

# Missed Opportunities with Red Flags and Warning Signs



**Article submitted by  
Rick Shaw, Founder  
and CEO of Awareity.**

You can follow Rick's  
blogs at:  
<http://blog.awareity.com/>

Already in 2011, tragedies in Tucson and Omaha have reminded each of us about the consequences of missed opportunities involving red flags and warning signs. Lives were lost and lives will be changed forever because of these and many other tragic incidents.

We are now learning numerous red flags and warning signs existed involving the gunman in each tragedy, which has many people asking why these two tragedies were not prevented and how can we prevent future incidents like these from occurring?

Some people are suggesting new gun control laws in Arizona or new laws that do not allow guns within 1000 feet of government officials. In Omaha, some are suggesting school metal detectors and cameras.

Unfortunately these suggestions are knee-jerk reactions that miss the point. The 'big picture' issue is prevention and what organizations need to do differently to improve their prevention and intervention efforts.

For example, what are schools' responsibilities for sharing information with appropriate entities in the community and how can we ensure all dots are connected across multiple locations, multiple levels of law enforcement, mental health professionals, etc.?

Organizations need to encourage and empower people (students, faculty, staff, law enforcement, parents, employees, community members, etc.) to report suspicious incidents, red flags and warning signs as soon as they identify them.

All personnel should be trained to look for early indicators - behaviors and warning signs (bullying, intimidation, threats, harassment, targeted violence, etc.) - that require immediate reporting.

Organizations need to offer anonymous incident reporting options and the ability to automatically deliver incident reports to the right people...even if the right people are in multiple locations or at multiple organizations. Once incidents have been reported it is also critical to ensure all necessary follow-up actions are documented, appropriate authorities are notified and red flags do not continue to fall through the cracks. Traditional and status quo incident reporting systems rarely offer this level of holistic functionality.



Organizations need to centralize and securely share information more effectively across silos, organizations and communities. Sharing has been difficult because of paper-based methodologies and because of lack of awareness involving privacy regulations such as FERPA and HIPAA, as well as political and authority breakdowns.



Organizations need ongoing training based on individual roles and responsibilities, more comprehensive policies and procedures, increased awareness on how to recognize behavioral changes, secure access to professional threat assessment and behavioral analysis teams, and effective ways to continually connect the dots (people dots and process dots). Organizations need to empower their people (and third-parties) with proactive prevention tools that replace status quo and reactive approaches that are not working.

With improved situational awareness, improved information-sharing and proactively identifying red flags, organizations will be able to prevent incidents, rather than reading about them in the news.

#### **Awareity CEO, Rick Shaw**

Awareity's Founder and CEO, Rick Shaw has over 27 years of experience with managing risks, technology, processes, clients and people at both large and small organizations. In addition to Rick's experiences, hundreds of case studies, incidents and failures have played a key part in Rick's vision and the development of Awareity's innovative and forward thinking web-based services. Rick is passionate about helping schools and organizations implement comprehensive safety procedures, behavioral intervention teams and threat assessment team programs.

You can follow Rick's blogs at <http://blog.awareity.com>.