

MY WORK WITH STAN BOWMAN

When news first broke of a sexual assault that occurred ten years earlier within the Chicago Blackhawks organization in October 2021, my phone rang non-stop.

Given the decades I have spent working in the space of not only sexual abuse, but all forms of abuse, harassment, and discrimination, it seemed everyone in the media and hockey community at large wanted my reaction to this horrible news. I heard Kyle Beach's interview and felt it was as honest and raw as they get.

I clearly recall expressing that this was a terrible situation with significant impact to those involved. I also believed however, it could serve as a powerful learning opportunity if approached with courage. I've always believed that regardless of how dire a situation may be, there is always some good that can emerge from it. This incident was no exception.

I was contacted by Al MacIsaac, Joel Quenneville, and Stan Bowman, who were all suspended indefinitely by the NHL for their association with the incident. Each of them wanted to learn more about the issues of sexual abuse and the critical role of bystanders in confronting and addressing maltreatment effectively. I spoke at length with all three men and they each chose their own journey to educate themselves and improve in this area.

I want to focus on what I would now call my friendship with Stan Bowman. I never knew Stan and had never spoken to him before, although he tells me we met in Detroit in my playing days. I don't remember that, which is not surprising during that time, to say the least!

I was immediately struck by Stan's genuine care and concern for Kyle, and what could have been done differently. During that period, we spoke almost daily about the seriousness of sexual abuse from the victim's perspective. We didn't talk about hockey at all. We focused on what went wrong, what he could have done differently and, most importantly, what could be done to prevent this from happening again.

This is an area to which I have dedicated my life, striving to make a difference for victims. I always bring the conversation back to the impact on the victim. I believe this is the only way we will ever be able to create the change we desire. I fall back on what my mother taught me. No matter what, there can be good that comes from this conversation.

In my last 20 years of living sober and helping others struggling with addiction, what gives me the most hope is seeing people accept the truth, demonstrate a willingness to change and learn a better way, and acknowledge the impact their actions have on those around them.

Stan exemplifies this to me. During our many conversations he took accountability for his actions and genuinely wanted to learn how to do better. His desire to acknowledge his mistakes and make amends with Kyle was sincere.

Stan wanted to know about our work at Respect Group over the past 20 years. Respect Group has trained over 2.5 million Canadians on their roles and responsibilities to prevent bullying, abuse, harassment, and discrimination. I talked to Stan about how we were developing the next phase of our Respect Charter training. Our goal was to create a tool that would help teams improve communication and understanding around these sensitive topics and empower them to create their own Respect Charter, a set of "we statements" they develop together to drive accountability with a focus on psychological safety on and off the ice.

In my own case, and in the many incidents of abuse that I continue to see, there are bystanders present who, instead of stepping in to make things better, often make the situation worse for the victim through their inaction. Bystanders typically have fear and anxiety around intervening, even when their gut tells them something may be wrong. Too often it's unclear where to seek help or even how to begin a conversation on the topic. We need to foster confidence, clarity, and a sense of ownership in this critical area.

Stan understood this and agreed completely. I invited him to work with our team to help us build on our vision of the Respect Charter. He accepted and volunteered nearly full-time hours to help develop the program.

It was a powerful and impactful approach—I was coming at it from a victim's point of view and Stan was approaching it as a guy suspended from his job because he could have done more. Stan's acceptance, open mindedness, and understanding were huge difference makers in building this workshop. I was impressed with Stan's insights, but more importantly, just how deeply he cared.

Stan showed incredible leadership by helping craft the workshop curriculum, using his experience as a compelling real-life example, and facilitating the sessions along with a colleague from Chicago.

Along with myself, our Team at Respect Group, and our partners at the Western Hockey League, we conducted 3 Respect Charter pilots in 2023 (Red Deer, Edmonton and Calgary). Check out [this clip](#) of the [WHL Workshop](#) with a team during one of our pilot sessions.

Stan's hockey experience had great credibility with the young players on these 3 teams, but his honest admission of what he could have done differently really resonated and had an immense impact. Stan spoke about how he personally should have been relentless in following up on every conversation and accusation, rather than trusting others to do so.

In the 2024 season, we expanded the Charter to every team in the WHL, one team in the OHL, the USA World Junior Men's Team, who would go on to win the 2024 World Junior Championships, and insisted the Respect Charter was part of their success as noted in their [post victory interview with USA Hockey Today](#). We also delivered Respect Charter workshops to three Universities in Western Canada (Men's and Women's Hockey, Women's Volleyball Women's

Basketball), USA U17 and U18 National Development Teams, and U17AAA and U18 AAA teams in the Calgary area in the 2024 season.

In September 2023 Stan co-facilitated the Respect Charter session at Trinity Western University in Langley, BC. That workshop was attended by Kyle Beach, who was then the Assistant Coach of the Men's Hockey Team. I heard from both men afterwards that they appreciated the opportunity to meet again, discuss their personal realities, and to clear the air given that time had passed.

I have made it my life's work, through Respect Group and my involvement with Child Advocacy, to empower bystanders through proactive education. Stan has demonstrated to me that he is clearly committed to "doing the work".

So why am I writing this piece? I believe Stan would be a valuable asset to an organization due to his acknowledgment of past mistakes and his relentless efforts to make the locker room/game safer for everyone. He possesses the insights, knowledge, and confidence needed to lead in this area. I feel building a strong and healthy culture within an organization and practicing it on an ongoing basis will be a top priority for Stan. I also believe Stan will carry this message within the hockey eco system, which can only help.

Lastly and most importantly I feel that Stan will do everything in his power to make sure what happened to Kyle Beach (who is a hero in my opinion) will not happen to anyone else.

I know that wherever Stan lands, whether in the game of hockey or not, he will be a true champion in the important area of Respect.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sheldon Kennedy".

Sheldon Kennedy **OC AOE OM**
Co-founder Respect Group
Order of Sport - Canada's Sports Hall of Fame
Order of Hockey in Canada