

Violence Awareness Week Fights the Good Fight

By KERI ANN FLACCOMIO
Staff Writer

The Women's Center sponsored a variety of events on campus to observe Violence Awareness Week, which began on Sept. 28.

An information table set up in the Fishbowl on Monday provided resources about violence against women and outlined events scheduled for the week.

The YWCA Bergen County Rape Crisis Center Clothesline Project accompanied the annual Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event on Tuesday. The project showcased a collection of shirts bearing the graphic messages and illustrations of sexual-assault and relationship-violence survivors. The shirts made statements about the situations each victim experienced.

"One shirt that always sticks out in my mind," said Sarah Costello, Women's Center Graduate Assistant, "is a bright yellow shirt with different objects and vegetables drawn on it that says, 'these do not belong inside me.'"

A screening of the modern feature-length documentary "No!" on Wednesday night presented empowering accounts from black survivors, and offered professional perspectives on preventing and overcoming sexual assault. The film also described how rape is often a response to homophobia.

The events of Violence Awareness Week

culminate today with Take Back the Night, a speak-out rally and march across campus to promote unity and strength. Those who participate will walk across campus holding signs and chanting positive messages.

Laura Hahn, Women's Center Program Coordinator and Office Manager, called the annual march "the most empowering part of the night and week."

"Often, people who are survivors of sexual assault or relationship violence may feel a sense of shame and may be afraid or unwilling to talk about what occurred," Costello said. "Take Back the Night creates a safe space where those who are willing may break the silence and talk openly and honestly about their feelings."

Junior Ali Melillo, a Women's Center volunteer, described the event as a means for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence to "take back" their pain.

"By talking about what they have been through, it gives them the strength to heal and move forward. They should not be expected to stay silent about the abuse they have endured."

Violence Awareness Week is observed each year for the purpose of spreading awareness on sexual assault and domestic violence, and acknowledging abuse occurs more frequently than people realize. The program goals also include preventing violence against women, educating and involving men, and promoting healthy relationships.

"We hear the numbers," said Kat McGee, Women's Center coordinator, "but I don't think, unless people start putting faces with these numbers, that it really resonates with them."

Anthony Harris, men's outreach coordinator for the Women's Center, wants to send the message that violence is a vicious cycle perpetuated by ignorance, and that silence only allows abuse to continue.

"I also want people to understand that vio-



photo by Keri Ann Flacomio

Anthony Harris, men's outreach coordinator, and friends staff the info table.

lence of any kind transcends race, gender and class. It affects everyone involved - even those who choose to sit by and ignore it," Harris said.

September and October are the months when assault is most likely to occur on campus, according to McGee. Many people who are new to the college environment let their guard down, and perpetrators are ready to take advantage of this vulnerable population.

According to the Department of Justice, three percent of college women report assault each year, which means that an average of 65 women at Ramapo may become victims every year.

"We know that one in four women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime," Costello said. "The number of people who have been indirectly affected is undoubtedly greater."

McGee believes that change has to start with the campus culture, in terms of speaking and acting in ways that stop enabling violence. She wants individuals to realize that they each have a stake in the outcome, and that when the "good guys" do nothing, the "bad guys" speak for them.

"Everyone has this misconception that they have to go before large crowds to declare their war against domestic violence," Harris said, "there are more subtle ways to show that you are against violence which can be effective in making a change."

Harris, along with staff members and volunteers from the Women's Center, organized Violence Awareness Week. A number of fraternities, sororities, and student organizations co-sponsored the program.

CORRECTION

Professor Tom Owen was misquoted in the Sept. 24 edition.

The correct quote is: "You shouldn't treat everyone with anti-viral medications due to the possibility of generating resistant viruses."

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Contact us at:

The Ramapo News
Robert A. Scott Student Center
505 Ramapo Valley Road
Mahwah, NJ 07430

Telephone: (201) 684-7842
Advertising: (201) 684-7842
Fax: (201) 684-7939
E-mail: rcnjnews@ramapo.edu

Staff: Lianna Albrizio, Megan Anderle, Michelle Angelino, Natasha Arena, Morgan Balog, Francesca Baratta, Brian Beckman, Erica Buchman, Kristen Burnell, Courtney Cerreta, Alyssa Connors, Kelly Craig, Deanna Dunsmuir, Amy Fezza, Keri Ann Flacomio, Melanie Framo, Rachel Frank, John Frazee, Andrew Gould, Lauren Haag, Ashley Hastings, Bryan Kaminsky, Jeremy Kelly, Nick Kolani, Scott Laudati, Jon Lindenauer, Ryan Mallory, Stefanie Mauro, Nicole Mazewski, Kaitlin McGuinness, Jenna Moonjian, Abi Pangili, Dave Ragazzo, Diana Stanczak, Keith Stratton, Ali Szczepanski, Brittany Temple, Samantha Ullrich, Rachel Wintermute.

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