

Strengthening Community on Orcas Island

A Response to the Tragedy at Newtown, Connecticut

Preamble

This document has been created by a group of concerned citizens of Orcas Island. We met to reach a consensus on what improvements to local practices and attitudes we can make in order to lower the risk of an event occurring here such as the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre.

We recognize the responsibility, as members of this great nation, to address on a local level, attitudes and social practices which we determine to be both complementary to our island culture and essential for the health and well-being of our citizens.

We commit ourselves to promote and support the continued development of principles, attitudes, and practices which will permit our children and community at large to live and learn in a safe, caring and cooperative community.

These principles and attitudes are:

- Concern and compassionate action for the wellbeing of all members of our community
- Respect for one another's beliefs and opinions
- The nurturing and maintenance of a safe environment
- The responsible stewardship of firearms

The development and improvement of the following practices will serve these principles:

- Public and interpersonal communication
- Identification and support of community spaces and venues which promote healthy social interaction
- Educational programs that lead to a clear understanding of how to reduce threats to personal and public safety
- The promotion and support of emotional and mental health in our community

Our process categorized discussion as follows:

- Gun Issues
- Individual Responsibility
- Community Caring
- Wellbeing

Gun Issues

- We acknowledge the Second Amendment Rights for individuals to keep and bear arms subject to legal regulation.
- We support government enforcement of existing laws, including Washington State laws making schools gun-free zones.
- We promote gun safety and security, public awareness, and individual, parental, and community responsibility. We recommend gun safety through age-appropriate firearm education, privately-owned gun safes, and the Sheriff's free gun-lock program.
- We recommend that all community-based organizations which provide family services be trained to recognize the threat of inappropriate access to firearms and ammunition, and that staff be trained to recognize and deal with such a threat.
- We recommend that our teachers be provided similar training in threat assessment and methods for crisis intervention.
- We encourage individuals to be active politically to influence legislation locally and nationally on these issues.

Individual Responsibility

We believe that every member of the Orcas community has a personal responsibility to lower the risk of violence in our community. We ask that every individual in the community:

- Strive to strengthen your family
- Treat others with honesty, caring and respect
- Notice community members in need and facilitate their assistance
- Reach out to community members who appear isolated, marginalized, or distressed
- Be mindful of your own health and well-being
- Embrace diversity of opinions and lifestyles
- Commit to being an ongoing, active part of our community
- Seek opportunities to be a mentor or to be mentored
- Recognize personally and publicly the "small deeds" of others
- Educate yourself and actively engage with your health care provider on the side effects of prescribed medication for you and your family
- Participate in community events and gatherings
- Support funding for school, mental health, and recreation programs
- Initiate activities in your neighborhood to develop and nurture community
- Be mindful of the culture of violence your child and the community's children are exposed to through video games, media, internet, literature, etc.
- Actively discourage and report physical or emotional bullying
- Be aware of the immediate and long-term impacts of legal and illegal drug use (including alcohol) on yourself, your family, and our community

Community Caring

Community caring is clearly evident on Orcas Island, and it can always be improved. Expressions of caring can be an important way to build relationships among all islanders. It is the basis for the following suggestions and ideas.

We must address the needs of the children, youth, and young adults as well as those of adults and elders. Some concrete ways to show this change include:

- Recognizing a child's accomplishments through community-organized, appropriate rites of passage
- Acknowledging good deeds, large or small, either verbally or through publication
- Encouraging young adults, adults and elders to become mentors for all levels of youth (for example— island grandmothers and grandfathers)
- Asking what it is that people need
- Encouraging student-led initiatives such as "The Happiness Initiative"
- Providing internship opportunities with local businesses for young adults

Better communications concerning services available can be accomplished through flyers, town hall meetings and service fairs.

Wellbeing

We recognize that our existing individual, familial, educational and mental health systems share the primary responsibility for the emotional development and support of many of our children, our families and our organizations.

We strive to create an environment which offers and improves resources that empower children and their families. These resources include information, collaboration, intervention or assistance in improving social and mental wellbeing and stability.

We recognize the following issues need to be addressed and appropriate educational materials created or provided:

- Prescription drug information
- Danger assessment
- Intergenerational cycles of violence
- Discussion groups about scary topics
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and related special needs categories such as ADD and ADHD
- Anti-Bullying programs
- Child and youth participation in community services
- Leadership classes

We recognize the sensitive balance between intervention and intrusion.

The Consensus Process

As our group struggled to reach consensus, our process demonstrated integrity, inclusion, openness, and dedication to exploring and developing a plan to address a complex and contentious community issue. The participants represented a diversity of experience and opinion, but were mindful of those opinions not in the room as well. Through patient listening and, for the most part, the expression of mutual respect, participants freely spoke their truth.

Moving Forward *(written after the consensus process ended)*

This consensus statement represents a sincere effort at beginning a community process whereby these practices and attitudes may be implemented, enhanced, and embedded in our island culture...some of them exist at present...some as memories when times were simpler. The group of 36 who arrived at this consensus recognizes the need for and welcomes the ideas, resources, and energy of our entire community. In our deliberations, someone coined the phrase...“Code of the Rock”...an idea not yet defined, but offered as a yet-to-be-created means by which we express our attitudes and aspirations for a safe, vibrant, sustainable, and connected community.

In short, the work has just begun. It needs awareness, recognition, tempering, conversation, experimentation, dedication and resources in order to realize its mission. Some members of this consensus group have committed to participate in ongoing, open forum meetings on the topics outlined above. We welcome *all* Orcas Islanders to consider, support, and enrich these initiatives. Imagine the impact if *you* choose to step forward, participate, and provide leadership to strengthen our community.

Background

This Statement of Consensus was created by thirty six Orcas Islanders who responded to an island-wide invitation to gather and *"To reach a consensus on what changes to local practices and attitudes we can make in order to lower the risk of the tragedy at Newtown, Connecticut occurring on Orcas Island; and to draft a statement of that consensus to be published and shared with the Orcas community."*

The agreed upon definition for consensus was, *"a decision by two or more people...a decision which everyone may not feel is the best decision...but is a decision which everyone can live with, and commit themselves not to undermine"*.

Participants committed to attending fifteen hours of deliberations spread over four meetings. These gatherings took place from January 26th thru February 2nd, 2013 following the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre of December 14, 2012.

Participants:

Marta Branch	Adam Farish	Lin McNulty	James Scheib
Phil Branch	Kyle Freeman	Morgan Meadows	Norm Stamper
Josh Bronn (1)	Douglas Gainor (4)	Barry Neville	Chris Sutton
Anita Castle	Bill Griswold	Kevin O'Brien (3)	Ed Sutton (2) (5)
Bruce Distler	Andrea Hendrick (2)	Nancy O'Brien	Joe Symons
Don Drozd	Paul Kamin	Don Pencil	Judy Turksel (4)
Dave Dunlap	Fred Klein	Nancy Reas	Dave Turnoy
Jenifer Dunlap	Ladd Lindholm (2)	Tina Rose (4)	Bob Vietzke
Margie Doyle	Jim McKeon	Harvey Rossiter	Denise Wolf

(1) attended first meeting only

(2) missed second meeting

(3) excused from second meeting

(4) missed fourth meeting

(5) participated and fully-endorsed the consensus of Feb. 2nd and asked to withdraw a week later.

Facilitators:

Fred Klein

Marta Branch