



Darkness to Light - Case Study

The Journey to A Holistic Model for Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

Background

Darkness to Light (D2L) is a leading non-profit organization working to protect children from sexual abuse. Based in South Carolina, D2L was founded 25 years ago by a small group of concerned citizens and child advocates in response to a local sexual abuse crisis.

For years, D2L's approach has centered around its award-winning training, Stewards of Children (SOC). This training offers both in-person and online sessions, targets adults in various, front-line positions of authority, such as caregivers at home, community leaders, and school administrators. Through these trainings, D2L builds awareness, empowers and educates adult advocates on how to prevent child sexual abuse or respond to suspected or confirmed cases. To date, D2L has trained over two million adults all over the world.



As we've reached a tipping point in the percentage of adults trained, communities keep coming back to us and asking, 'What else is there?'

How can we enrich our community with more than just this one training?

- Stewards of Children Facilitator

Our Work with D2L

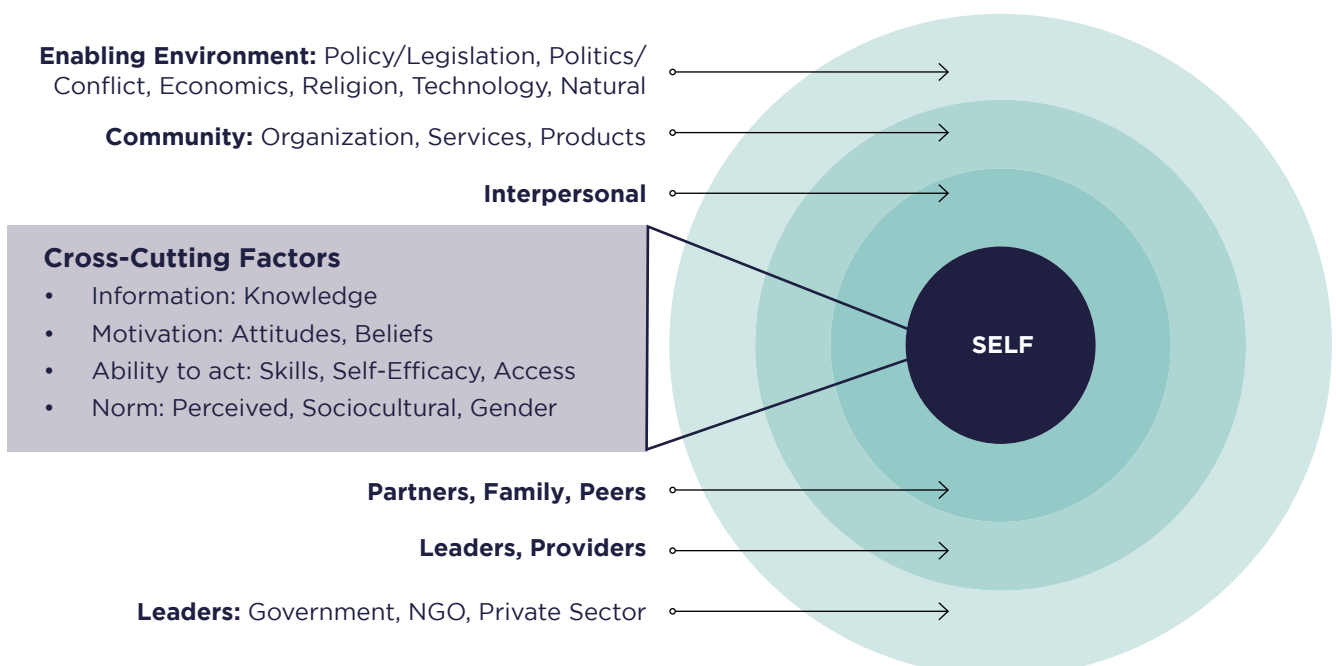
In 2018, Darkness to Light decided to expand their prevention approach by developing strategic behavior change methods in conjunction with their existing training programs. Recognizing that meaningful behavior change requires more than basic education and awareness training, D2L engaged Changeable to build a more robust and holistic behavior change model for child sexual abuse prevention.

The Social Ecological Framework is a targeted, user-centered approach to behavior change that first identifies the audience(s) and the range of factors existing at multiple levels in the social system (individual, community, services, social – political environment) that influence human behavior.

These insights are then used to identify and design appropriate interventions that may include, but are not limited to communication.

Working with our research partner, Databoom, we embarked on a multi-step process to build an evidence informed prevention model. By identifying relevant behavioral factors such as established norms, community systems, and support structures, our team was able to develop a model informed by key audience insights and organized through a framework based on a social ecological approach.

Figure 1: Social Ecological Framework



We reviewed recent literature on child sexual abuse to better understand the primary drivers for adults; behavior. We then deepened our understanding by consulting a select group of D2L's key stakeholders, including: representatives from child advocacy centers, long term SOC trainers, and staff from various community organizations working with youth across the United States.

Our assessment resulted in rich insights and enabled us to identify four core factors of adults taking action to prevent child sexual abuse:

1. **Beliefs** – Child sexual abuse is something that the community should openly discuss and that every adult has a responsibility to take appropriate, informed action when necessary.

"There's really a belief that 'We don't talk about that here.' People say, 'Those folks (perpetrators) are crazy. That's not normal (behavior) for us.' So you don't want to be the one to make it a problem for the community."

2. **Risk perception** – Adults need to be aware that all children, regardless of their community, culture, socio-economic background, and ethnicity are at potential risk of experiencing sexual abuse.

"(During a Stewards of Children training), a male community member said, 'child sexual abuse is not a problem in our community. I don't know anyone who's been affected by CSA.' And the man next to him turned to him and said, 'Now you do.'"

3. **Self-Efficacy** – Adult advocates for prevention need to feel confident that they have the skills to recognize the signs of child sexual abuse and act appropriately to mitigate it. Furthermore, it is important to build community cooperation if an advocate needs support or to report a case without fear of repercussion or obstruction.

"We need to be reinforcing ideas that people haven't thought about, like 'If you feel like something is weird then tell someone. If you feel like something's truly wrong, there's never anything wrong with telling someone.'"

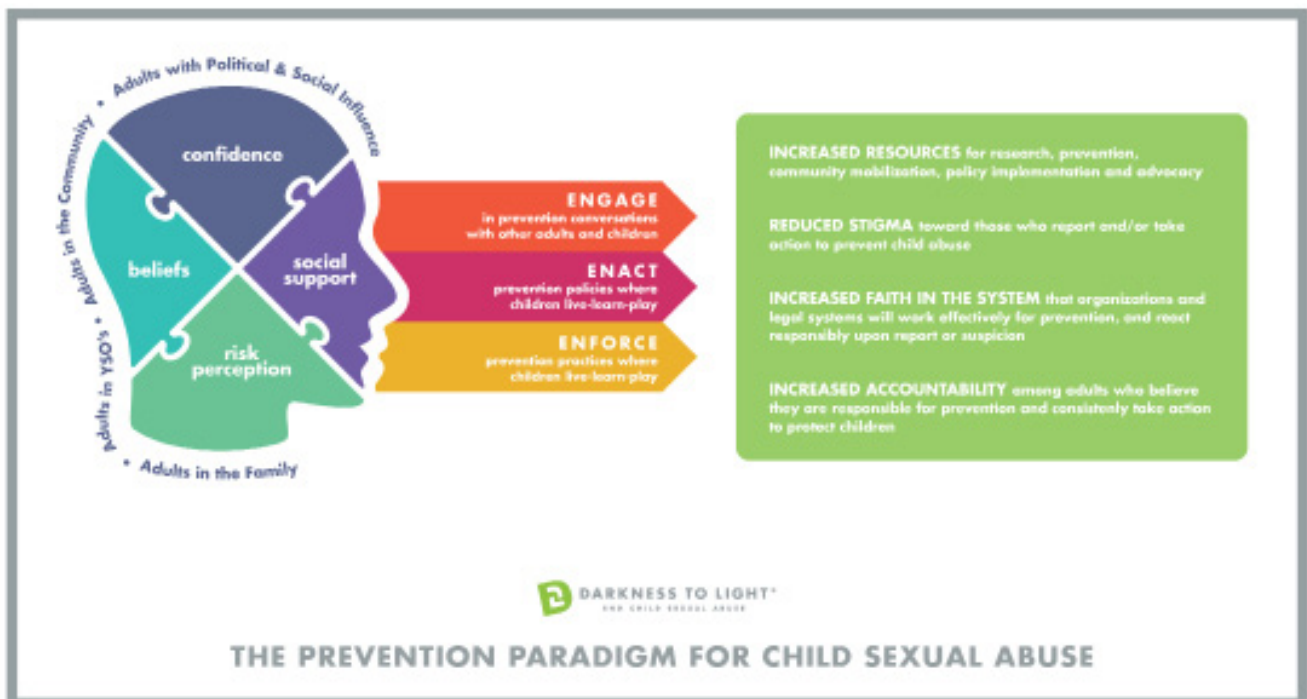
4. **Social Support** – Communities must work together to foster systems and cultures where talking about child sexual abuse prevention, enacting prevention policies or reporting suspected cases are encouraged and protected – free from stigma or backlash.

A New Holistic Model for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

The primary result of our work was D2L's new Prevention Paradigm. This framework envisions a world free of child sexual abuse achieved when adults engage in open and frank discussions about the risks and consequences of child sexual abuse and where community leaders enact and adopt policies that will prevent victimization. To achieve these outcomes, the new Prevention Paradigm defines an integrated approach to child sexual abuse prevention that targets four categories of behavioral factors: beliefs, risk perception, self-efficacy and social support at multiple levels of society. The new framework will guide D2L's program design and measurement and in fact, D2L has already begun to apply it to a number of new projects, including:

- Guiding pediatricians to integrate child sexual abuse prevention messages during routine visits.
- A primary risk reduction program that works with administrative staff and faculty at schools catering to children with learning differences.
- Guiding a refresh of the Stewards of Children training curriculum and new tailored modules adapted for specific audiences with unique needs, such as the Special Olympics and faith-based organizations.
- A new adaptation of the Stewards of Children training tailored for emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic which, because of widespread home quarantining and the increased reliance on online platforms for entertainment, education and communication, has increased the risk of child sexual abuse at home and through digital hacking.

Figure 2: New Prevention Paradigm for Child Sexual Abuse



Moving Forward with the New Prevention Paradigm

To date, very few child sexual abuse prevention programs have been able to sufficiently measure their intermediate and long-term behavior change outcomes. This new framework enables a more robust program design and measurement for all of D2L's programs including Stewards of Children. D2L will be able to test its Theory of Change in various settings, including youth-serving organizations, health clinics, and community-based interventions. D2L expects that its new Prevention Paradigm will contribute to the broader discourse, literature, and best practice compendium and be useful to all organizations, entities, and individuals combatting child sexual abuse around the world.

For more information about Darkness to Light, please visit: www.d2l.org

CONTACT US

www.changeableworld.com for more information on this work and about other recent projects.