

Report on The Community Disclosure Network's Consultations for a SSMU Policy Against Gendered and Sexualized Violence

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Introduction

Content Warning. The following report discusses instances of sexual violence committed by people who occupied positions of relative power and authority within SSMU affiliated communities. Engaging with stories of sexual violence can have an impact. It can result in vicarious trauma, or trigger our own memories of sexual violence if we are survivors. We encourage you to take care of yourself as you choose how you want to engage with this report. We acknowledge that it is often impossible to tell who has been exposed to sexual violence, and we recommend that you share this report and others with discretion and care. Listed at the end of this statement are Montreal-based resources including crisis centres, active listening services, self-care material, and 24 hour support services both on and off-campus

A note on language: The language used throughout this statement mirrors language used by those whose disclosures we received by the CDN, as well as language used within sexual assault activism. However, we want to honor that any and all language chosen by someone to define/label their experience of sexual and gender-based violence, abuse, assault, and trauma is a valid and important choice.

Background

The Community Disclosure Network (CDN) was formed as an ad-hoc group around the repeated violence perpetuated by a particular student in a leadership position on campus. On the 21st of February, 2017, the CDN [released a statement](#) condemning the gendered and sexualized violence committed by the SSMU's former Vice-President External Affairs David Aird, and recommending, amongst other things, that the SSMU create its own standalone Policy against Gendered and Sexualized Violence. On March 27th, CDN released [another statement](#), addressing the resignations of both Aird and former SSMU President Ben Ger, and outlining the work that CDN would be doing with SSMU in order to consult about the creation of a standalone Policy against Gendered and Sexualized Violence.

These consultations were conducted with the hope of creating a policy that not only demonstrates the SSMU's commitment to proactively and meaningfully addressing the gendered and sexualized violence faced by their membership and recently perpetuated by its



officers, but that it would also be a step forward in the [student-led movement against sexual violence on this campus](#).

Although it draws from our own experience with speaking to and working with the survivors of sexual violence the past few months, this report is largely compiled from the information gathered through discussions during the focus groups with survivors, the open forum on the creation of a policy open to the SSMU membership on April 11th, and the roundtable with student groups/associations on what training around disclosures, violence, and existing resources they would want to have in September.

In the focus groups, survivors were able to share their experiences navigating existing SSMU resources or policies concerning sexual violence at the McGill administrative level (such as the [Policy against Sexual Violence](#) and the [Policy on Harassment, Sexual Harassment, and Discrimination](#)), dialoguing about where they encountered problems in the past, and what they found would be helpful in a new policy based on their experiences. In the [open forum](#), some findings from the focus groups were presented to the membership in three categories:

- 1) Pro-survivor Frameworks
- 2) Implementation, and
- 3) Accountability

After CDN's presentation, there was a very productive break-out group discussion around the three themes and concerns/questions/thoughts folks had on the topic. In the roundtable, various invited student groups took part in a discussion about soft-skill training and what resources and training groups felt they would need in order to be able to act with integrity and in a pro-survivor manner when issues of gender-based and sexualized violence took place within the context of their groups or associations.

This report will look at the findings from these consultation processes and includes a list of recommendations the CDN has to how a Policy against Gendered and Sexualized Violence policy should be created at the SSMU, and what it should entail.

Why a SSMU Policy?

Through our work with survivors over the semester, it became obvious that there was a gap within existing SSMU policies for survivors to access student-led reporting procedures,



especially as concerns with McGill's recently passed Policy against Sexual Violence continue(d) to be raised. It is from these survivors' concerns that the push for the creation of a SSMU Policy against Gendered and Sexualized Violence was first mobilized. Through discussions with survivors and student groups, we have established the need for a clear centralized place - made by and for students - for accessible information and resources on how to respond to sexual violence. This policy should not be written by SSMU. Instead, it must come from the community, which includes making sure the consultation process is accessible and inclusive, as long as it needs to be, and that the grassroots groups on this campus who have done work around sexual violence and support for years are able to lead the policy making process. This will help ensure that the policy has as much teeth as it possibly can and is not treated as an end solution to the problem of sexual violence on this campus or within the SSMU community. It will also create an alternative to the McGill Policy Against Sexual Violence that currently does not exist

Recommendations

PRO-SURVIVOR FRAMEWORKS

Through our discussions and consultations, we found that although there was a general understanding of the term 'pro-survivor', there was a gap of knowledge about what this work concretely looks like on the ground. Through discussion with survivors and grassroots organizations who have been working with survivors, we see the recurring call for acting with integrity - making certain that systems are in place to ensure that an advocate is in a position to act with the survivors' best interests in mind. This would, among other things, would look like :

- Outlining reporting procedures that are survivor-directed, while ensuring that the majority of labour does not fall on a survivor
- Including clearly outlined possibilities, ensuring that a survivor can make an informed decision from the choices presented based on their specific situation / needs / goals - including all the possible legal implications of each of these decisions
- Ensuring the possibility for confidentiality (including clearly outlining before a survivor would even engage in a process who would have access to what information, and at what point of the process) & third-party reporting/disclosing.
- Including measures that ensure all procedures unfold in a way that is mindful of emotional and psychological trauma



- Including the possibility for transformative justice frameworks rather than just punitive disciplinary measures for perpetrators of violence. There are communities on campus with experience in transformative justice, such as pockets of SACOMSS, QPIRG, CDN, and the Third Eye Collective. We must make sure that their voices are heard throughout the process of writing the policy, that anyone involved in the process of the writing of the policy has an understanding of transformative justice, and that transformative justice within the SSMU context is one of the conversations had during the further consultations on this policy.
- Ensuring that any steps taken or measures put in place have the explicit consent of the survivor and that it is clear the level of implication the survivor wishes to have throughout the process
- Ensuring a survivor does not have to report an incident within a specific time frame of the incident having occurred
- Committing to consulting on what intersectional frameworks / resources actually look like and how we, as a community, can work to ensure that a SSMU policy does not just end up replicating the real (visible and invisible) violence that survivors with intersecting identities face on a daily basis
- Ensuring the immediate suspension of a respondent from any position of power until an accountability process is in place (and extensive consultation on what this process would look like are put in place)
- Ensuring that all of the above information, and as much information as possible, be available online for survivors to access so that they are able to be informed of what a reporting process would look like before making the decision of whether or not to report, including photos of the people they would be reporting to.

IMPLEMENTATION

One of the largest and most important conversations exists around the implementation of the policy, i.e. how to give a SSMU policy teeth. How do we ensure that a SSMU policy does not end up being empty words and being treated as a check-box of sorts? What do we include in the policy to ensure that it is a living, breathing document that can respond to each case as it arises as well as to the needs of the community? How do we make avenues of disclosure/pro-survivor frameworks more accessible? Especially to marginalized communities (e.g. BIPOC, trans, international students) who are disproportionately affected by sexual and gendered violence?



How do we ensure that best practices are sustainable? This is a very large and long conversation that needs much further consultation, but the recommendations we have collected are:

- Training for all SSMU Executives (and other relevant positions such as Human Resources manager and the Equity Commissioners) on how to respond to disclosures of sexual violence and on the different existing reporting channels and resources both on and off campus
- An emphasis on proactive as well as reactive measures
- Creation of an implementation guide that complements the policy and is available to all SSMU members to be able to access should they wish to access more information on existing reporting structures, resources, how to respond to disclosures etc.
- Ensure that a policy would truly support the work already being done by organizations such as the UGE, QPIRG, SACOMSS, CDN, BSN, QM, and other organizations that work around addressing violence in the SSMU community
- Ensure that there is sustainability and oversight during and after the creation of a policy in order to make sure that the creation of a policy is only one of many steps, not an end goal to addressing violence in the community, including but not limited to a clear communication and consultation plan for engaging with the community throughout this process
- Ensure that the policy also mandate the VP University Affairs to pressure the McGill admin to change the McGill Policy Against Sexual Violence (specific mandates to be finalized through further consultation)

ACCOUNTABILITY

The word 'accountability' has been mobilized a lot over the past semester, especially in the context of the 2017-2018 SSMU elections, in such a way that it has become a buzzword and lost its grassroots meaning. How do we hold our leaders accountable to their actions both inside and outside of their work sphere? How do we hold each other and ourselves accountable? How can SSMU remain accountable to a policy when it continues to host / support events where sexual violence is more likely to occur? However it became apparent that the conversations about accountability is still very underdeveloped and should be a focus in the coming consultations. Through the consultations of the past semester, our recommendations are :

- Ensuring the ability for feedback loops throughout processes



- Making sure there is a third-party individual always identified for a survivor to be able to disclose / report any issues they may have with those who are advocating for them
- Ensure that despite high turnover of student positions, that a full training on the policy and its expectations (re: skills, training, work) of SSMU officers and employees is provided during the transition period every year , and that everyone is given the tools necessary (such as training and resources) to be able to fulfill their role as expected. These processes should be reviewed and improved on every year as we identify gaps in processes, soft-skill knowledge, and/or culture.
- The scope of the SSMU policy is clearly outlined, and includes resources/referral pathways of where to go to if it is outside of the SSMU scope

Next Steps

Going forward, a timeline has been created for next steps.

June, a writing group will put together a rough first draft of the policy based off of the consultations the Winter 2017 semester as well as in reference to the consultations and recommendations by the students through the process of the creation of the McGill Policy Against Sexual Violence

By **July 7th**, this draft will be sent to community groups identified as 'stakeholders' by nature of their doing work around themes of violence.

July and August, these groups will consult on the draft.

End of August, the groups will present their edits, comments, recommendations and rewrites to SSMU to adopt in a second draft.

Beginning of September, membership consultations on the second draft begin, including, but not limited to focus-groups and townhalls. These consultations continue into the Fall.

By the last day of classes, **December 7th**, a third draft of this policy will be written based on the consultations and sent out to the membership to be able to look over in the winter break. Abilities to submit anonymous comments over the break will be included.



January, open consultation on the third draft continues. A final draft is constructed.

Mid February, the final draft is brought to Council.

February 23rd, the policy is brought to the membership for approval at the GA

**This timeline must remain flexible based on how consultations progress. If the timeline needs to be extended, the quality of the policy always takes precedent over the deadlines established in this timeline

Conclusion

As shown in the above timeline, the consultations of the last semester are not conclusive and instead are only the beginning of a larger process as we go forward with the creation of a SSMU Gendered and Sexualized Violence Policy. The results of this report are not exhaustive, and instead will hopefully serve as a document to refer to when designing 'next steps' for over the summer and the Fall 2017 semester around addressing sexual violence on campus both within the SSMU context and outside - especially around creating opportunities for soft-skill sharing / training / cultures. One thing we wish to stress as groups move forward - the creation of a SSMU Policy against Gendered and Sexualized Violence is not an end goal and should not be treated as such. A policy will not stop violence from happening within our community. Instead, it is only one of many other steps it will take in order to properly address the gender-based and sexualized violence perpetuated on this campus. We need to, as a community, commit to taking the time and putting in the work - using this policy to fall back on as we engage with abusers, support survivors, or advocate to the university for change. We look forward to continuing to work with the new SSMU executive, but most importantly we look forward to continuing to work with the groups on this campus who have shown immense resilience and care for each other and for their communities.