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"Finding Voice" raises awareness of domestic violence

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To help raise awareness of domestic violence, students performed poetry, music and movement pieces in "Finding Voice: The Performance," a presentation put on by the USU Women's Center Thursday night.

"Finding Voice" used poetry and music written by women who were victims of domestic violence. The works of art were created as part of research in 2003, which investigated music therapy's effects on domestic violence victims.

Jennifer Franchina, a student employee for the Women's Center, said the center and Community Abuse Prevention Services Agency hope this performance will help others see the value of the Finding Voice program. She said they also hope it will inspire others to create similar programs throughout the state and create more awareness for domestic violence.

Franchina said it's becoming increasingly important for college students to be aware of domestic violence and its effects.

"They're young and at the age of dating and finding out about relationships," Franchina said of students. "It's important for them to realize what domestic violence is so they can recognize the signs in their own relationships or in the relationships of their friends."

Students who performed this year were volunteer music therapy students from USU. The students were given the pieces to practice and began rehearsing together two weeks ago.

"It's amazing to me," Franchina said. "The 10 students performing aren't doing this as part of a class, and they're not getting paid. They are helping individuals to find a voice who otherwise wouldn't have one, and they are doing it all voluntarily."

The performers told stories of how music therapy helped heal these women. They read lines such as, "I want the courage to sing like an angel, to use music to heal, to express my truth."

Kaelynn Monson, senior studying music therapy, was one of the students who performed in "Finding Voice." She said the performance helped her consider what pursuing music therapy would be like and what things she might face as a music therapist.

Katrina Schmalz, also a senior studying music therapy, said she was glad to be able to be part of the performance. She said she learned a lot from the words and messages of the program.

"If domestic violence ever happens to me," Schmalz said, "I know I have somewhere to go. The program made me realize how much these women who've been through violence have grown and improved. Now

I know I can grow and improve, too."

Susan Evans, junior majoring in music therapy, said she too learned about her own strength through the testimonies contained in the program.

"Just to know that these women could heal," she said. "Everyone has their own problems and goes through their own trials. Now I know if a trauma like that happened to me, I could heal."

Outside of the performance, the Women's Center hung several shirts from the Clothesline Collection. Each shirt in the collection was designed by a victim of domestic violence within Cache Valley and tells the story of its creator.

Patricia Stevens, director of the Women's Center, said the Clothesline Collection contains more than 200 shirts.

"That, my friends, is just a drop in the bucket of what's really going on," she said.

Social workers are not the only people who should be looking for signs of domestic violence, Franchina said, and everyone can be aware of these signs and able to help those who may be in a domestic violence situation.

"Anyone can help," Franchina said. "More individuals are now getting help and seeking help. The information has been available for a long time, but there hasn't been much awareness until now. We're hoping to raise that awareness. Helping even one person can change the world."

Barbara Scott, a liaison and consultant for the Utah Domestic Violence Coalition, said the Finding Voice program is expanding and the coalition is working on getting the program to Idaho.

For more information regarding the music therapy research program, contact Maureen Hearn, director of music therapy, at maureen.hearns@usu.edu or by phone at 797-3009.

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