

Sexual Violence Prevention and Response

Annual Report (May 2023 – April 2024)

Introduction

The 2023–2024 year marked a period of significant growth, increased collaboration, and expanded impact for the Sexual Violence Support Centre (SVSC). Across prevention, response, education, policy development, and stakeholder engagement, this year reflected both the complexity of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) response and the power of coordinated, community-based approaches.

Throughout the year, the Sexual Violence Advisor provided direct case management support; supported prevention education through the Sexual Violence Prevention Initiative (SVPI); led institutional policy review processes; collaborated across campus and province-wide networks; and secured new funding to strengthen and sustain prevention efforts.

1. Case Management and Systems Response

A central pillar of the Advisor role is providing trauma-informed, survivor-centred case management. Over the past year, the SVSC supported a high and steadily increasing volume of disclosures, reports, and information requests.

Trends and Volume

Across the reporting period:

- Monthly new cases ranged from 3 to 20 per month, with a significant spike in October (20 new cases).
- Active caseloads consistently remained between 24 and 39 active files per month, with long-term cases spanning more than one year.

Ongoing files increased from the mid-60s in May to over 120 by spring 2024.

- Both student and employee reports were supported, including formal investigations and respondent sessions.

Support provided included:

- Information and options counselling
- Coordinated academic and workplace accommodations
- Referrals to internal and external service providers
- Ongoing check-ins and safety planning
- Support through formal reporting and investigation processes within SMU and externally.

The October increase in disclosures and reports illustrates the ongoing need for accessible, trusted support systems on campus.

The sustained caseload across the year also highlights the longitudinal nature of this work, with many individuals engaging in support for six months or longer.

Importantly, this work occurred alongside continued collaboration with Security, Counselling, Human Resources, and Senior Administration to ensure coordinated institutional response.

2. Prevention Education and Student Engagement

The Sexual Violence Prevention Initiative (SVPI) continued to expand its reach and visibility across campus.

Welcome Weeks & Consent Awareness

September 2023 marked one of the most successful engagement periods to date:

- 267 students trained in consent, bystander intervention, and healthy relationships programming in September alone.
- An additional 213 students trained in late August.
- 188 participants engaged in Consent Awareness Week activities.

Programming included:

- Creating Communities of Consent (Athletics teams)
- Safe and Respectful SMU (graduate orientation)
- Sexplanations! Alcohol and Consent
- Waves of Change Bystander Intervention
- Open House, Pride Picnic, and Movie Night events

This represents a substantial increase in engagement compared to prior years and reflects strategic integration into orientation and student leadership training.

Sexual Violence Prevention Week

In January 2024, SVPI hosted another successful Sexual Violence Prevention Week, including:

- Services Pop-Up
- Societies Expo
- Sense-Making Workshop
- Cheers to Consent event

Despite winter weather disruptions, participation remained strong and demonstrated sustained student interest.

Societies Competition

The annual Societies Competition engaged multiple student societies, including Psychology, Pride, Biology, and Enactus, fostering peer-led engagement in prevention education.

Sexual Assault Awareness Month

In April, the SVPI team led the annual Survivor Support Letters campaign, including:

- 20 online submissions
- 12 in-person participants
- Media coverage in the Halifax Examiner

This initiative centers survivor affirmation and community solidarity while increasing awareness of SVSC services.

3. Athletics Engagement and Masculinities Work

This year marked a significant deepening of partnerships with Athletics.

Highlights include:

- Consent and bystander training for Women's Soccer (25 participants) and Football (68 participants).
- Creating Communities of Consent sessions for Basketball and Hockey teams.
- Cross Country team training (41 participants).
- "Masculinity and Gender-Based Violence Prevention" workshop for Football (60 participants), requested by players as a follow-up session.
- "Cards for Consent" initiative with Football (80 participants).

In addition, the Athletics Ambassador Program was developed and launched in March–April, creating leadership pathways for varsity athletes to engage in prevention education.

This work represents a cultural shift toward proactive engagement with sport communities and aligns with broader strategic initiatives such as the proposed SCORE (Sports: Changing Our Role in Education) project.

4. Policy Review and Systems Improvement

As the one-year anniversary of the Sexual Violence and Harassment Policy approached, planning for an "informal" review process became a priority.

Planned components included:

- Anonymous campus-wide survey
- Student, staff, and faculty focus groups
- Consultation with Responsible Authorities
- Review Committee and BIAC consultation
- Presentation to Executive Management Group

Additionally:

- Letter of support templates were developed to streamline academic accommodations for case management.
- A plain-language policy guide and resource mapping was initiated.
- Report templates were adapted to clarify policy implications and next steps.

These system-level refinements improve accessibility, transparency, and efficiency in institutional response.

5. Provincial and National Leadership

The Advisor played an active role in provincial and national prevention networks, including:

- Nova Scotia Sexual Violence Prevention Committee
- Nova Scotia Front-Line Advisors Working Group
- Courage to Act Advisory Committee
- Waves of Change Supervisory Committee
- Respondent Advisor Supervisory Committee

In addition:

- Coordinated the Provincial Sexual Violence Investigators Training (June/July)
- Co-facilitated Provincial Peer Educator Training

The SVPI Peer Educators were also awarded a National Courage to Act Award, recognizing their excellence in peer-led prevention work.

6. Capacity Building and Team Development

Key internal developments included:

- Onboarding a GBV Education and Policy Consultant (Respondent Advisor)
- Transitioning SVPI leadership
- Supporting WGST teaching assistants and service-learning students
- Expanding Brightspace modules into “Consent at SMU 101 and 102” with new videos and infographics

These initiatives strengthen sustainability and student leadership capacity.

Conclusion and Looking Ahead

The 2023–2024 year demonstrates:

- Increased disclosures and sustained demand for case management support.
- Record-breaking prevention engagement during orientation and awareness campaigns.
- Expanded athletics partnerships and masculinity-focused programming.
- Strategic policy review and system improvements.
- Provincial leadership and successful external funding.

This work continues to balance urgent response with long-term cultural change. As we move into the next year, priorities include completing the policy review process, deepening evaluation strategies, sustaining athletics engagement, and continuing to build a campus culture grounded in consent, accountability, and collective care