

April Is Sexual Assault Awareness Month

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The month of April has been designated Sexual Assault Awareness Month in the United States. The goal in doing this is to raise public awareness about sexual violence and to educate communities and individuals on how to prevent sexual violence.

April 2, in particular has been declared "A Day to End Sexual Violence" by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. It is a day for all groups, organizations and individuals to participate in or organize events to raise awareness and help prevent sexual violence within their communities. Holding such events helps to educate the public of the dynamics of sexual assault, how the community can help prevent it and what resources are available for those who have been victims of this or know someone who has.

The Chautauqua County Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault organize several awareness activities within the Chautauqua County. Each April, sexual assault screenings are held at Jamestown Community College, Jamestown Business College and Chautauqua County Health Department. Project Crossroads facilitates this and it entails having students, voluntarily, complete anonymous surveys about any history of sexual abuse. Also available for all, whether they complete a survey or not, are various pamphlets/resources to take, and individuals available to answer any questions they might have.

Another activity is the display of our "Silent Witness" display. This display began nationally in 1990 as a way of remembering and honoring those who have been victimized. The exhibit is made up of life-sized red figures each representing a victim/survivor. Each figure holds a shield on its chest, which tells the story of a survivor here in Chautauqua County. Although faceless, and nameless, there is a real person with real feelings behind each story. The goal of this exhibit is to bring



awareness that:

1) Rape is the fastest growing violent crime in the U.S.

2) Every two minutes, someone in the U.S. is sexually assaulted. According to the U.S. Department of Justice's National Crime Victimization Survey, there are an average of 207,754 victims (age 12 or older) of rape and sexual assault each year. (U.S. Department of Justice, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2006-2010.)

3) One in four girls will be sexually assaulted by the age of 18.

4) One in six boys will be sexually assaulted by the age of 18.

5) Approximately 68 percent of rape victims knew their assailant. Twenty-eight percent of victims are raped by husbands or boyfriends, 35 percent by acquaintances and 5 percent by other relatives. Twenty-nine percent of female victims reported that the offender was a stranger. (U.S. Department of Justice)

It is also hoped that those who take the time to read the individual stories are left with more knowledge regarding sexual assault. Along with the displays are pamphlets, business cards, etc. that give information on the many resources that are available in Chautauqua County. The exhibit will be on display throughout the month of April at Jamestown Community College (Hultquist Library), Jamestown Business College, the Prendergast Library and the Chautauqua Mall, each for one week.

What can you as an individual do to help raise awareness/participate in Sexual Assault Awareness Month?

- Start a conversation about healthy sexuality with your family and friends. Open the lines of communication which in turn will raise awareness.

- Teal is the color for Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Wear it often and share with others why you are wearing it and what they can do to become involved.

- The Sexual Assault Awareness Month logo is "It's time ... to talk about it." If you have Facebook, change your profile picture to yourself holding a clock or a picture of a clock to represent "It's time" to talk about the issue of sexual assault.

- Tweet about April being Sexual Assault Awareness Month, as many are not aware of this. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center will hold hour-long chats each Tuesday in April using #Tweet-AboutIt.

- Help prevent sexual assault by utilizing your own healthy sexuality skills with consensual, respectful and safe relationships.

- If you hear others make inappropriate comments or behaviors, respond accordingly. When you choose to become an active bystander you help to show others healthy and proactive dialogue.

The Chautauqua County Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault is committed to coordinating a countywide collaborative network to address the needs of those affected by interpersonal violence.

Through their unified efforts the coalition membership is committed to providing education, support and assistance, in a consistent, sensitive and nondiscriminatory manner. The coalition is facilitated by Project Crossroads. Project Crossroads, created in 1996, is an educational partnership between the Jamestown Police Department and Family Service of the Chautauqua Region.

For more information about how you can become involved, for available services or educational presentations, please contact Project Crossroads at 483-7718.

If you have been a victim of sexual assault or domestic violence in Chautauqua County, contact The Salvation Army Anew Center Crisis Hotline at 1-800-252-8748. Operators are available seven days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.