic and sexual violence. And so the Sexual Assault Task Force, the Law Center, there's an organization called the Partnership for Safety and Justice and then the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, we are sort of the statewide organizations that form the steering committee, but membership is open really to anyone who is an ally and wants to help coordinate our response. And we formed back in 1999 when I was not actually involved but, and I think people came together really with the organizing principle of, we need to rally around a state response or a state funding request for the network of shelter and advocacy programs across the state. And so in 1999, they, people worked together to

create the first funding for non-profit programs. And they were able to get a \$1 million in the budget. And we've been working to increase that number ever since.

ASHLEIGH: That's great. Thank you for sharing more about that, it gives a really good picture of the Alliance. It's 20 years been in existence so that's really great that it's been so sustainable. And then I love that, you know, when you're talking about who's involved, survivors was really kind of at the lead of that description, so that's really great to hear.

Partnerships opening doors to prevention, 04:05

ASHLEIGH: I'm wondering how else these partnerships that you've created through this particular bill but also through the Alliance, if they've opened other doors to prevention work.

SYBIL: From my perspective, as we have started to have the Alliance and survivor voices that's started to have a presence in the capitol, I've noticed two really big benefits over the last, you know, ten years or so. One is that I think that I see legislators more often thinking to ask what, how would this impact survivors, what do survivors, what does the survivor community think about this particular policy? So it's a little easier to have a seat at the table and be part of discussions and I'm so appreciative of the Oregon legislature really in a bipartisan fashion, just across all sectors, you know, voicing concern and really being willing to show up and incorporate the voices of survivors in policy-making. And so you know, in my blunt sort of way of looking at this as I'm learning is that, that has a huge impact on our ability at some point to start thinking in a more preventionist way, if that's even a word. And you know, for example, survivor voices were involved in the paid sick leave discussion that happened in Oregon a couple of sessions ago and we were able and so grateful to the incredible advocates and allies who brought that bill forward and really worked to pass that, but we were able as survivor voices to make sure that the need to leave work because of safety reasons, like if you need to go to court to get a protection order or you are unsafe at work because of domestic or sexual violence, those needs were included in the definition of sick leave so that survivors could take that leave without suffering workplace sanctions or economic sanctions, so that's just an example that comes to mind for me. I don't know what you'd say, Michele.

MICHELE: Yeah, I would say that it's because our prevention educators are primarily housed within our domestic and sexual violence programs, culturally-specific, tribal programs, and that those voices are at the table with the Alliance and the group of folks that make of the Alliance that bringing a prevention lens to that, to the work has definitely been a benefit of bringing these folks together. You can say that it has opened up the opportunity to talk about how to support prevention education in our state and one of the great

benefits of having the Alliance come together is that this legislative session, we've been able to highlight in the legislature, the work of prevention education, and have legislators sponsor bills to establish dedicated prevention fund for programs that are doing violence prevention education. And we know that even if that bill isn't funded this session, that we're setting the foundation for an understanding of what primary prevention is and it's been an incredible opportunity to highlight the work of preventionists across our state, the work that they're doing in middle and high schools, and with youth, and to have youth voices at the table to talk about their experience of being participants in prevention education and also to have teachers speak out about the, you know, barriers and challenges that they're experiencing in the educational setting and the support that is needed. And that bringing in those community-based programs, those culturally-specific, and those tribal programs that are already working with survivors and already doing violence prevention work in their communities is such a natural connection and so being able to highlight that this legislative session in particular and to have the Alliance's support has been incredibly beneficial and really setting that foundation in the same way that when the Alliance came together 20 years to advocate for funding for those non-profit programs, legislators are asking questions and considering things that are so important for this to work and so we know, we're trying to build off of that and invest long-term in prevention funding, but also an understanding of primary prevention. And so, it's very exciting and I'm so appreciative of the support of the Alliance and the interest of the Oregon legislature.

ASHLEIGH: Those sound like really big successes because I think that, it, you know, it can be hard to explain primary prevention to people and so to be able to highlight and have legislators listening and seeing and hearing the stories, you know, Michele, as you said from teachers, from the youth that are involved, from prevention educators, that's super important, as well as the ability for survivors to tell their stories for them to be listened to, and then for them to also be, take a really active role in leadership when we're talking about prevention. I think survivor leadership and prevention is a really important area so it sounds like you have had some real success in getting Oregon legislation on board to understand the importance of prevention and kind of the need for prevention to have an impact across the state, not just to support survivors but to really change conditions, so we have less survivors.

TORI: Yeah, I remember when I lived in Oregon, when I had moved there and I started working at a part-time job, that was the first time I had ever, ever had paid sick leave in my entire life, and I remember just being so like "oh, like, Oregon really cares about its citizens, like this is really cool." And to now learn that that was a survivor-driven effort, like, that is so incredible, too. And I love, Sybil, what you had said about how legislators are more often asking, "How does this bill effect survivors?" And I think that goes back to what Ashleigh was saying about that importance of survivor leadership and it's so great to

see that that message and their role is being recognized by those who are writing the laws and who are passing laws in the state.

Changing Conditions: Advice for Preventions Practitioners, 11:34

TORI: So yeah, sounds like successes all around, and with that, we want to know what advice you have for other sexual and domestic violence prevention practitioners looking to engage in statewide policy work or also just looking to engage in more of these cross-sector partnerships.

MICHELE: I think that's a great question, and this is Michele. When I think of the preventionists, the prevention practitioners here in Oregon and have observed their many strengths. I think one of the strengths that I would encourage prevention practitioners to play to is thinking about the long-game. I think so often prevention educators are working in spaces where you're changing attitudes and beliefs and shifting norms and we know that that doesn't happen over night but it takes time, and so I think you're always considering the long game and how to get us to a place where violence doesn't exist. I think also there is, and I think we experienced this frequently in the Kavanaugh hearings, where we have this just feeling of complete let down that all of this work and effort has gone in to changing attitudes and beliefs and shifting community norms and you know, that I think was just a highlight of how much further we have to go and how much more work there is and that can make us weary and experience burnout. And so I think also just acknowledging that those conversation are difficult and being aware that when we're in spaces outside of our community-based programs, or doing prevention work that, that we're still kind of up against this idea that violence is inevitable. We know that while it is epidemic, it's not endemic, we're not, it's not a natural part of human development and that then it is preventable. And I think our experience is, particularly this you know last six months, is helping folks come to a place where we truly believe that violence is preventable. And so that's overcoming that barrier can be, it can be tiring but it's also what fuels us right? So I would say my advice is to play to your strengths and that is thinking about the long-game.

ASHLEIGH: Michele, so I love like everything that you just said. Put it on a t-shirt. One thing that made me think about was, yes it is about, it's long-term, right? And the other thing that what you said made me think about is that it's also about understanding that there's not one thing that's going to end sexual and domestic violence, right. We need to be changing social norms and to be you know, changing beliefs and attitudes, but then we also need to be changing conditions and we need to be increasing economic supports and so it's really this whole package of what we've been talking about during this conversation that there are all sorts of in-roads to changing, to getting to those root causes of violence.

MICHELE: Yeah, and I think preventionists know that investing in relationship and building stronger communities strengthens community and is a foundation of creating violence-free communities and so it's, you know, keeping true to that and you know, keep moving forward and so I'm excited by it, I know that we've got a really long road ahead and it's also tiring.

SYBIL: I applaud all of that and completely agree, this is Sybil. Just one other thing that I was thinking while you guys were talking or you all were talking was that I think one really awesome thing that's happened as a result of some of this collaborative work is that I see other policy and lobbyist folks starting to ask how their work is impacting survivors. So for example, some of the housing advocates, you know, are starting, because we worked so closing together on the rent stabilization and just cause eviction proposal, I see them thinking about you know, what are their issues that they're going to work on in the next coming sessions and starting to ask, you know, is this something that the survivor community would be interested in, or would this impact the survivor community. In my ideal situation, that starts to happen and those relationships start to develop where people are thinking about how to collaborate with the longer-term, to your point Michele, at all levels. So it is really exciting and I'm so hopeful for all we can accomplish in the future to end sexual violence.

MICHELE: I second that.

TORI: I'm feeling really hopeful after this conversation, too. Thank you both so much, it was so inspiring to listen to you both talk about, you know, we started talking about housing and we ended up talking about how when we're working together long-term, we can see the change happening in real-time and we can see the potential for future change and for violence-free communities, too, so we just wanted to thank you both so much for joining us today.

SYBIL: So fun to be here, thank you so much for your great work.

MICHELE: It was a lot of fun, thank you so much.