



CSSD Chronicle



A regular publication of information and news about Court Support Services Division

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Thursday, October 15, 2009

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Addressing Violence Against Women: Project M.O.R.E.'s "The Clothesline Project"



Secrets keep us sick. Find someone to confide in. It's okay to say no is handwritten with fabric paint across a bubblegum pink t-shirt. The message is bold, clear, and unwavering. A fire engine red t-shirt shouts, **Take me as I am**. On a sun yellow t-shirt, **The Ladder of My Life** shines across the top, with the words **shy, insecure, rape, denial, drugs, arrest** and **salvation** written upward on each rung of the ladder, like a timeline. A total of eleven powerfully written t-shirts are strung across a brick wall at the New Haven AIC, held in place by simple wooden clothespins. A dozen or more shirts also hang across the center's front entry. Female offenders who attend the AIC created the t-shirts as part of "**The Clothesline Project**"—a growing, international program that bears witness to violence against women.

The Project's Beginning - "The Clothesline Project" was started in 1990 on Cape Cod, Massachusetts by a small, local coalition of battered women. They wanted to do something in response to the ever-growing number of women who were being murdered by their male partners. The group displayed the first shirts, 31 of them, on a village green in Hyannis in October of 1990 as part of an annual "Take Back the Night" march and rally. The idea of using simple shirts on a clothesline to convey a message is a throwback to a time when women used "laundry day" to socialize with

other women in neighborhood backyards. According to the project's website www.clotheslineproject.org, the painted shirts "act as an educational tool for those who come to view the Clothesline; it becomes a healing tool for anyone who makes a shirt—by hanging the shirt on the line, survivors, friends, and family can literally turn their back on some of that pain...and walk away; finally, it allows those who are still suffering in silence to understand they are not alone."

Connecticut Women Bear Witness - "The Clothesline Project" has become a permanent component of Project M.O.R.E.'s "Moving On" program for women offenders at the New Haven AIC. According to Raquel "Rocqui" Cruz, who oversees Project M.O.R.E.'s bi-lingual intervention groups, and is a "Moving On" facilitator, this art therapy module allows women to "let out some things that have been hiding for a while." Each shirt color represents a particular type of abuse and/or survival: White represents women who died because of violence; Yellow or Beige represents battered or assaulted women; Red, Pink, and Orange are for survivors of rape and sexual assault; Blue and Green t-shirts represent survivors of incest/sexual abuse; Purple or Lavender represents women attacked because of their sexual orientation; and Black is for women attacked for political reasons. Cruz explained that as the women decorate the shirts with their individual "symbols of the dark moments," they



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Linda.Grzeika@jud.ct.gov



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also discuss ways to make healthier choices in their relationships with family members and intimates. Making the shirt is voluntary; some women are not ready to address this issue, and they are encouraged to simply reflect on their personal experiences during their time in the group.



A Permanent Message of Power - Addys Castillo, the New Haven AIC's Program Director, is a strong and vocal supporter of **"The Clothesline Project."** Originally planned as a one-time activity, the display is now a permanent fixture at the AIC. "It elicits conversation and sends a powerful message," Castillo said. AIC staff members, including many men, have expressed a desire to create t-shirts based on their own experiences with violence and abuse. Castillo noted that several t-shirts in the foyer were created separately by AIC's female staff and intermixed with those made by female probation clients. She pointed to an electric blue t-shirt that she says makes a profound impact on her every time she sees it: **Monsters are real. I had a monster in my closet. His name is Dad.**

October is **National Domestic Violence Awareness** month, a month-long observance begun in 1981 by the *National Coalition Against Domestic Violence* where local, state and national events highlight domestic violence and efforts to end violence against women. For more information on **"The Clothesline Project,"** visit the organization's website at www.clotheslineproject.org; or, contact **Project M.O.R.E.** Program Director Addys Castillo, addys.castillo@projectmore.org.

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