

What

The **PEER SUPPORT NETWORK** is a group of students, postdoctoral scholars, staff, and faculty who are available to stand in solidarity with targets of gender harassment. Peers will listen to targets, let them know that what they have experienced is not consistent with our community values, and that they are not alone. Peers can point targets to more formal resources available in the community, accompany targets to meetings to discuss the events, and connect targets to other components of Below the Waterline support.

FACULTY ALLIES provide targets of gender harassment at the University of Washington with help navigating through toxic events or environments. Armed with experience and institutional knowledge, Faculty Allies help targets of gender harassment identify pathways through toxic events and environments. Our goal is to facilitate the career success of students, postdoctoral scholars, staff, and faculty even when we can do nothing to prevent the harassment.

The Peer Support Network and Faculty Allies programs are:

- Informal
- Volunteer-based
- Confidential
- Focused on helping those affected by gender harassment

Who

Many Peers and Faculty Already Serve as Informal Supporters

- Some people are just trusted/skilled, develop reputations, and step up when called upon
- An ideal environment would offer these trusted advisors training and access to resources
- There is no support network for trusted responders nor a way to look out for their welfare
- The potential of trusted responders to disseminate information is untapped

Why

Targets of sexual harassment and bystanders have unmet needs:

- Social isolation may be an issue for those new to their environment
- Distinguishing between healthy and toxic environments can be challenging, especially when it comes to gender harassment
- Many do not have the skills to calibrate their responses to harassment
- Discussing harassment-related experiences with members of one’s own department/program may feel risky
- Access to trusted peers and faculty who can affirm their value and provide practical advice may be limited
- Some may wish to discuss harassment with someone from a group with which they identify (e.g. LGBTQ, international, POC)
- Many who demonstrate harassing behavior are also supportive, a confusing situation many trainees are ill-equipped to handle

Why Focus on Below the Waterline Harassment (i.e. Gender Harassment)?:

- It is ubiquitous
- There is an educational gap
 - Many do not recognize gender harassment as a form of sexual harassment
 - It is not widely known that, when pervasive and repeated, gender harassment can be just as damaging to targets and community members as Above the Waterline forms of sexual harassment
- Environments in which gender harassment is common are at increased risk for high prevalence of Above the Waterline forms of harassment
- Volunteer-based, informal programs are best suited to address Below the Waterline forms of harassment
 - Targets of sexual coercion and unwanted sexual attention likely need a higher level of support than can be provided
 - Protecting volunteers from secondary trauma may be more challenging for other types of harassment
- Avoid legal issues related to mandatory reporting
- Circumvent territorialism associated with established, formal institutional programs

How

Volunteer Recruitment:

- Word of mouth
- Below the Waterline presentations
- All volunteers must be vetted
 - Understanding of gender harassment
 - Effectiveness of past support to others

Volunteer Training:

- How to determine whether the problem behavior/environment reported is within the program scope
- How to refer community members needing more support to appropriate resources
- How to recognize secondary trauma and ask for help

Referral and contact mechanisms:

- Web-based intake form for those seeking support via www.BelowTheWaterline.org
- Brief interview with Faculty Ally to determine appropriateness of scope and desired characteristics of Supporter/Ally
- Faculty Ally identifies possible match from among volunteers and queries the match for availability and conflict of interest

Monthly meetings for volunteers:

- Monthly meetings to seek advice
- Identify volunteers at risk for burnout
- Identify those with secondary trauma
- Answer questions
- Identify program needs – more training in X
- Identify patterns of harassment, e.g. departments, types of harassment
- Write a report to track program progress

What next?

Progress to Date:

- Program guidelines are being drafted
- Input from those running formal target-support programs on campus has been sought
- Nearly three dozen volunteers have stepped forward, representing 3 schools/colleges and 6 departments
- Web-based infrastructure for targets seeking connection to a Peer Supporter or Faculty Ally has been built

Challenges:

- Existing campus programs are resisting implementation and have not yet agreed to provide feedback or advice
- The distinction between this informal, grassroots support network and a program affiliated with/controlled by the institution is not universally appreciated
- Institutional sources for training and support of volunteers may not be willing to cooperate
- An advisory group is needed to steer the future direction/scope of the programs
- A plan for managing growth is needed