

News: UW-Madison Campus

Performance aims for domestic abuse awareness in college students

By Danielle Miller Wednesday, October 19, 2011 10:58 p.m.

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An event held Wednesday night tackled the issue of domestic violence and its repercussions in a college student's life as the keynote program for Domestic Abuse Awareness Month.

Promoting Awareness, Victim Empowerment hosted the one-woman play, "The Yellow Dress," which addressed the experience of a college student in an abusive relationship.

Rydia Vielehr performed the play and is an actor from the Massachusetts-based Deana's Educational Theater. The performance was followed by a discussion with attendees connecting the play's story to the realities some individuals experience.

Vielehr interacted with audience members to convey indications of a sexually, verbally or emotionally abusive relationship and ways for victims and bystanders to seek help.

"Most of the problem is there's not enough awareness," she said. "People always say, 'It won't happen to me.'"

Meghan Sohns, Domestic Abuse Intervention Services crisis intervention coordinator, was in attendance at the event and detailed the resources available to survivors of abuse in the community.

Sohns also said nearly one-third of the total amount of arrests in Dane County are related to domestic violence, a figure which she said demonstrates the scope of the issue.

PAVE spokesperson Jacqueline O'Reilly said the student group chose to bring "The Yellow Dress" to campus as the month's keynote event because of its relevance in telling the story of a college-aged woman's process of coping with an abusive relationship.

She also emphasized the story had the power to affect all students from all walks of life on campus.

She said it was "inspiring" to see so many interested and involved students concerned with such an important issue, as reflected by the student support over the last month of events.

"It's inspiring that people are excited and involved in our cause," O'Reilly said. "Once you realize how big [of] an issue domestic violence is, it's pretty hard not to get involved."

Other events hosted throughout the month included a pledge to end violence event and a workshop on domestic violence in the media.

Statistics show one in four women and one in six men are victims of domestic violence, according to a statement from PAVE.

The statement also said this type of violence does not specifically apply to physical abuse or only heterosexual relationships, but instead involves any form of physical, verbal or emotional abuse and can affect anyone, regardless of sexual orientation.

PAVE Chair Val Kowis emphasized how large of a footprint domestic violence has left in today's society.

"Either personally or through a friend or family member, everyone is touched by domestic violence," she said. "Because of this, the whole community, [and] specifically UW, should be working to end violence."