

Coalition looks toward **bolder** future

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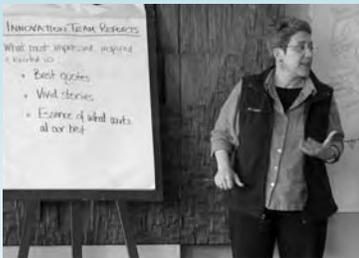
—Lonnie Weiss,
Appreciative Inquiry facilitator



From left, Beatta Peck-Little of Womens Resources of Monroe County and Peggy Gusz of the Crime Victims Center of Chester County present the results of their innovation team surveys.



From left, Mary Onama of Victim Services Center of Montgomery County, Carole Johnson of Women Organized Against Rape (WOAR) and Kathleen Dugan of Sexual Assault Resource Counseling Center (SARCC) present the results of their innovation team surveys.



Lonnie Weiss, Appreciative Inquiry facilitator, helps guide the participants through an exercise at the spring leadership retreat.

As PCAR’s leadership celebrated the organization’s 30-year anniversary, accomplishments of the past freshly reviewed, they recognized the need for a broader, bolder direction to move the organization closer to fulfilling its mission.

“We were looking for direction that would be more visionary and really express our priorities to crystallize how we can change our world and make it a safer place without sexual assault,” said PCAR Executive Director Delilah Rumburg.

This new direction is guided by six inspiring strategic initiatives approved at the summer Board of Directors meeting to shape PCAR’s course for the next three to five years. While the initiatives were drafted at a spring leadership retreat, the work began more than a year ago with information gathering and visioning through a process called “appreciative inquiry.”

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a study and exploration of—in this case—an organization to uncover existing strengths, hopes and dreams so the positive core of the organization can be amplified. Lonnie Weiss, Appreciative Inquiry facilitator, helped guide PCAR leadership through the process which has been successfully used by major corporations like Hunter Douglas and Roadway Express as well as non-profit organizations like the National Children’s Alliance.

AI occurs through a “4D” process of discovery, dream, design and destiny. With a focus on successes, highlights and strengths, the process reveals a future that springs directly from all that has worked effectively for the organization.

“I felt comfortable using this approach with PCAR because there’s inherent optimism within the group. They might start with anger or resistance about what’s happening, but it quickly turns to ‘we can do better than this,’” said Weiss. “Work around violence is really difficult, and it’s important to be reminded of successes and strengths.”

Weiss met with the staff management team last summer to provide an orientation to the AI process. Then she supported the board executive committee and the management

team as they identified topics for innovation teams that would conduct the first of the 4D phases, discovery. Five teams were created and co-managed by staff and executive committee members to focus on peak times of excellence in the areas of:

- Public awareness/engagement/prevention
- Capacity building
- Social transformation
- Advocacy
- Diversity

One of the strengths of AI is its inclusiveness. Team members developed scripts and interview formats to use when talking to and recording the comments of numerous stakeholders nationwide from CDC officials to major funders and contractors of services for the state as well as survivors.

“The minute you ask a question, change begins, and that creates a greater alignment across the board,” said Weiss. “All of the people in the preliminary interviews were changed because they were asked to remember PCAR’s strengths and successes and to relive the things that are working.”

The innovation teams assimilated their data and prepared presentations to be shared during an intensive work retreat at the Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center in Bangor, Pa.

Amid an inspiring and natural setting in the Kittatinny Mountain Ridge of Eastern Pennsylvania, more than 40 leaders of Pennsylvania’s anti-sexual violence movement gathered to work on the dream and design phases. Their first goal was to develop creative images of big, bold positive futures for PCAR.



From left, Judy Copeland and Peg Ruddy, both of Womens Resource Center, Inc. (Lackawanna County), take a moment to enjoy the scenery.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Collaboration: Through social transformation, we desire a cohesive, socially integrated, non-violent and safe society where there is no sexual violence. Therefore,

- we develop and nurture circles of collaboration with service partners, allied professionals and systems.
- we believe communication is the basis for mutual understanding and a precursor to change, therefore initiating dialogue at every level necessary.
- we nurture activism by engaging survivors and supporting advocacy by others to advance our vision to end sexual violence.

Diversity Creates a Unified Voice: We affirm our humanity. We foster an environment that promotes and supports valuing all people, ideas, perspectives, beliefs, cultures, and abilities. We foster an environment that recognizes the complexities of diversity and sexual violence. Embracing differences creates opportunities for all.

Engaging Survivors: Victims/Survivors engage in our mission and propel our work. We honor survivors' needs to be heard and create safe spaces where they are valued. We actively advocate for victims/survivors through their healing process and search for justice.

Public Awareness: PCAR's unifying message educates society about the realities of sexual violence. Together with our network of helpers, supporters, advocates, protectors and teachers, we are identified as the leading voice in the anti-sexual violence movement. PCAR's leadership is the catalyst for transforming our culture so that not getting involved is unacceptable.

Public Policy: Public Policy drives the social change necessary to eliminate sexual violence in our lives and ensure quality and appropriate care for victims/survivors.

Reclaiming Prevention Transforming Society: We are social change agents and recognized leaders in preventing sexual violence. We recognize that to prevent sexual violence, we must prevent its perpetration. We identify and inspire innovative initiatives. Our work is research based and community driven. We are change agents. We are the catalyst for profound transformation that eliminates oppression and violence and creates social justice.



A group works together during one of the exercises.

“It was just so perfect, we were focusing on our strengths, and this place just inspired us with so much positive energy,” said PCAR Board President Janet MacKay. “Everything just came together, and it felt like everyone gave 100 percent. I’m so thankful to everyone for what they did to support this.”

As the innovation teams shared their findings, participants formed groups to examine PCAR’s strengths and positive core. And, a transforming energy grew. Connections between attendees and a respect and understanding for past accomplishments created a framework for the next phase: design.

“What I saw in working with the board and staff members was a really brilliant group of people, women and men with deep commitment and a lot of passion and experience mixed with fresh perspectives,” said Weiss. “It was inspiring to watch.”

Working in groups during two sessions, leaders developed “provocative propositions” that drew upon their discoveries and dreams. These statements are now known as “strategic initiatives,” and present clear, compelling pictures of how things will be when PCAR’s positive core is boldly alive.

“What we brought out is almost a living, evolving and much more personal goal that people can relate to,” explained Bruce Harlan, executive director, The Abuse Network. “The process really helped us bring forward the best of what was in the past without all the baggage. My impression is that we are moving to be more inclusive and more sensitive to bringing all groups together in this.”

“It was amazing to sit in that meeting room and look around and see the energy, excitement and commitment,” said Rumburg. “My heart filled with gratitude and love knowing that within that room existed the capacity to change the world!”

Destiny, the final phase, will take place as staff creates work plans that translate the strategic initiatives into concrete goals. Weiss explained that because of the inclusive process, an additional part of “destiny” is the subtle alignment of activities throughout the organization and with key stakeholders.

“Momentum created by the AI process will spur additional, spontaneous, creative initiatives and actions that are in synch with the vision and goals set forth by the strategic initiatives,” said Weiss.

“We came out with something so much more proactive and visionary than a ‘normal’ strategic plan,” said MacKay. “This is a really good solid structure that we can build specific goals on. With our role as a national leader, this is what we needed.” ■

Jennifer Moon of the PPC Violence Free Network of Venango County looks over her notes.

