

The Erin Levitas Initiative for Sexual Assault Prevention at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law

The Erin Levitas Foundation and the University of Maryland Carey School of Law came together to create The Erin Levitas Initiative for Sexual Assault Prevention to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and assault between youth through the use of restorative practices and restorative justice. The Initiative is housed within the Law School's Center for Dispute Resolution (C-DRUM), which promotes the effective resolution of conflict to empower and transform.

Under the leadership of C. Quince Hopkins, a gender violence and restorative justice expert, The Erin Levitas Initiative for Sexual Assault Prevention engages young men and women in educational activities designed to help them identify, question, and reject the destructive ideas that give rise to sexual violence and may help us to undo the damage such attitudes cause, from middle school through high school.

Working in partnership with Dr. Laurie Graham of the University of Maryland School of Social Work, Quince designed an evidence-based research program, including a new curriculum that introduces students to the concept of addressing difficult subjects through open dialogue. The Initiative's goal is to facilitate a safe conversation around sexual violence in an attempt to change the current culture.

To accomplish its goal, the work of the Initiative includes

- Conducting outreach to the schools. A key component in the work of this initiative is building and maintaining relationships with participating area elementary and middle schools. The law school is fortunate to have an existing foundation of trust with a number of local schools and their leaders.

- Coordinating presentations at the schools. Our goal is to change the way norms of masculinity and femininity are understood and encourage youth to think about ways that adherence to outdated and rigid gender norms gives rise to violence. By changing attitudes early, we hope to transform the culture in the long-term. Through a series of facilitated discussions with middle school students, we can open a dialogue and begin planting the seeds of change.

- Training law and social work students on the curriculum. When given the training and opportunity to use restorative practices, law school students have provided powerful learning opportunities in the middle school circles to enhance social emotional learning and to prevent conflict and harm in schools. The curriculum delivered to the law and social work students has two parts: 1) training on using proactive restorative circles to engage in dialogue



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Preventing sexual assault
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with young people about attitudes and other predictors of future sexual offending, and 2) training on responsive restorative justice to address low level sexual offending situations as they arise. In training, the law students are also challenged to engage in self-reflection on their belief, attitudes and biases prior to engaging with students. Law and social work students then work within schools, acting as the conduits of change.

•Training teachers, principals, administrators, and parents. Participating middle school students and school staff cannot effectively act alone in their communities in supporting sustainable change in attitudes. To help ensure that the program is accomplishing its broad community goals, the Initiative also works with the adults that the students interact with on a daily basis. This work includes training a broad range of staff, administrators and parents in restorative methods of conflict resolution, educating them on their legal rights and responsibilities, and spreading awareness of when and how to intervene in a way that optimizes safety. As with the law students, teachers, principals, administrators and parents are encouraged to challenge their beliefs, attitudes and biases.

More information about the program can be found at:

<https://www.law.umaryland.edu/Programs-and-Impact/Other-Initiatives/Erin-Levitas-Initiative/>