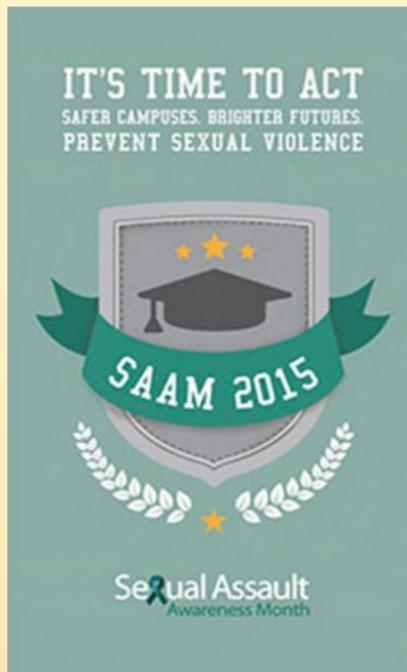


# SAAM 2015

April is Sexual Assault  
Awareness Month



**Social norms** are informal rules in a group of people that influence a person's beliefs and attitudes and guides their behaviors. People often feel that if they don't follow the social norms of their group then they won't fit in and they may be punished by being left out.

Please take our survey assessing gender-based social norms in Kent County: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/LLJN59B>



## Kent County Sexual Assault Prevention Action Team Annual Newsletter

Inside this issue:

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# Stop Victim Blaming!

By: Jennifer McKinstry

## Scenario #1

**"Mr. Adams, you were held up at gunpoint near Ocean and Main?"**

"Yes."

**"Did you struggle with the robber?"**

"No."

**"Why not?"**

"He said he was going to hurt me."

**"Then you made a conscious decision to go along with what he was telling you to do, rather than resist?"**

"Yes, I guess".

**"Did you scream? Cry out? Tell him to stop what he was doing?"**

"No, I was afraid."

**"I see. Have you ever been robbed before?"**

"No."

**"Have you ever GIVEN money away?"**

"Yes, I have".

**"And you did so willingly?"**

"Yes, what are you saying?"

**"Well, it's like this Mr. Adams. You've given money away in the past. In fact, it sounds like you have quite the generous reputation. How can we be sure that you weren't attempting to give your money away this time, and regretted doing so afterwards?"**

"What are you saying? If I wanted to--"

**"What time did this robbery take place?"**

"Around 11:00pm."

**"You were out on the streets at 11:00pm? Doing what?"**

"Just walking."

**"Just walking? You thought it was a good idea to go for a walk that late at night? Did you think about the fact that you**

**could have gotten robbed?"**

"No, I didn't think about that."

**"What were you wearing at the time, Mr. Adams?"**

"Uh, jeans, a sweatshirt, and these shoes".

**"The shoes you have on right now?"**

"Yes."

**"They look expensive, like they're brand new."**

"Yeah, I just got them a couple days ago."

**"In other words, Mr. Adams, you were walking the streets late at night wearing some expensive shoes that practically advertised the fact that you might be a good target for some easy money. I mean, if we didn't know better Mr. Adams, we might even think that you were asking for this to happen."**

## Scenario #2

**"Stacey, you were raped at gunpoint near Ocean and Main?"**

"Yes."

**"Did you struggle with the man?"**

"No."

**"Why not?"**

"He said he was going to hurt me."

**"Then you made a conscious decision to go along with what he was telling you to do, rather than resist?"**

"Yes, I guess".

**"Did you scream? Cry out? Tell him to stop what he was doing?"**

"No, I was afraid."

**"I see. Have you ever been raped before?"**

"No."

**"Have you ever had sex before?"**

"Yes, I have".

**"And you did so willingly?"**

"Yes, what are you saying?"

**"Well, it's like this Stacey. You've had sex in the past. In fact, it sounds like you have quite the reputation with boys at your school. How can we be sure that you weren't willingly having sex this time, and regretted doing so afterwards?"**

"What are you saying? If I wanted to--"

**"What time did the rape take place?"**

"Around 11:00pm."

**"You were out on the streets at 11:00pm? Doing what?"**

"Just walking to my friend's house."

**"Just walking to your friend's house? You thought it was a good idea to go for a walk that late at night? Did you think about the fact that you could have gotten raped?"**

"No, I didn't think about that."

**"What were you wearing at the time, Stacey?"**

"Uh, a skirt and a t-shirt".

**"You were wearing a skirt?"**

"Yes."

**"In other words, Stacey, you were walking the streets late at night wearing a skirt that practically advertised the fact that you wanted to have sex. I mean, if we didn't know better Stacey, we might even think that you were asking for this to happen."**

(continued on following page)

# Let's Stop Victim Blaming!

(Continued from previous page)

A 9<sup>th</sup> grade class at a local high school was given the two scenarios listed above. I asked for their thoughts on the first scenario, which included statements like:

*"Just because you wear nice things doesn't mean you want to be robbed"*

*"It sounded like the cop questioning him had already made up his mind that Mr. Adams got what he deserved"*

*"Nobody would fight someone with a gun, why would Mr. Adams even be asked that?"*

*"Just because Mr. Adams likes to give his money away doesn't mean it should be taken from him"*

I then asked the students to give me their thoughts on the second scenario. Those statements included:

*"Why would she wear a skirt at night? That's dumb"*

*"Of course she got raped...she was wearing a skirt and walking by herself"*

*"It sounded like she had already had sex before, so it wasn't like it was her first time or anything"*

*"She was already outside. She could have gotten away if she wanted to"*

Two scenarios. Two victims. Two very different reactions.

Victim blaming occurs when the victim is blamed for the crime that is committed against him or her. It has become common in cases of sexual assault, like the one mentioned above. Instead of holding the person accountable that committed the crime and broke the law, the focus is placed on the victim, with the belief that they somehow caused the assault to take place.

In having worked with victims of sexual abuse for the past six years, I have seen

this play out time and time again, no matter the age or gender of the child. From questions like, "why didn't you tell me sooner", to statements like the ones listed above, victim blaming appears to be accepted as normal when a victim discloses their abuse.

Ninety percent of child sexual abuse cases (17 and under) occur by someone the child knows. It could be a family member, coach, pastor, etc. This often makes it difficult for an adult to not only believe the child, but also accept that someone they knew and trusted abused their child. It then becomes common for the adult to downplay the abuse, blame the child, or choose to believe that the abuse never happened in the first place. We want to believe that the adult(s) we trust are the good people we have always believed they were, and we certainly don't want to feel any guilt for putting our child in harm's way, even if it was doing so unknowingly.

The important thing to remember is that the abuse is not about us, it is about the victim. Choosing to believe that an uncle didn't molest his five year old niece, that a coach didn't sexually abuse a nine year old boy, or that a thirteen year old girl didn't get raped at a party she went to doesn't mean it didn't happen. It means that by not believing, or looking for fault in the victim, you have become part of the problem.

Victim blaming is allowed to continue to occur because people do not want to admit the uncomfortable truth—sexual abuse happens, and every child is at risk.

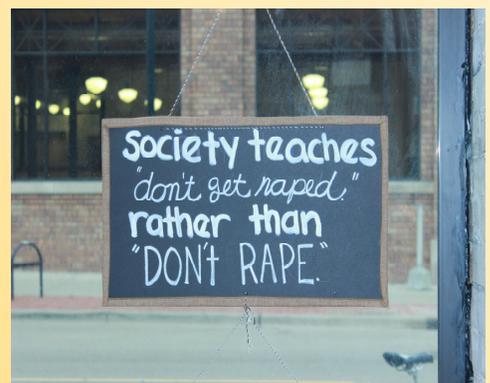
Some examples of victim blaming include believing that a child was sexually abused for reasons like:

- Wearing inappropriate clothing
- Not fighting off the offender
- Not telling right away
- Having previous sexual encounters in the past

- Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Attending a party, or someplace deemed to be "inappropriate"
- Not saying "no" loud enough
- "Letting" it happen
- Improper supervision
- "Acting" like they wanted it

Whatever the reason, it is never acceptable to blame the victim for being the victim. It sends a message to the offender that what they did wasn't really that bad, and re-victimizes the victim by telling him or her that they got what they deserved, simply by being who they are. It also sends a message to others that if they become victims of sexual abuse, its better not to tell because it's probably your fault anyway.

The ninth graders that commented on the two scenarios were blaming the victim before they even realized it. After further discussion, they came to the conclusion that they didn't know why they thought it was the victims fault, but that it was just what they heard from adults and the media. This way of thinking is unhealthy, and will continue to tell victims that they got what they deserved. Victims of sexual abuse deserve to be heard, deserve to be believed, and deserve to be protected.



## How Can I Help a Victim of Sexual Assault?

At the YWCA West Central Michigan we offer medical-forensic examinations to victims of sexual assault up to 120-hours post-assault. This service is available, at no cost, to the victim and can be obtained whether the victim chooses to report the assault to the police or not. In addition, we offer crisis advocacy, therapy and support groups to assist in recovering from what could have been the most traumatic event in that person's life. *[These services can be accessed through our 24-hour crisis line at (616) 776-7273]*

We often hear from family members and friends of sexual assault victims/survivors, "How can I help her?" or "I don't know what to say to him." and "I don't want to say the wrong thing." Often that person who cares about the victim feels compelled to "do" something, when the reality is that if you "do" something it should only be at the victim's request. Well-meaning people might start making decisions for the victim, which may seem like "helping" to that well-meaning person, but it could very well feel controlling and disempowering to the victim. We need to remember that when she/he was assaulted her/his power and control were taken from her/him. By allowing the victim to make decisions at their own pace, we are allowing her/him to reclaim their power and control.

We want to avoid saying things that could be re-victimizing or re-traumatizing to the victim. Anything that could be blaming or that calls into question her/his behavior or decision making could be harmful/hurtful to the victim. The bottom line is that the responsibility for the sexual assault lies with the person who committed the crime.

Below, on the left, are some examples of things that you might say to a victim of sexual assault that would be sensitive, empathic and empowering. On the right are examples of things that could be re-victimizing.

Say This...	Not That...
<b>"I am so sorry this happened to you."</b>	<b>"I thought you liked him?"</b>
"You did not deserve to be raped."	"You were drinking and went to his room?"
"He took advantage of your vulnerability because you had been drinking."	"You sat on his bed to watch a movie? What did you think was going to happen?"
"You must have been so scared."	"Why didn't you scream for help? There must have been 30 people at that party."
"You need to be able to make decisions that you are comfortable with, when you are ready to make them."	"Why haven't you called the police?"
"You get to decide who to tell and when to tell them."	"I'm going to call your mom for you."

You will likely be dealing with your own reaction to what happened to the person you care about. This event may have even triggered memories of traumas from your past which you thought had been adequately dealt with and that you had moved on from. It would not be unusual or unexpected for trauma from your own past to get triggered. It will be important for you to address (rather than ignore) those issues while you are trying to be there for your friend or family member. Our crisis advocacy services are available not only to victims, but also to family and friends who care about them.

By: Patti Haist

## Advice from an Expert on Campus Law Enforcement Response to Sexual Assault

By: Amy Endres Bercher

**“Awareness about sexual assault has increased, but justice has not increased.”**

Chief Paul Cell, Montclair State University Police Department & Vice President International Association of Chiefs of Police

Chief of Police Paul Cell, speaking to local campus police, public safety officers, and victim advocates at Grand Valley State University in March, acknowledged that in the recent past rape victims were not taken seriously by law enforcement. Compound that with societal attitudes that frequently don't believe a woman who reports being raped and then makes her feel if she was raped- it was obviously her fault. A man that is raped fairs no better. He is even less likely to be believed. Society questions if it is even possible for a *real* man to be raped. That's what's dealt the nearly 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men who reported being raped at some point in their lives as reported in research released in 2011 by the CDC and Prevention<sup>1</sup>. Is it any wonder that most rapes are never reported to law enforcement? Law enforcement agencies themselves report sexual assault as the most under-reported of all crimes. When cases are reported they almost never make it to trial. Offenders plead out to a lesser crime, or the victim, ill-treated by the criminal justice system and re-victimized by their family and peers, becomes afraid and recants. On college campuses, it is no surprise that victims of sexual assault are being treated no differently. There is enormous pressure from peers to not report. The attitude is the same as off campus - shame and blame - you should have known better. With little threat of consequences for raping, the message to campus offenders

– it's open season. Chief Cell is advocating for change. He is speaking at campuses across the U.S. educating police and public safety officers on how to improve the law enforcement response to sexual assault. He encourages officers to challenge attitudes on campus that blame the victim and provide safe harbor for the offender. Campus police are encouraged to become a part of the university community, to attend athletic events outside of their work and not in their uniform. To get to know their campus culture. He suggested officers work at building relationships with students and avoid the *We versus Them* attitude.

Chief Cell told officers in attendance that the process of reporting a rape is very difficult for victims. From reporting, through the investigation, and on to the court proceedings it is a physical and mental hardship and they need to look at what can be done to improve the process. Suggested best practices for officers include utilizing a different strategy than with other crimes. Most important is to start with believing the victim rather than taking the usual attitude that everyone is lying and it must be proved to be telling the truth. Chief Cell advised officers to build rapport with the victim at first contact. It is alright to show empathy for what the victim has been through. **Chief Cell presentation included the following tips for law enforcement responding to sexual assault:**

- Believe them. Most victims don't report to law enforcement they are more likely to tell a friend.
- Delayed reporting of rape is common. Forensic evidence can be collected for up to 102 hours after an assault.
- Officers should expect a lack of resistance, force, or a weapon in rape cases.
- There is not a fine line between liking

someone and being assaulted. Non-consensual sex is sexual assault.

- Reaffirm that flirtatious behavior does not mean consent for sex
- Know that the style of clothing a victim wears is never to be interpreted as consent to sex
- Alcohol and drugs are used as a weapon and a shield by the rapist because they make the victim vulnerable and less likely to remember what happened. Rapists sees vulnerability as an opportunity to rape.
- Alcohol and drug use does not mean the victim asked for it.
- Past sexual behavior does not mandate future sexual behavior (yes does not mean yes forever)
- It can be rape even if the victim and rapist used to date.
- Submitting to sex is not the same thing as consenting to sex
- Lack of physical injury or fighting back on the victim's part does not mean that rape did not occur
- Rapists do not have to fit the profile of a masked man carrying a weapon. Rapist can look like anyone.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/sv-datasheet-a.pdf>



# The Hunting Ground



## Documentary on College Campus Sexual Assault

*"Any parent sending a child off to college should consider this required viewing"*  
- New York Magazine

## Free Event!



**Brought to you by**  
**Kent County**  
**Young Leaders**  
**Against Violence**

This film has the power to fuel the movement to end campus assault, but we need to show a strong turnout at theaters to demonstrate the growing public concern and demand institutions change their ways.

Thursday, April 16  
6:30 - 8:30 PM  
Celebration Cinema North

SCREENING  
&  
PANEL DISCUSSION



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Grand Rapids, MI 49525



The data is frightening. Research shows that people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD) experience twice as much violence than people without disabilities. People with intellectual disabilities also experience the highest risk of violent victimization, and are sexually victimized more often and for a longer duration. Other studies indicate that 49% of people with Intellectual disabilities will experience ten or more sexually abusive incidents in their adult life. And those with communication and behavioral disorders, or multiple disabilities, result in even higher risks. To make matters worse, 97-99% of abusers are known and trusted by the person with intellectual disabilities and are often part of their care delivery system. Our community is largely unaware of the high rate of sexual assault that happens to those with disabilities.

WEAVE (Working to End Assault and Violence for Everyone) is a collaboration between the YWCA West Central Michigan, providing sexual assault services, and Hope Network, MOKA, Thresholds and Spectrum Community Services, the major providers of residential disability services in Kent County. WEAVE’s goal is to reduce the incidence of sexual assault against people with disabilities and to eliminate barriers to services when sexual assault does occur. For the past two and a half years, the WEAVE collaboration has worked to create a foundation to better educate staff, improve services, raise awareness about this issue, and create resources to help our community address this problem.

While our goals are evolving and developing as our work progresses, here is a snapshot of some of the activities we are currently working on:

- Creating an educational resource guide for direct care staff at the disability service agencies to aid them in recognizing the signs of sexual assault/abuse and to provide guidance on how to respond effectively.
- Developing a healthy relationships curriculum for individuals with IDD to help develop better understanding of relationships, safety, and knowledge about healthy sexuality; reducing the risk of sexual victimization, and providing skills to

Harrell, E., Ph.D., and M. Rand. *Crime Against People with Disabilities, 2008*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Sobsey, D. “Patterns of Sexual Abuse and Assault.” *Sexuality and Disability*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Sullivan, P.M. and Knutson, J.F. “The relationship between child abuse and neglect and disabilities: Implications for research and practice.” Omaha, NE: Boys Town National Research Hospital. 1994.

- Conducting a needs assessment with guardians to gather information and create a resource Toolkit to support them in caring for their wards.
- Creating tools and resources that we will use to strengthen policies and procedures as well as improve safety within our environments and access to services for people with IDD who have experienced sexual assault.

Our vision: “WEAVE envisions a community that will collaborate to ensure that all individuals with developmental differences will have equal and open access to sexual assault prevention and support services. WEAVE envisions a community-wide response to sexual assault that is trauma-informed and compassionate.”

WEAVE is currently funded by an Office on Violence Against Women grant, designed to create community change around safety, education and access to services for people with disabilities who experience sexual assault. We have been successful in accomplishing our many goals because of the dedication of over 42 staff members from the five collaborative organizations who are devoting their time and experience in six different inter-agency work groups focused on the above tasks. These groups include: 1. Safety and Access, 2. Policies and Procedures, 3. Healthy Relationships, 4. Sustainability, 5. Staff Education and Training, 6. Guardianship. Each are comprised of representatives from all five agencies and meet twice each month. This is a huge time commitment for non-profit organizations with limited resources, but there is a high level of enthusiasm for WEAVE and a strong belief that it is a necessary collaboration to make our community safer for everyone.

**For more information or questions, please contact:**

Christine Drewel, Ph.D.  
 Project Manager for WEAVE of Kent County  
[cdrewel@ywcawcmi.org](mailto:cdrewel@ywcawcmi.org)  
 w: 616.459.7062 ext. 3749  
 m: 616.301.4714

## Street Harassment

By Abby Choffel,  
YLAV

“Hey girl!” a man shouts at me from across the street. Now, you would think that when being addressed, I would raise my head and look to see who my caller call is. Instead, I do the opposite. I immediately put my head down, avert my gaze, pull my phone from my pocket, and attempt to act as preoccupied as possible. This may seem like a rude reaction, but for a teenage girl such as myself walking the city streets, it is only precautionary, for I can easily guess what will happen next. As I continue to walk, I try to ignore the string of profanity being slung at me from across the street. Just another day in the life of a young women. Another day in which I attempt to ignore the objectification I face from sexual harassment.



### Young Leader Against Violence

**YLAV** is a new anti-violence organization in West Michigan. YLAV is made up of teens and young adults working together to prevent violence. YLAV organizes community and school events to raise awareness about the impact of violence and increase individual’s skills to prevent it. Being a part of YLAV provides the opportunity to be a leader, gain experience working as part of a diverse team, and energize our community to take a stand against violence. If you are interested, e-mail [stopviolencegrteens@gmail.com](mailto:stopviolencegrteens@gmail.com) or visit Young Leaders Against Violence on Facebook.

Now, the problem I face is not a unique one. In fact, one in three women will face some sort of sexual harassment in their lifetimes, and one in four will face sexual assault. These numbers are outrageous, and as a member of Young Leaders Against Violence, it is something I intend for us to address. One of our primary goals is to raise awareness, and if at all possible, prevent violence. As such we will address one of the most common forms of violence, which is that of verbal harassment. I hope for us to work with both girls and boys, to stop this objectification of women, and provide the public a better understanding of this issue. I am thrilled to have such a leadership position in my community, and am confident of the changes we can make and of the positive influences we will ultimately have.



YLAV is sponsored by:



**Girls Incorporated®  
at the YWCA West Central Michigan**



## Michigan Legislative Updates

**Senate Bill 74** - Passed. Matt's Safe School Law is amended to include cyberbullying. The bill requires Michigan schools to add cyberbullying to their existing policies and report discipline data to the state. A study of the *Best & Worst States for Controlling Bullying* conducted in February, 2015 ranked Michigan near the bottom of the list of states working to prevent school bullying. **For more about the study** see <http://wallethub.com/edu/best-worst-states-at-controlling-bullying/9920/>

**Senate Bill 924** - stalled in the Senate. The so called "Revenge Porn" law would enact two laws. The first part of the bill would criminalize the posting on the internet of sexually explicit photos and other visual images with intent to frighten, intimidate, or harass any person. The second part of the bill would, once posted, make the failure to remove such images upon written request of that person a criminal offense. The intent of this bill is to prosecute those who vengefully post sexually explicit images with intent to humiliate a person - for example, after a relationship break-up. Critics of the bill suggest that these types of cases represent a social problem that would be best handled in civil court, not in criminal court.

## Tackling Violence in a New Way

By Abby Choffel

Violence. This word represents a life-threatening problem, one that has plagued our world for centuries, and continues to harm our society even today. An issue such as this deserves the utmost attention. However, while there are many anti-violence groups that encompass the adult world, the danger that derives from this matter is rarely discussed among adolescents. Furthermore, it is even more intermittent to see young people leading such discussions. It is for this reason that when I was informed of the Young Leaders Against Violence organization, I was blown away.

While I am a member of numerous clubs, YLAV has been my first experience delving into the world of societal violence. We are a small group, but diverse, with participants of all ages, ethnicities, genders, and backgrounds. As such, I was extremely

impressed by the opportunity set before me to not only work, but *lead* with such an amazing group of people. I believe it is both our leadership role and our different experiences that are our greatest assets. We will be able to tackle the problem of violence in a new way, one that is unique to the culture in which we grew up in. As younger members of society, we will be able to utilize our technological skills to tackle the media aspects of violence, and furthermore, we will be given the tools and means necessary to help anyone else our age who deals with this issue.

YLAV is a unique and wonderful experience. It fills a much needed void in the anti-violence market due to its youth leadership, and I believe we will continue on to amazing things.

*Photo below: A few YLAV members attended the MI Lead - Michigan Women's Coalition in March. YLAV will be attending Pay Equity Day in Lansing on April 14. Michigan ranks 44th in the nation on the wage gap.*



## YLAV Offers Opportunity To Lead

By Henry Atkins

The effectiveness of any organization begins with its structure, and as a new member of Young Leaders Against Violence, I'm excited to say that this group has an excellent one. When I joined YLAV, I was elated at the prospect of working with people my age to make a difference in our community. But what surprised me about YLAV, and what makes me eagerly anticipate every meeting, is the degree to which the organization seeks to involve youth in the decision-making process. The adults who organize YLAV are as passionate as they are capable, but they also allow us to help decide what path our group

will take. We were surveyed to decide what advocacy efforts we'd like to take, and then split into subcommittees to turn those ideas into reality. For example, I have the responsibility of coordinating our social media presence, and right now young people in YLAV are writing grant proposals, planning presentations for the Kent County Board of Commissioners, and working to educate students both inside and outside of their schools. In my view, YLAV's structure is its greatest asset: among countless other youth organizations, YLAV actually makes them feel like they have a voice.

## Girls Incorporated at the YWCA West Central Michigan

Girls Inc. at the YWCA West Central Michigan is the premiere, gender specific, primary prevention, program in the Kent County area. Girls Inc. at the YWCA West Central Michigan inspires all girls to be strong, smart, and bold through their research-based curricula. Programming is available for girls ages 9-18 afterschool every Tuesday evening from 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Summer Programming is available for 2015

Monday thru Friday 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Ages 15-18: June 15-26, 2015

Ages 9-11: July 6-17, 2015

Ages 12-14: July 7 – August 7, 2015

**For further information you can contact Girls Inc. at the YWCA West Central Michigan at 616-426-3724 or email [girlsinc@ywcawcmi.org](mailto:girlsinc@ywcawcmi.org)**



**Coaching Boys  
INTO MEN**



Coaching Boys Into Men (CBIM) is a program that helps coaches and teachers instill important lessons about respect into the lives of young people. Designed as a dating violence prevention program, CBIM provides concise guidelines and exercises on how to effectively discuss this important information with youth. The curriculum consists of 11 mini lessons that can easily be incorporated into existing classroom or practice sessions.

Staff training and materials are provided free-of-charge.

**Please contact Aaron Toffoli at (616) 632-7295**

**Or [Aaron.Toffoli@kentcountymi.gov](mailto:Aaron.Toffoli@kentcountymi.gov)**

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