

The Citadel Training Initiative: Setting a New Standard for Colleges and Universities

How and why does a college become a model for the nation in the prevention of child sexual abuse?

In 2010 as incidences of child sexual abuse on college campuses were being spotlighted by the media, college campuses around the nation quickly realized that they were not immune from child sexual abuse and needed to do more to prevent child sexual abuse on their campuses. Dr. Stephanie Hewitt, was an associate professor in the Citadel School of Education, believed that “it is essential that all college personnel and students are aware of the risks, the signs of abuse, and their legal responsibility to report.” This philosophy propelled The Citadel (The Military College of South Carolina), to become the first college in the nation to establish ongoing child sexual abuse prevention and intervention training for all students, faculty, and staff. They serve as a model for the entire nation.

THE CHALLENGE

Most college campuses host thousands of children on campus each summer, and many conduct camps of various types. During the school year, students interact with children in the community by interning and volunteering at local businesses, non-profits, and government agencies. Therefore, it is common that students, faculty, and employees of a college interact with children. How does a college or university lessen the risk of sexual abuse for children associated with these programs? How does a college or university meet its responsibilities for creating safe environments and ensuring proper reporting?

The answer is clear. Policies, procedures, and training to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse for all college faculty, employees, and students is necessary to foster a culture of child safeguarding.

A LONG HISTORY

In 2006, The Citadel School of Education incorporated Darkness to Light’s *Stewards of Children*® child sexual abuse prevention training as part of its curriculum and a graduation requirement for both undergraduate and graduate students in its teacher education, counseling, literacy education, and educational leadership programs. The *Stewards of Children*® training was also offered within the college’s psychology program.

A NEW STANDARD

In 2011 The Citadel saw an opportunity to create a new standard for child protection on college campuses and in college programs. The Citadel became the first college or university in the nation to make child sexual abuse prevention training mandatory for all students, faculty, and employees.

The Citadel chose to use Darkness to Light’s *Stewards of Children*® child sexual abuse prevention and intervention program because of its wide base of evidence, ease of delivery, subject specificity, and empowering message.

“The Citadel has the challenge and opportunity to set a new standard within our community,” Lt. General John W. Rosa, Citadel President, said in October 2012. “This partnership with Darkness to Light demonstrates our commitment to serving as an example to others and making The Citadel a safe place to live, learn, work, and visit.”

Dr. Stephenie Hewett when tasked with leading the training initiative at The Citadel. In 2012 and early 2013, she oversaw the training of 3,650 individuals who live and work on The Citadel campus, using the *Stewards of Children*[®] program. An ongoing regimen was set up which required training for new hires and incoming students. It also mandated retraining for faculty and employees. “At first, some faculty and employees did not want to participate because they did not interact with children in their jobs. However, after taking the *Stewards of Children*[®] training, most were amazed at how useful and empowering it was,” Dr. Hewett said.

In addition to its model training program and regimen, The Citadel went one step further in ensuring ongoing success. The college created the position of Chief Protection Officer in the Office of Institutional Compliance to oversee compliance with reporting laws and college policies.

RESULTS

The ongoing Citadel initiative has proven to be both effective and manageable over the long-term. The Citadel has received the distinction of being named Darkness to Light’s largest Partner in Prevention, a title bestowed on organizations that implement policies and train all employees to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse on a continuing basis.

The Citadel offers the *Stewards of Children*[®] training in both the online and in-person, facilitator-led formats. The Corps of Cadets and most faculty are trained with the in-person format, while most of the students in the evening and graduate program use the online version. The Citadel has 20 active facilitators, most of whom are faculty members and employees, although there are also cadet facilitators. To date, the Citadel has provided training and retraining for more than 7,000 students, faculty, and employees.

The impact of the *Stewards of Children*[®] training program, particularly on Citadel Cadets, has been tremendous. In a recent study, 75% of Citadel Cadets demonstrated a significant increase in knowledge after completing the program.

Even more impressive is the attitude and behavior change in those that complete the program. Participants agreed that the training program is effective in teaching adults about sexual abuse with a score of 8.97 out of 10. More importantly, there were significant increases in child-protective behavior changes after taking the *Stewards of Children*[®] program, evidenced at both a 2-month and 6-month follow-up.

Katelyn Brewer, President & CEO of Darkness to Light, summarized the Citadel initiative: “Not only is the implementation of a campus-wide sexual abuse prevention training initiative cost-effective and manageable, it is effective in creating an environment that is empowered to prevent and intervene properly in child sexual abuse, helping to keep all of their young visitors safe. That is priceless and helps keep kids safe.”