



The Blueprint Project is a Students Commission program that addresses violence in the lives of young women. Funded by Status of Women Canada, the program raises awareness about violence in young women's lives, gender equality, gender norms/expectations, and other similar social issues through meetings, workshops, videos, and discussions.

Tena Brown was on staff with the Students Commission when she started working on the proposal for the Blueprint Project. Now she is a facilitator of the program which started around a year ago. I caught up with Tena to talk about her experiences. She told me that after the idea for the Blueprint Project was fully formed and approved by Status of Women Canada, she got past and present co-op students from the Students Commission to spread the word about the new program. Flyers were put up in schools and universities until there was a group of participants for the Blueprint meetings.

Participants in the Blueprint Project met once a week at the Students Commission to discuss violence in the lives of young women. Topics included domestic violence involving women, women in gangs, perceptions people have about gender, how violence differs between cultures, and what violence looks like. Youth participants at the Blueprint Project meetings ranged between the ages of 12-21. They did activities such as finishing statements like "I know that violence is . . ."; "Violence happens when . . ."; and "Violence makes me feel . . .", to help get a clearer understanding of the different forms violence that youth experience. They also made videos on the issues they discussed.

The youth that attended these meetings were not just participants in the program, they also helped create a workshop that the Blueprint Project would eventually deliver in the community. The first workshop was facilitated at the Toronto event 'The Cause' this past September. Brown was one of the facilitators at this event. Her favourite activity was showing and discussing the gender norms video, a video made by the

members of the Blueprint Project. The video shows that when a male dresses more feminine he is judged and ridiculed, but when a girl dresses in masculine sweats and a baggy shirt no one gives a second glance. Brown feels that this video opens participants' eyes to some of the double standards about gender expectations, getting the participants more interested and engaged in the issue.

The Blueprint Project is off to a good start, and Brown is happy about what it has accomplished so far. She is pleased with the way the meetings have created awareness about gender expectations and violence in young women's lives, and believes that the participants will take what they have learned back to their own communities. Looking into the future, however, she is excited for the Blueprint

Project to accomplish even more. Brown hopes to get more participants involved in the future and be able to reach a larger number of people through the workshops. She is also interested in having a walk or rally similar to UMove (United Mothers Opposing Violence Everywhere), and to get more press attention.

Brown believes that what makes the Blueprint Project different from other programs for young women is that it focuses on women and violence, including female gangs and domestic violence. "The Blueprint Project," she says, "focuses on breaking stereotypes."

For Brown, the best part about working with the Blueprint Project is engaging and talking with youth about their opinions on the issues and their experiences in this area. Not only does she enjoy seeing the faces of the participants as they get the point of a video, she loves seeing the proud and accomplished face of the youth videographers seeing their work in action.

For more information about the Blueprint Project or to request a workshop at your school or organization visit www.studentscommission.ca/blueprint/ or contact Sharif Mahdy at 416-597-8297 or at sharif@studentscommission.ca. Workshops are free and can be tailored to your audience.



By Danni Sherman