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YWCA Addresses Partner Violence with Creative Teen Education Approach

Richmond Teachers and Service Providers Join Healthy Relationship Awareness Campaign

RICHMOND, Va. (Feb. 3, 2015) – On Feb. 1, the YWCA of Richmond embarked on its first “Why Wait?” violence prevention and community education campaign, in conjunction with Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month (TDVAM). The “Why Wait?” campaign is the agency’s concentrated effort to encourage adults to teach teens about healthy relationships by interacting with youth service-providers, creating community activities, and initiating a targeted social media campaign.

The YWCA created and shared 50 “healthy relationship kits” with 18 Richmond middle and high-schools, which contained resources, posters and other materials to incorporate in classrooms during National “Respect Week,” (Feb. 9 to 13.) Richmond City Council has taken notice of the YWCA’s initiative, and will issue an official Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month proclamation on Feb. 9.

The “Why Wait?” campaign was spearheaded by Ryan E. Morris, MSW, the YWCA’s Community Outreach Specialist, who teaches workshops about dating violence, healthy relationships and bullying at schools and youth organizations. Morris says the campaign is an extension of the YWCA’s efforts to eradicate violence through preventative education.

“While most community resources and media coverage focus on preventing collegiate sexual and intimate partner violence, children are beginning to date long before they enter college,” Morris said.

The YWCA’s “Why Wait?” campaign builds on the knowledge that violent behaviors generally begin during the formative teenage years, when intimate relationships first begin to develop. Teen dating violence is a widespread problem, with a 2008 study indicating more than one-third of adolescents in the U.S. have experienced dating violence, only one-third of whom reported the abuse.

As a first step in addressing teen dating violence, the YWCA asks that adults begin conversations at home or on social media, sharing healthy relationship advice with #whYWait. To further promote discussion, the YWCA dispersed 500 blank paper valentines featuring the prompt “Love Is...” throughout Richmond city, encouraging individuals who find these orange hearts to share their interpretation of a healthy relationship with a friend, co-worker or stranger.

Morris says the YWCA hopes the positive angle of their approach toward the serious issue of dating violence will increase the attention adults pay toward ending abuse before it starts.

“Violent behaviors begin between the ages of 12- and 18-years-old and 72 percent of eighth and ninth graders are dating.” Morris said. “We hope this campaign will encourage adults to think about why they are waiting to teach teens about healthy relationships.”

You may learn more about the YWCA of Richmond and Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month at www.ywcarichmond.org/tdvam or by contacting Rachel J. Solomon at rsolomon@ywcarichmond.org. If you would like to request a talk from the YWCA regarding healthy relationships, bullying, intimate partner violence or other topics, visit www.ywcarichmond.org/speaker.

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If you or a loved one has experienced domestic, intimate partner violence or sexual violence, you may call the Greater Richmond Regional Hotline at [804-612-6126](tel:804-612-6126).