

# South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

## Bar Outreach Listening Sessions Report

### December 2018

The Bar Outreach Listening Sessions Report is a summary of insights gained from interviews with staff at alcohol-serving establishments across South Carolina. Intended to be complementary to the outreach efforts of community-based domestic and sexual violence organizations, this report will provide education and outreach staff with additional knowledge on the perspectives of professionals in the food and beverage industry and what they see as priorities or needs in addressing violence and harassment.

We hope the information in this report will help domestic violence and sexual assault (DV/SA) organizations design effective strategies for collaboration and provide them with greater ease in initiating connections with bars and restaurants.

SCCADVASA sees these Listening Sessions as part of a long-term plan to make spaces safer across the state.

### Philosophy behind the Listening Sessions

SCCADVASA began the Bar Outreach Listening Sessions in March 2018 to better understand the perspective of bars and restaurants in addressing sexual violence, harassment, and relationship violence in their establishments. Although staff from member organizations had been equipped with Bar Outreach Facilitator Training from Our VOICE of North Carolina in 2016, many programs were reporting difficulty engaging bars in the training or gaining enough interest in their communities.

While providing support and technical assistance to member organizations doing bar outreach, SCCADVASA staff considered our own lack of knowledge about the industry and created a plan to interview bar and restaurant staff to gain insight about the industry and their current thoughts on violence and harassment in their workplaces. By listening to the needs and opinions of bar and restaurant staff, SCCADVASA will be better able to connect with and meet their needs, able to create resources they find relevant, rather than resources we think they *should* want, and have opportunities to better support member organizations seeking to connect with their local establishments.

### What Listening Sessions are:

- A chance to learn about an important industry with which we have limited familiarity
- A time to listen and ask questions about the experiences of bar and restaurant staff
- A time to hear potential challenges and ask what those working on the frontlines see as solutions
- A time to talk about the issues of alcohol, sexual and intimate partner violence, and harassment more broadly

- A time to make connections in the community and have dialogue around these issues
- An opportunity to refer bar and restaurant staff to their local DV/SA organization if they express interest in obtaining resources or information

#### What Listening Sessions are NOT:

- A time to promote specific services, trainings, and programs
- A time to tell bars and restaurants what services we think they need

### Listening Sessions Process

With the goal of gathering opinions and attitudes about sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and harassment and the barriers to engaging in training to keep patrons and staff safer, two SCCADVASA staff members visited three bars or restaurants with bars in each of the following locations: Aiken, Charleston, Columbia, Greenville, Myrtle Beach, Orangeburg, and Rock Hill.

Bars were initially selected based on Google and Yelp rankings. However, due to limitations in staff availability to be interviewed, on occasion the interviewers had to select alternate locations where bar staff had more flexibility to participate in the listening session. Visits were conducted after lunch hours but before busier evening hours in order to minimize interruption to business. In each establishment interviewers asked a predefined set of questions, while also allowing for natural conversation and follow-up questions.

### Limitations of Study

The scope of this study is fairly small due to the limited ability to conduct listening sessions with a large number of establishments in each city and the reality that three interviews is not a large enough sample size to make generalizations about an entire community. The results are also impacted by the establishments themselves and the staff members who participated. Interviews were conducted with bartenders, wait staff, management, owners, event coordinators, and other positions, which added diversity to the responses and perspectives. However, because establishments either volunteered a certain staff member or a specific person expressed interest, it is likely the results are impacted by who agreed to participate.

While the findings should not be generalized too broadly, SCCADVASA believes they are valuable insights into the food and beverage industry overall and into the specific communities included in the study. These findings can be used as jumping off points to begin more in-depth conversations with establishments in your communities.

## What We Heard from Staff at Bars and Restaurants

### Sexual Harassment Happens

Most of the individuals interviewed acknowledged the prevalence of sexual harassment in the community, in general, or in bars, in particular. Many people pointed to the role alcohol could play in negatively impacting people's behaviors.

*"I think [sexual harassment] happens because people get to drinking and think they can get away with anything."*

*"Yes, sexual harassment happens in the bar scene."*

While acknowledging sexual harassment as a problem, some interviewees were reluctant to say it was more of an issue in bars than other places or reluctant to say it happened in their community.

*"I wouldn't say bars in particular. It just happens everywhere and at the workplace in general."*

*"That doesn't seem to have hit our community."*

### But it Doesn't Happen Here

Almost all interviewees were reluctant to say harassment or assault happened in their establishment, often insisting that while it might happen in bars in their community, there were certain factors that prevented it from happening at their bar or restaurant in particular.

*"I think with the kind of restaurant this is, we don't attract that kind of behavior."*

*"This is a pretty relaxing place, not where people come to do shots and get crazy."*

At one bar, the staff member interviewed said their bar was a nicer, upscale place so any sort of harassment was minimal to nonexistent. As he spoke, a female coworker overheard and said under her breath, "Oh, I've been harassed here by coworkers."

### Then Again, Maybe It Does Happen Here

While interviewees most often answered "no" to the question of whether sexual harassment happens at their bar, when asked later about any concerning behaviors they saw among patrons, they described scenarios that could be considered harassment. Examples of behaviors staff witnessed and found concerning include:

- Physical behaviors and aggression
  - Unwanted touching
  - Lack of respect for personal space
  - Patron trying to grab a woman
  - Patrons being aggressive and persistent in an unwanted way

- Overt aggression, throwing things
- Drunk men following women out of bars
- Harassment while walking to car
- Verbal harassment and inappropriate comments
  - Customers calling staff “sweetie,” speaking condescendingly, making inappropriate comments
  - Customers saying obscene, derogatory, or provocative things to women (customers or staff)
  - Travelling businessmen treating a staff member like a prostitute, offering hotel room keys, or offering large tips with the suggestion they come back to the hotel
- Issues between couples or groups
  - A man slapping his wife
  - Controlling behavior
  - Suspected human trafficking
- General issues and concern for employees
  - Men being “creepy”
  - General sexism
  - Customers being overserved and having lower inhibition
  - Signs that an employee is experiencing abuse at home

### Questions of How to Handle Harassment or Other Problems

Many of the interviewees expressed the difficulty of balancing a need to keep customers happy in order to receive tips versus a need to address unsafe or disrespectful behaviors. Some expressed an interest in receiving information on addressing problematic behaviors while still providing good customer service. Others expressed willingness to tolerate these behaviors up to a point, but when a line was crossed they would not put up with it, either addressing the situation themselves or asking management for support.

*“I don’t let anyone walk all over me. If you’re going to be rude, I don’t want your money, just get out.”*

Staff often spoke to the importance of support from the manager or owner of their establishment in addressing situations.

*“We tell the manager on duty and the manager handles it. If a server is ever uncomfortable with a table, the manager will take over that table. The main thing is to keep staff comfortable.”*

*“Management supports staff and isn’t afraid to ask people to leave.”*

### Ideas for Prevention

Staff were asked how they thought harassment and assault could be prevented in bars and restaurants. This, understandably, proved a challenging question to answer and interviewees gave a wide variety of responses, many of which focused on risk reduction rather than prevention.

Some staff members seemed to think there was no real way to prevent it.

*“What can be done about it? Nothing.”*

Many spoke of the importance of intervening or holding friends accountable if they were the ones creating problems. Proposed solutions often placed responsibility on customers to look out for friends or on staff to intervene or speak up.

*“People should go out in packs. Protect themselves and hold friends accountable. Look out for friends if they are being harassed or doing the harassing.”*

*“It’s nice to have regulars at a bar or be a regular. It’s a good sign people are comfortable there and a good way to be looking out for people. It’s good to be a regular somewhere so you know people when you go out.”*

*“I’ve never been afraid to say something and confront what people are saying.”*

*“Step in if you see something happen. Don’t just sit there and watch.”*

Some staff focused on ideas related to emergency response.

*“There are those blue poles everywhere on the street that you can push a button if you need help.”*

*“Video cameras, guns for women bartenders, physical confrontation, calling the police when needed.”*

A few interviewees considered the potential for a culture among staff and patrons that could prevent harassment or stop it quickly. They also offered ideas to help build that culture.

*“Cultural and environmental change.”*

*“Not overserving.”*

*“More knowledge, training, seminars, talking about sexual harassment with kids in school.”*

*“Prepare bartenders and servers with the language to combat poor behavior. A strategy to help people with the tension inherent in the business without isolating or upsetting customers.”*

Some staff members had heard about strategies used in other places that they thought would be positive to implement at their establishment.

*“Things like using secret codes, for example ordering a drink that means get me out of here.”*

*“Nonverbal cues established with regulars to communicate with specific bartenders.”*

*“Posters in the bathroom to let people know what resources are present.”*

## Resources and Support

Staff were asked about resources, trainings, and support that would feel relevant and useful. The goal was not to promote any specific trainings or resources, so the question was open-ended, but sometimes interviewees asked about examples of trainings or resources others had found useful or that DV/SA member organizations had developed.

A few staff members expressed interest in a training or had additional ideas.

*"I would definitely be into doing a training. What about a gathering of bartenders and servers in the area to discuss the topic together and develop strategies like how to maintain good customer service while dealing with a problematic customer?"*

*"We have a video seminar on sexual harassment for all employees. It covers employee-to-employee harassment and harassment from or toward customers. We try to train staff every year. But I guess there could also be a quarterly training where we call a staff meeting and whoever could come does. Then hopefully most people get the training at some point."*

Most commonly, staff were interested in printed resources that they could keep on hand or have posted. They preferred printed resources over training, either because of the time they thought training would require or because they did not think a training would be interesting or necessary. Some staff members said it would just depend on whether management supported the idea.

*"Flyers would be good, especially in the bathroom since that is the first place girls would go to escape."*

*"The sign in the women's restroom with weird drink names that mean different things. Then you can go order one of those drinks from a server and get help."*

*"A list of local resources, something to hang on the employee corkboard. Where to go if you feel like you can't talk to people in the building. For employees, know there are outside resources that can help you."*

They also expressed interest in pamphlets to keep on-hand.

*"I'd rather get a pamphlet to read than a training. People don't like sitting around being lectured to, especially if we feel it's information we already know."*

*"Pamphlets would be helpful. [Written materials] to include in orientation upon hiring someone would be good."*

*"Resources for how a server can do something, like how to say, 'No, I don't want to give you my phone number,' when depending on that person for income."*

Some of the people interviewed were uninterested in any resources, trainings, or other collaboration with their local DV/SA organization.

*“We probably would not hang signs in the restrooms with information. It wouldn’t go with the décor.”*

*“That would be a question for management, but training just doesn’t seem necessary for where we are at right now.”*

*“I really don’t think we need it. As part of a large corporation we have policies and protocol around sexual assault and staff can always come to the manager. I also don’t have time to get additional resources, but I am aware of [local DV/SA organization].”*

### Suggestions for DV/SA Organizations Collaborating with Bars and Restaurants

Some of the staff members offered a few words of advice to organizations in the community seeking to collaborate.

*“Do any outreach before 6pm.”*

*“Understand the industry better.”*

*“Hand out resources and we will use them. Management is open to creating positive change.”*

*“Promote more open discussion within the community. Make sure there are places where people can have these conversations.”*

Ultimately, interviewees offered words of support and appreciation for this work.

*“I think the work you do is great and just keep at it, because people need to be called out and held accountable.”*

*“This is important work.”*

*“Never give up. These issues are out there. If you save one, you save many.”*

## Recommendations

### 1. Begin by listening to your community and identifying their priorities and values.

Visiting seven different areas of the state, we noticed trends and variations in the concerns and attitudes in each location. As previously discussed, we do not want to generalize the findings to entire communities; however, it is important to listen to and incorporate the priorities of your community. Speaking to those priorities will make you more engaging, relevant, and effective.

For example, in Myrtle Beach everyone interviewed mentioned the issue of human trafficking in their area and considered that a more pressing issue than sexual harassment or sexual assault. While your goal may still primarily be to address sexual violence, promoting your program as a way to help bar staff recognize signs of trafficking and intervene if they suspect someone is being trafficked may spark more interest and get you in the door to teach both trafficking intervention and sexual violence prevention.

There were also interesting dynamics in places like Charleston, where the food and beverage industry carried community prestige. Large numbers of wealthy tourists, locals, and college students all contribute to the clientele and sexual harassment was openly acknowledged as an issue.

In Orangeburg, there seemed to be greater awareness of domestic violence and relationship abuse than sexual violence or harassment. Staff seemed especially interested in supporting other employees experiencing abuse or responding when they witnessed controlling behaviors or physical violence between couples.

A deep understanding of the priorities, dynamics, and needs of bars and restaurants in your community is a must-have before attempting to collaborate or promote any specific programs or resources. Staff interviewed at bars were quick to recognize when someone did not understand their industry or community and dismiss them as out-of-touch.

### 2. Start with low-hanging fruit.

It might be disappointing to hear how few interviewees expressed interest in a staff training at their establishment. However, the good news is that many did want printed resources, whether flyers for the bathrooms, community resource lists for employees, a sheet with intervention tips for servers to carry in their booklet, or something else entirely.

Organizations attempting to do bar outreach and promote trainings to local bars have sometimes expressed a feeling of defeat when hours were spent on outreach with zero scheduled trainings to show for it. Printed resources are likely an easier and more successful starting point, as most DV/SA organizations already have some of these resources created or could create new flyers with input from bars and restaurants. Additionally, distributing printed materials to bars and restaurants will take less time than doing trainings and will likely be accepted more readily.

Listening to input from bars and providing a resource that they consider useful will make them more likely to see DV/SA organizations as a supportive partner and someone they can reach out to for further collaboration, support, or training.



### 3. Thoughtfully engage when they say, “That doesn’t happen here.”

Most establishments were reluctant to acknowledge that violence, harassment, or abuse occurred in their space. They saw themselves as too upscale, more family-oriented, only served wine, not a pick up spot, not a dive bar, etc. At the same time, most were willing to acknowledge that these issues do impact their community overall and often occur when alcohol is involved. They also discussed specific behaviors that caused concern, even if not defining them as harassment or abuse.

When beginning conversations, consider focusing on specific behaviors they might see and want to address, without necessarily labeling the behaviors immediately as sexual harassment or abuse. It may also help to take a community approach. For example, you might suggest that this is a community issue and you would like to work with this establishment to promote a community-wide proactive approach. Discuss the value of their business being viewed as a community leader.

### 4. Clarify misconceptions about what your organization offers.

Not only did many bars and restaurants have little idea of the scope of services offered by local DV/SA organizations, they thought the trainings provided by those organizations would be boring lectures! Sometimes an establishment might need basic information about the scope of services offered to get them thinking about other ways to collaborate or prepare them to make a referral for someone in need.

When you get to the point of talking with an establishment about training, make sure they understand that it is interactive and collaborative. Far from having participants sit and be told what to do, trainings will engage bar staff in coming up with strategies that will work for them and their workplace.

### 5. Educate partners around the importance of inclusivity and ensure resources will be available to everyone.

Many of the interview quotes highlight that bar and restaurant staff support the idea of having flyers placed in women’s restrooms or having other resources available for women customers. However, we know that intimate partner violence and sexual assault impact people of all genders. Gender and LGBTQ+ inclusivity are an important piece of ensuring access to services for all survivors. More education is necessary on how harassment and abuse can impact anyone of any gender or sexuality. Evaluate your own resources ahead of time for any biases on gender or sexual orientation. If an establishment agrees to hang signs in the bathrooms, encourage them to have resources in all bathrooms, explain why it is important, and help them to have the resources ready.

### 6. Remain thoughtful about the impacts of culture, language, or other factors influencing a community’s willingness to engage in these topics.

A few of the establishments we approached had predominantly Spanish-speaking staff with limited English proficiency. They were wary of speaking with us, especially when they realized our questions centered on sexual harassment and abuse. We recognize that there are communities within our larger geographic areas who may currently be reluctant to talk with outsiders or for whom there are additional considerations and concerns. We recommend thinking through how you can be inclusive and responsive to language or other differences and also be respectful of the needs and concerns of those communities.

## Collaborating on Next Steps

Community-based DV/SA organizations are valuable partners with important resources to share. SCCADVASA hopes the information in this report will help you make meaningful connections with bars, restaurants, or any other businesses in your community.

SCCADVASA is currently evaluating the capacity to expand and build upon this project as a Safe Spaces Initiative. As we continue advancing this initiative, SCCADVASA is here to support DV/SA organizations develop their own bar outreach or safer spaces projects. We will connect you with others in the state doing similar work to discuss ideas and share resources. SCCADVASA staff can also assist you in developing resources or strategizing. Please call or email us to talk through what these projects could look like in your community.

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