



BUSH PRIZE FOR COMMUNITY INNOVATION

LEADERS
Ed Heisler
Sarah Curtiss

BUDGET
\$500,000 — \$999,999

GEOGRAPHY
Minnesota,
Native Nations

YEARS ACTIVE
Founded in 1996

INNOVATION STORY **No 3**

MEN AS PEACEMAKERS



TEAMING UP AGAINST VIOLENCE

Men As Peacemakers (MAP) aims to end violence against women and children, with a specific focus on preventing sexual assault, dating violence and domestic violence. MAP engages men through education and unique training strategies in order to build a world where everyone works together to prevent violence.

“WE’VE DEVELOPED A STRUCTURE THAT ALLOWS US TO ALL WORK TOGETHER AND SUPPORT EACH OTHER’S EFFORTS.”

— ED HEISLER, MEN AS PEACEMAKERS

STORY BY ANDY BENNETT

INNOVATION

MEN AS PEACEMAKERS

MEN AS PEACEMAKERS HAS AN IMPRESSIVE ARRAY OF INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS THAT REACH ACROSS SECTORS TO PROMOTE EQUITY, REPAIR HARM AND PREVENT VIOLENCE

BREAKTHROUGH



Men As Peacemakers made the rare decision to focus on the role men play in ending violence against women and children. They've been able to take what they've learned to inspire new approaches in the field of violence prevention in Duluth, in Minnesota and around the country.



The Rebel Radicals

Men As Peacemakers invests in a diverse group of passionate, young leaders and gives them the flexibility to try new things, fail and learn from those failures. Leaders are encouraged to hatch bold new ideas, and their flat organizational structure means that no ideas are more valued than others.

Prevention, Not Intervention

In a field crowded with organizations taking on the devastating effects of violence within a community, Men As Peacemakers made a choice to emphasize prevention. They engage with young athletes by encouraging healthy gender roles, addressing the issue of toxic masculinity before it has a chance to take root.



CHARACTERISTICS OF INNOVATION



LISTENING



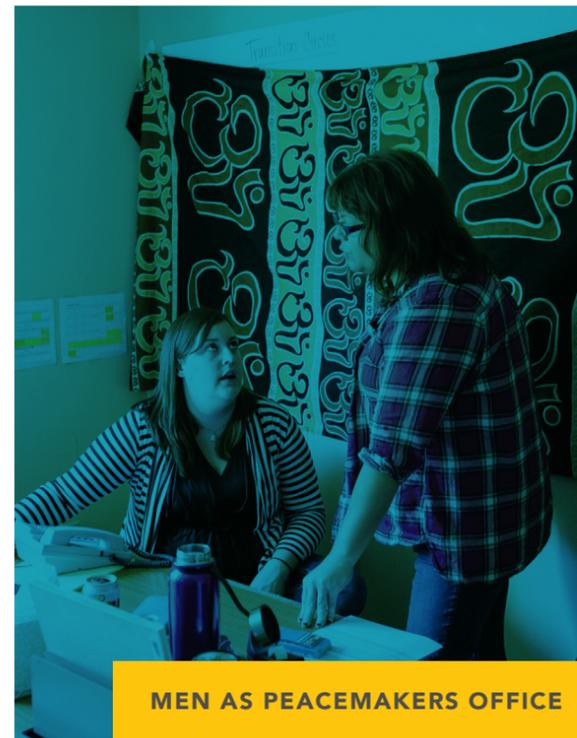
EMPHASIZE LEARNING



WELCOME IDEAS

INNOVATION STORY NO. 3

MEN AS PEACEMAKERS



MEN AS PEACEMAKERS OFFICE

A single killing would have rocked the community. But in the early 1990s, Duluth suffered through twenty.

This welcoming city tucked along the shore of Lake Superior turned sinister. The residents no longer felt safe. They grew angry. And this community unrest grew to an outcry in August of 1993, when a man murdered his ex-girlfriend and two of her friends before turning the gun on himself. It was Duluth's first triple-homicide in seventy years.

The coverage in the local paper was grim. Residents called it "the last straw." But eight months later, the local paper had a new headline: "Party ends with three men slain." It was the city's second triple homicide in less than a year.

By the fall of 1994, Duluth had suffered through the largest string of murders in the city's recorded history. And the outcry had become a full-throated roar.

Frank Jewell was a social worker for St. Louis county at the time. "There was a sense in the community that we had to do something," he recalls. "The violence couldn't continue." Early conversations centered on defining the issues impacting the community. "It became very clear," Frank recalls.

“THE PROBLEM WE HAD TO ADDRESS WAS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MEN IN OUR COMMUNITY WANT TO DO DAMAGE.”

— FRANK JEWELL, MEN AS PEACEMAKERS

As these community conversations continued, Frank noticed a major piece missing from the conversation. "There were no men," he says.

The violence was being perpetrated by men in the community, yet no men in the community were a part of the conversation on how to stop it. This realization sparked an idea for Frank—a retreat where a group of men, and only men, would gather to discuss the problem of violence and the steps men can take to address it. The

retreat would take place over three days and two nights away from work and family at a resort in Cable, Wisconsin. It would involve asking tough questions and facing a lack of easy answers. It was a lot to ask. But the men showed up. “We called them the unusual suspects,” Frank says. “They came from all over. We had conservatives and liberals, professors and businessmen.”

On the last day, these fifty men, reflecting the full depth and breadth of the community, gathered in a field and held hands, sharing the insights they’d gained. “It was just a moment,” Frank says. “But it felt powerful.”

“IT FELT LIKE SOMETHING MIGHT BE HAPPENING HERE.”

Frank was right. Out of that retreat a core group of men focused on creating an organization. Just a few months later, in January of 1995, that group had a name: Men As Peacemakers.

The Rebel Radicals

In a world where voices on the fringe are too often silenced, MAP is committed to amplifying voices that experience violence and oppression—regardless of income, gender or any of the other common barriers to being heard. Elevating everyone’s voice to an even plane can be seen by some as a rather radical idea. But that’s just how MAP likes it.

Radicalism is a word and concept that MAP embraces. They define it as the ability to affect the fundamental nature of something in a far-reaching or thorough way.

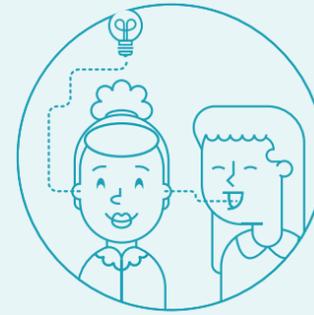


MEN AS PEACEMAKERS STAFF

INNOVATION STORY NO. 3

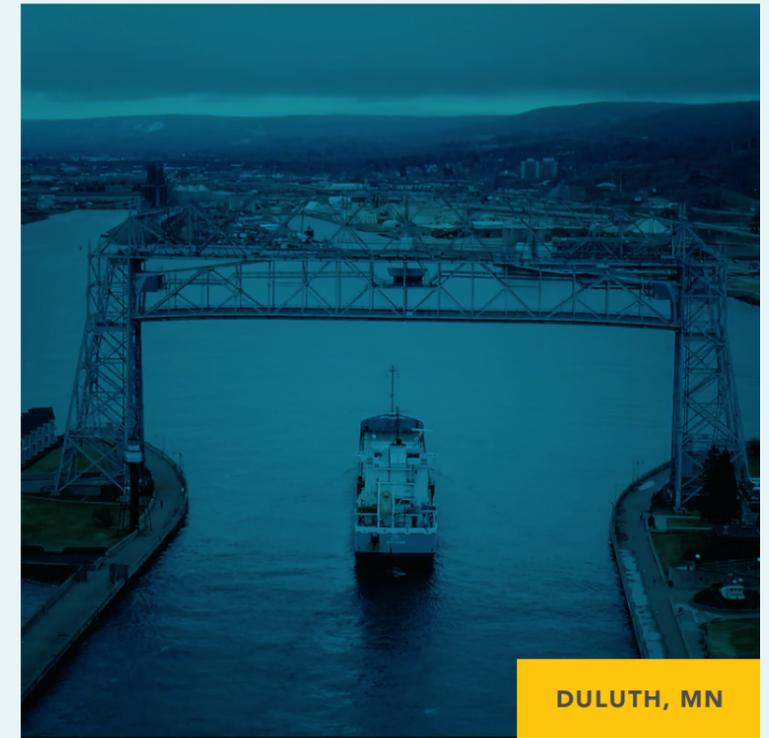
MEN AS PEACEMAKERS

CHARACTERISTIC NO 1



LISTENING

On a daily basis, Men As Peacemakers staff solicit feedback and collaboration with domestic violence survivors, women, Native Americans, people of color, LGBTQ community members and children. In the organization, all voices are welcome, respected and equal. Intersectionality exists in a robust way in their staff makeup and expands outward to include community partners and voices, as well. “Inclusivity is in our creation story,” says Sarah Curtiss, co-executive director for MAP. Harking back to those fifty diverse men holding hands in a circle. “We embrace our entire community, not just to make sure that all voices are heard, but because we feel the constant need to push on our growing edge.”



DULUTH, MN

“We don’t just talk about the power of radical change,” says Perry Serrano, coordinator of MAP’s Boys Restorative Group. “We actively work every day to achieve it.” His role focuses on helping boys in grades three through six understand masculinity, explore their own identities and connect with their community, and he sees radicalism in his daily work. “I have lived in places of poverty, places in need of positive influences and role models,” Perry explains. “My work lets me be that for these boys. By shifting the culture of masculinity at a very young age from one of dominance and violence to one of respect and equity, by promoting and amplifying their unique voices, we create radical change in their lives.”

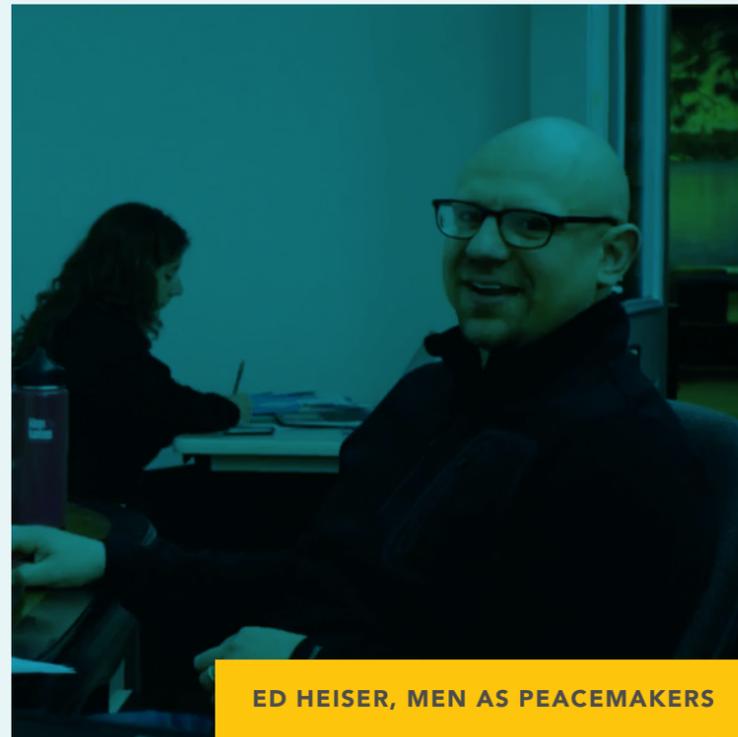
MAP invests in a diverse array of passionate, often young, leaders and provides them with a great deal of flexibility and freedom in their work. They are given time to test ideas, have concepts fail and then regroup to attack the problem better. Smarter.

CHARACTERISTIC No 2



EMPHASIZE LEARNING

Employee orientation at Men As Peacemakers is a little different. Sure, there are tax forms to fill out and email accounts to set up. But they take things a step further than a presentation from in-house HR by giving new staff training opportunities in everything from Batterer's Intervention, advocacy, movement building, strategic organizing, group facilitation and a long list of issue-specific topics. "These trainings give each person in the organization a foundational base of knowledge that they cultivate and share," says Ed. "It also supports ongoing opportunities to build collaborative relationships with our partners in the community."



ED HEISER, MEN AS PEACEMAKERS

The MAP staff have vastly different perspectives and knowledge bases that ensure collisions of viewpoints and ideologies. Their ideas spark others, which cause a domino effect into programs and policies.

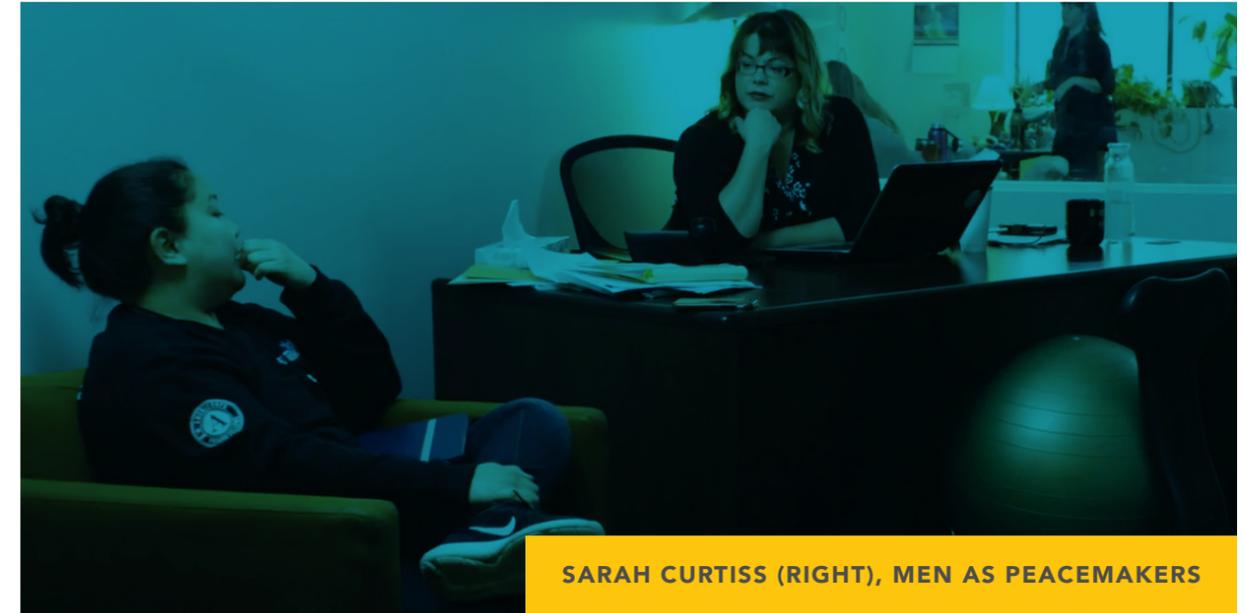
In their work, it's common for the solution to a problem to come not from the program coordinator, but from another member of the staff working in a completely separate field on an entirely different program. "Maybe they did a collaboration a year ago, or they have a connection in the community," explains Ed Heisler, MAP's co-executive director. "Maybe they know something from their own work or life experiences that gives them the fresh angle or approach needed. We've developed a structure that allows us to all work together and support each other's efforts."

MAP was founded on the belief that problems are solved by passionate people coming together to work as a community—and that the community itself has the best ideas about how to handle their own needs.

"Our lives in this community are interconnected," says Heisler. "They overlap. The problems we're trying to

INNOVATION STORY NO. 3

MEN AS PEACEMAKERS



SARAH CURTISS (RIGHT), MEN AS PEACEMAKERS

address in our work are no different." And that belief is what drives MAP's work to this day. It doesn't matter if you're rich, poor, black, white or Native."

**"THESE ISSUES
IMPACT EVERY
REALM OF OUR
COMMUNITY.
AND THE ONLY
WAY TO ADDRESS
THEM IS TO COME
TOGETHER AS ONE."**

— AMY BROOKS, MEN AS PEACEMAKERS

MAP works to maintain a flat organizational structure, with an open-flow approach to problem solving.

While there are supervisors, when it comes to the work there are only ideas. And none are valued more than others. One thing MAP has learned over nearly two decades is that when the ideas are radical, the work tends to be as well.

"It creates an inclusive, connected work environment," adds Amy Brooks, DVRC program coordinator. "That's vital to the radical transformation we're trying to make out in the community."



Prevention, Not Intervention

“There’s a story we use to talk about the stream of our work,” says Sarah Curtiss, co-executive director for MAP. “Three sisters are walking together through the woods and they hear this very strange sound. They go running to the river and see that floating downstream are babies.

“The first sister jumps into the river and starts passing these babies up to her second sister who’s putting them on the bank. They see their third sister is walking away. They ask her where she is going and she says, ‘I’m going to stop whoever’s throwing these babies in the river.’ In this work, it takes the intervention, the people taking the babies out of the river. But if we never stop the babies from being put into the water in the first place, the problem will never stop. We need prevention, too.”

MAP recognized early on that there was a gap to fill in the work being done within their community. There were many great organizations working on intervention, so MAP walked upstream. By making the conscious choice to be proactive, not reactive, they took the innovative step of putting the emphasis on prevention. MAP works daily to prevent issues of violence from gaining any firmer of a foothold in their community.

And they do so by focusing their work not on the effects of violence within a community, but on the root causes themselves.

They are one of the few organizations in the country combating domestic violence with restorative justice circles, in which community volunteers meet regularly with an offender to hold them accountable for the violence they committed while also providing the social support necessary for the offender to change their thinking and behavior. In Duluth alone, there are approximately 1,300 emergency calls to 911 and nearly 400 arrests relating to domestic violence annually. MAP knows that without providing reentry services before an offender is released, and without prevention efforts, many of them will re-offend.

“The people in this program are part of our community,” says Amy. “We have a responsibility as a community to help them succeed, and to hold the expectation that they will behave nonviolently.”

Real transformation happens in these Domestic Violence Restorative Circles. “It’s direct,” Amy says.

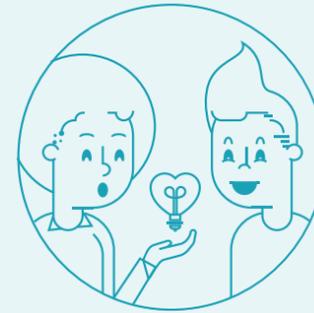
“PEOPLE CAN SEE THE CHANGE HAPPENING IN FRONT OF THEM.”

— AMY BROOKS, MEN AS PEACEMAKERS

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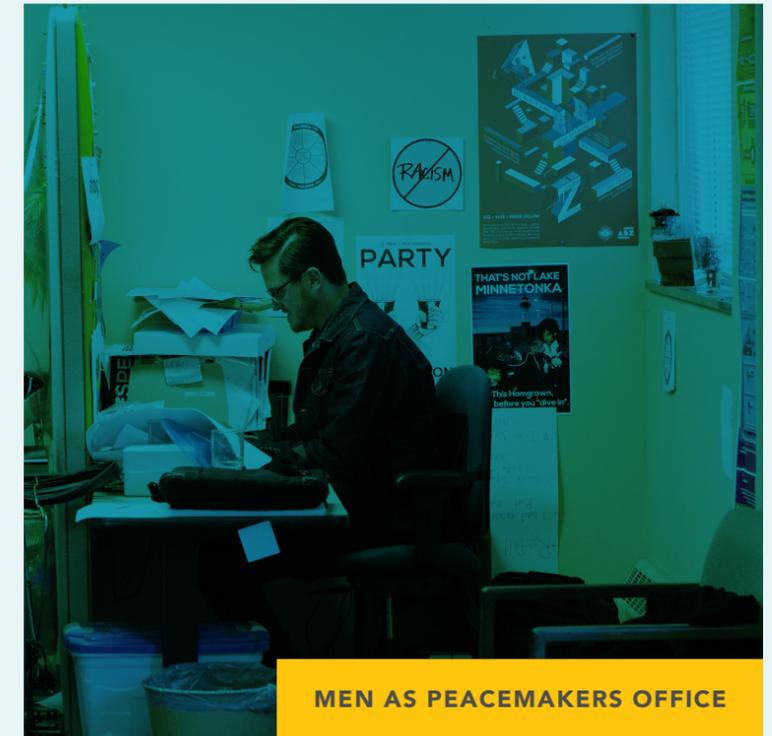
MEN AS PEACEMAKERS

CHARACTERISTIC No 3



WELCOME IDEAS

It’s small and simple, the table that sits just off the kitchen on the first floor of Men As Peacemakers’ office space. You’d never get a sense, just by looking at it, how important that little oval is. But if MAP has a nerve center, it’s that table. Every Thursday morning at 8:30, the staff gathers around it. Egos are checked at the door, and problems are laid out. It doesn’t matter the field, expertise or angle from which a staff member sits at that table. Their input is wanted, needed and indispensable. “When we say collaboration, we mean it,” says Sarah Curtiss. “And it starts inside our organization.”



MEN AS PEACEMAKERS OFFICE

Before the program began, thirty percent of domestic violence offenders in Duluth didn’t respond to the existing interventions and went on to re-offend. In four years of MAP’s circles, only one participant has. By addressing the problem at the root, MAP prevents the problem from growing.

Prevention, to MAP, takes many forms. In the wake of a 2010 murder/suicide of a Duluth woman by her husband, MAP set up a series of community forums to ask how the community could prevent this violence in the future. The impact and influence athletics has on almost every child in the Duluth community rose to the forefront organically. MAP realized that, much like the work they do with their Boys Restorative Group, they had an opportunity to impact the lives of boys in a way that would shape who they became as men. They could help prevent a generation of toxic masculinity.

“ATHLETICS IS A REALLY INFLUENTIAL SPACE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.”

— ED HEISLER, MEN AS PEACEMAKERS

“It can be equated with perpetuating the more negative aspects of masculinity and gender roles. But the vast majority of athletes, coaches and programs aren’t involved in the problem, and wanted to be a part of the solution,” Ed says.

Working collaboratively with members of athletics departments on college campuses, representatives from local youth sports and staff members at other local organizations, MAP developed resources that build in prevention systematically.

They used the platform of athletics to teach gender equality, encourage healthy gender roles and prevent violence. A variety of youth athletic organizations used what is now known as the IMPACT project to develop a mandated training for all 25,000 high school coaches in the state of Minnesota, which has led to opportunities for prevention trainings at all athletic levels across the country.

MAP is one of only a handful of organizations across the country focused on the role men play in ending violence against women and children. They rely on a lesson they learned over two decades prior: Without bringing men to the table, you only deal with the damage after it’s been done. By working directly with men, you can prevent the damage from occurring altogether.



INNOVATION STORY NO. 3

MEN AS PEACEMAKERS



DULUTH, MN



MEN AS PEACEMAKERS OFFICE