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Victims's Tees Honestly, Courageously Tell of Domestic Violence

Middletown's New Horizons Shelter's annual display also includes 66 tiny pairs of shoes. Each represents a child who sought refuge from physical violence in the last year.

By [Cassandra Day](#) | [Email the author](#) | October 20, 2011

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"Walk in Our Footsteps" is a display of children's shoes to raise awareness of how many children are affected by domestic violence each year — in the case of this past year, 66.

Credit [Cassandra Day](#)

If it hasn't happened to you, then it has to someone you know.

Intimate partner violence — characterized as physical, emotional/verbal or sexual abuse — affects one in four women in the United States, according to Sarah Chagnon, child advocate for Middletown's [Community Health Center New Horizons Domestic Violence Services](#).

The annual observance of Domestic Violence Awareness Month was marked recently with two displays: [The Clothesline Project](#) and "Walk in Our Footsteps."

The Clothesline Project began on Cape Cod, Mass., in 1990 to address the issue of violence against women. It is a vehicle for women affected by violence to express their emotions by decorating a white T-shirt. They hang it on a clothesline to be viewed by others as testimony to the problem of violence against women.

The shirts on display in front of the Community Health Center, says Stephanie Backus, adult advocate for New Horizons, "were done over a course of a couple of years. It's a project we do ... it's a way for the women or children to get their feelings across."

"It represents what the victim and survivors are going through and when they make them, they put down pretty much what they're feeling at that time," Chagnon says.

There are two types of reactions from victims, Chagnon says, once they express their sometimes conflicted feelings in words and pictures.

"When people do them, they can either feel really, really liberated or they can feel extremely angry," she explains. "They'll say, 'I want get this out there and don't want it to happen to anybody else,' or they can feel so good to get this off their chest and show everybody what they're going through."

The process of creating these shirts in a group setting, with others suffering the same troubles, often draws them closer together.

"Some victims and survivors, they feel more connected to one another and they're able to find support in one another," Chagnon says. "It's kind of like a unity against domestic violence. Each T-shirt represents a different story. When you put them all together, it really raise awareness to the community."

Walk in Our Footsteps is 65 pairs children's shoes — well-worn little boots, sneakers dress shoes and sandals. "It represents the children that have gone through domestic violence and it shows the number of children that we have provided service to within the last year," Chagnon explains.

The idea is to raise awareness of how many children are affected by domestic violence each year.

Both displays seek to raise community awareness of how many of neighbors are affected by domestic violence and allow people the chance to stop and reflect on the situation.

For almost 30 years, the CHC has operated New Horizons, a 24/7 emergency shelter for women and children fleeing domestic abuse. The shelter is one element of a comprehensive approach to intimate partner violence that also includes community education, support groups, individual counseling, and consultation to CHC's clinical provider teams.

New Horizons staff are members of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence and work as part of that coalition to push for ongoing advancement of legislation and policy that protect the health and interests of women

New Horizons offers a 24-hour, toll-free hotline at (888) 774-2900.

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