

Skilled Adults, Safer Students

A Q&A with the Center for Safer Communities, formerly Turning Points Network, on how they've partnered with local schools to train staff members with skills for supporting their students



If schools are serious about supporting student well-being, there's a hard truth to face:

We can't just tell students to find a trusted adult.

We have to make sure adults have developed the skills to be one.

That's where professional development becomes essential—not as another box to check, but as a foundational investment in school culture.

At One Trusted Adult, the "Make It Your Mission" program is designed to do exactly that: equip all adults in a school community with the mindset, language, and practical skills to build trusted, boundaried relationships with students.

In 2025, the Center for Safer Communities partnered with three different organizations—a public high school, a private high school, and a residential program—to implement Make It Your Mission as full-staff professional development.

Their work offers a powerful example of what's possible when schools don't just hope relationships will happen—but intentionally work to build them.

We sat down with two of their team members, Kerry Rochford Hague and Ray DePaola, to learn more.

OTA: Can you share a bit about your organization and how One Trusted Adult has supported your mission?

Safer Communities: We are one of twelve programs in New Hampshire that provide support to individuals experiencing any form of abuse. Our work includes 24-hour crisis services, emergency shelter, advocacy, peer support counseling, and support groups.

On the prevention side, we work with students from Pre-K through high school, teaching healthy relationship skills through the Healthy Relationships Project curriculum. A core part of that curriculum is helping students understand what a trusted adult is and encouraging them to identify one.

Our intention was to close any gap there might be between what we were teaching students to look for in trusted adults, and what the teachers might be providing in their roles. Make It Your Mission provides the framework of common language and skills to address that gap. It ensures that the adults in those students' lives understand what it means to be a trusted adult. It creates common ground and clarity between what students are being taught to look for in trusted adults and what adults are prepared to offer.

That clarity is where we saw the real impact happen.



Safer Communities team members leading the Make It Your Mission training sessions: Kerry Rochford Hague and Ray DePaola

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"It was amazing to see what a trusted adult can actually be for the kiddos we serve. Although we lead daily with the mentality of building trust, the training was a great reminder of the why."
- MIYM participant

OTA: You partner closely with schools—what does that relationship look like, and how did “Make It Your Mission” fit in?

Safer Communities: We’ve built strong, long-standing relationships with schools in Sullivan County. We’re seen as partners—an organization that can bring best practices, support, and professional development into the community.

When we introduced Make It Your Mission, it naturally fit into that role. Schools are always looking for meaningful professional development, and we were very intentional in how we framed it. We emphasized that this wasn’t about adding more to staff workload when they might already feel overwhelmed.

OTA: What did the actual implementation look like across the three organizations?

Safer Communities: We delivered the training to full staff at each site during existing staff meeting and professional development time.

Originally, we planned to facilitate one video module at a time with discussion in between. In some cases, due to time constraints, we combined two modules into a single session. While that wasn’t our preference—because the conversations are so rich—we found it still worked effectively.

A key part of our approach was incorporating small breakout groups where staff could reflect on what they were already doing well. That piece was critical. It gave staff a sense of agency and respected their expertise as professionals.

We noticed that even if there was any initial skepticism about “another PD day,” that resistance shifted quickly once staff realized this was about affirming and strengthening their existing skills. It was incredibly inspiring to see the conversations unfold during each session, and to hear from each of the three organizations how these continued in between sessions, and long after we finished the program.

OTA: What kinds of outcomes or impact did you see as a result of the “Make It Your Mission” training?

Safer Communities: The level of engagement exceeded expectations.

One principal shared that they had never seen that level of staff conversation and continued engagement after a training session. The dialogue didn’t stop when the session ended—it carried forward into daily practice.

We saw tangible outcomes as well:

- A climate committee formed as a direct result of the training
- Staff began rethinking how to make advisory time more meaningful
- Plans to increase student leadership involvement in orientation

We also heard powerful reflections from staff during discussions—about consistency, setting expectations, being

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transparent, not holding grudges, keeping their word, and checking in with students in ways that showed they were valued outside of just academic conversations.

OTA: What do you think makes “Make It Your Mission” resonate with educators compared to other professional development programs?

Safer Communities: It’s highly relatable.

The MIYM program meets educators where they are—whether they’ve had extensive trauma-informed training or are just beginning. It quickly addresses a common concern: “I’m not a counselor.” And the response is, you don’t have to be. You’re already using relationship skills every day. And this training helps you find the line between mentor and mental health professional, between what you can do and when you should hand it off.

What this program does is name those skills, strengthen them, and provide a shared framework and language. It’s not something new to add to their plate—it’s something that helps them understand what’s already on their plate more clearly.

That validation goes a long way.

“I really found this training valuable and know that we all learned a lot from it. These skills are vital to the work we do with our students.” – MIYM participant



Safer Communities Prevention Education team providing training for camp counselors at YMCA Camp Coniston.

The Takeaway: Culture Doesn’t Change Without Adult Investment

What Safer Communities’s work makes clear is this:

You can’t build a culture of trusted relationships through student programming alone. You have to invest in the adults.

When schools prioritize professional development that:

- Validates educator expertise
- Provides a shared language and framework
- Focuses on relationships as a core practice—not an add-on

...then you start to see real, measurable shifts in culture.

OTA’s Make It Your Mission program is designed to support exactly this kind of transformation—whether you’re a

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school, district, or community partner working alongside schools.

If you're thinking about your next professional development investment, here's the question worth asking: *Are we training our adults to be the kind of people our students are being taught to look for?*

If the answer isn't a clear yes—this is the place to start.

***Thank you for sharing your story,
Kerry and Ray!***



RESOURCES AND NEXT STEPS

Make It Your Mission — Video Training

Video PD that can be completed in one 90 minute block or in four shorter sessions. Designed for group viewing, it offers research and real life examples of what a trusted school adult is, and isn't, and how to make building strong connections and healthy boundaries with young people your mission. Includes pdf reflection guide and discussion prompts. (\$1,250/school for one year of access)

Looking to support parents and caregivers by providing a common language and understanding when it comes to supporting youth? Check out "It's Our Mission" a video series designed to be facilitated for a gathering of parents and caregivers.



It's Our Mission — Video Training

A group training video series for parents and guardians that provides strategies for supporting positive academic and developmental outcomes in youth. Includes discussion questions and reflection guide. (\$995 per school for 12-months of access with unlimited participants)

"One Trusted Adult" Second Edition Book + Reader's Guide

"One Trusted Adult: How to Build Strong Connections & Healthy Boundaries with Young People" by Brooklyn Raney, book with Reader's Guide. (\$24.95/book plus shipping)

