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Community Health Center, Inc. Reflects on the Growth and Success of New Horizons Domestic Violence Services during National Domestic Violence Awareness Month

MIDDLETOWN, Conn. (October 19, 2012) – According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence one in every four women in the United States will experience domestic violence in her lifetime. Community Health Center, Inc. (CHC) has played an active role since 1979 in protecting women in Middlesex County from intimate partner violence, which is characterized as physical, emotional, verbal or sexual abuse.

In 1979 Middletown's first domestic violence shelter – The Sojourn House – opened its doors as a safe haven for battered women. In the beginning, the shelter was funded by federal grant money and supported by local organizations including Community Health Center, Inc., Connecticut Valley Hospital, Middlesex Memorial Hospital and the Middletown Police Department. But within 8 short months the federal funding dried up and the secret location of this safe haven was discovered by one of the women's partner, who in a fit of anger set the home ablaze.

Almost immediately after the home was destroyed, CHC began working on plans to open a new shelter, in a new location. And so was born New Horizons Domestic Violence Services. The shelter opened in May of 1981 and has been continuously serving women and child victims of domestic violence.

Mark Masselli was quick to point out that the success of this shelter rested on the entire community, "The keys to the success of any program to help abused women and children, are community support and following through on that support," he said in an interview with the Middletown Press in January 1981, just a few months before opening New Horizons. At that time Masselli spoke about the importance of pulling together friends in the community, civic groups, and resources to make a facility of this nature a success, because it is dealing with a serious problem that affects the entire community.

And success it has had. On an annual basis New Horizons provides services and shelter to over 1300 women, children, and male victims. The shelter itself is one element of a comprehensive approach to intimate partner violence (IPV) that also includes community education, support groups, individual counseling consultation to CHC's clinical provider teams, and court advocacy. New Horizons' staff members are part of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence where they advocate for ongoing advancement of legislation and policy that protect the health and interests of women. A 24/7 confidential hotline service is also available through the program.

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Despite great advances in public awareness and legal support, too many women still experience violence, injury and even death at the hands of an intimate partner. "Statistic show that domestic violence is one of the most chronically underreported crimes," explained Michele Waldner. "Only one-quarter of all physical assaults, one-fifth of all rapes, and one-half of all stalkings perpetrated against females by intimate partners are reported to the police. Our job at New Horizons doesn't stop at providing safe shelter for victims; we must also create awareness of this epidemic and encourage more women to come forward."

Celebrating Domestic Violence Awareness Month within the Community

New Horizons and CHC have a few events planned to recognize Domestic Violence Awareness month and pay tribute to those who have been victimized, including a display of the Clothesline Project, a fundraiser at Coldstone Creamery and promotion of Purple Tie Tuesday.

The Clothesline project will be on display in the 2nd floor reception area of the Community Health Center of Middletown, October 22–26. Dozens of t-shirts, that have been individually decorated with thoughts, emotions and artwork by victimized women who have been sheltered at New Horizon's over the last few years, will be on display.

This project started on Cape Cod, MA, in 1990 to address the issue of violence against women. It is a therapeutic vehicle for battered women affected to express their emotions by decorating a t-shirt. They then hang the shirt on a clothesline to be viewed by others as testimony to the problem of violence against women. This display seeks to raise community awareness of how many of our neighbors are affected by domestic violence.

There are two types of reactions from victims, Sarah Chagnon, child advocate for New Horizons says, once they express their feelings in words and pictures. "The women either feel really liberated or they can feel extremely angry," she explains. "They feel good about getting this off their chest and hope that by sharing what they're going through they might help someone else through it as well."

On October 24th, a fundraiser to benefit New Horizons will be held at the Middletown Coldstone Creamery (100 Riverview Center). A portion of the proceeds from ice cream sold between 4pm and 7pm will go towards supporting the program.

As one of the 18 domestic violence agencies across the state, New Horizons' knows the importance of engaging men in their efforts to end domestic violence. On Tuesday, October 30th, men are encouraged to show their commitment to ending domestic violence by wearing a purple tie.

About Community Health Center, Inc.

Since 1972, Community Health Center, Inc. has been one of the leading healthcare providers in the state of Connecticut, building a world-class primary health care system committed to caring for uninsured and underserved populations. CHC is focused on improving health outcomes for its more than 130,000 patients as well as building healthy communities. Recognized as both a Level 3 Patient-Centered Medical Home by the National Committee for Quality Assurance and a Primary Care Medical Home by The Joint Commission, CHC delivers service in more than 200 locations statewide, offering primary care in medical, dental and behavioral health services. For more information, visit www.chc1.com.