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Schuylkill Haven High School learns about domestic violence

BY AMY MARCHIANO

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ANDY MATSKO/STAFF PHOTO Katy Heckman, Orwigsburg, tells her story of domestic violence involving a friend that was killed by her husband. The Deana's Educational Theater from Wakefield, Mass., presented "Remote Control," an interactive play about dating violence, Tuesday at Schuylkill Haven High School.



Rydia Vielehr, left, plays "Amy" and Timothy Hoover plays "Josh," two teens in an abusive relationship.



ANDY MATSKO/STAFF PHOTO Casey Preston asks students about the play.

SCHUYLKILL HAVEN — Schuylkill Haven high school students learned life lessons during a play about domestic violence Tuesday in the Zwerling Auditorium.

Almost all of the eighth- through 12-grade students attended the play titled "Remote Control" sponsored by Schuylkill Women in Crisis, a domestic violence prevention organization. Some students opted out of attending the play.

Schuylkill Haven Area High School Principal Sarah Yoder said she realized the subject was difficult but was an important one for the students.

"I want them (the students) to understand that they are in control of their relationships and not to be afraid to ask for help if it's necessary," she said.

Before the play got underway, Katy Heckman, a member of SWIC, shared her personal experience of a friend, Cindy, whom she knew since sixth grade, who died as an adult as a result of domestic violence.

"I hope today that you learn something that I wish I would have known when I was 16. Maybe I could have made a difference in Cindy's life. I dedicate this performance to my friend and angel, Cindy. I hope all of you get something out of this performance that may help you or a friend in an unhealthy relationship," Heckman said.

"Love is a great thing but love shouldn't hurt. A good relationship is based on mutual respect and trust and good communication," Rydia Vielehr, who played "Amy" in the play, said.

Timothy Hoover played "Josh," and the role of "Darryl" was played by Casey Preston. The actors were part of Deana's Educational Theater, based in Wakefield, Massachusetts.

During various scenes in the play, the characters acted out scenes that a teenager could encounter: a date, a disagreement outside a locker where Amy said she did not want to be in a relationship with Josh any longer, a scene where he was jealous of Amy talking to other guys and other scenes where Darryl talked to each one about the unhealthy relationship he witnessed. Students got to offer comments about what should have been done differently or what warning signs they noticed during the play.

The play was made possible by fundraising earlier in the year from the Power of Women team, a group of women who want to spread awareness of domestic violence. Invitations were sent out to all schools in the district about the play and eight responded. Because of funding availability, the first five high schools that responded were chosen: Blue Mountain, Pottsville, Schuylkill Haven, North Schuylkill and Marian, Darla Troutman, communications director for SWIC, said. High school students in Blue Mountain and Marian will see the play today and those in North Schuylkill will do so Thursday. The play was performed for high school students in Pottsville at 8 a.m. Tuesday. The play will also be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday in the Morgan Auditorium at Penn State Schuylkill and is free to the public. Troutman said domestic violence is all about "power and control."

Preston said it is important for students to tell someone about an abusive relationship even though it might be hard.

"This type of relationship can take a really long time to get out of," he said.

Those in the situation might not realize what they are doing or are letting happen to them, he said. The play ends with Amy deciding in a public place that she did not want to be with Josh any longer.

"I love you but I don't want to get hurt any more," she said.

Josh did not respond well at first, saying she was making a mistake.

"It's not safe for me to go anywhere with you right now," she said.

For one senior, domestic violence is all too real. A 17-year-old said there was abuse in her family when she was younger, which resulted in her mother leaving her dad.

"I've seen it first hand," she said.

An eighth-grader, 13, said he learned not to be abusive toward loved ones. Another eighth-grader, 13, said the play was educational. He learned to "be nice in relationships and don't hurt people."

Troutman said the issue is an important one for everyone to be aware of.

"This is not just an individual issue, it's a community issue," she said.