



NEWS RELEASE

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The Women's Center Teaches Violence Prevention Skills to Middle School Students

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WAUKESHA, WI – This past spring, The Women's Center launched its Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI) pilot program. The VPI is an educational program for middle school youth designed to curtail or reduce harmful behaviors including bullying and teen dating violence. The Women's Center's educational programs have historically been geared towards high school students, but experts, advocates, and victims themselves all agree prevention efforts must begin earlier. Approximately 75% of youth begin dating in middle school, with 1 in 6 individuals becoming victims of physical violence.* Through an emphasis on nonviolent conflict resolution skills, the VPI helps students develop the ability to intervene when they witness bullying, establish and respect boundaries, and foster healthy friendships and relationships.

The pilot program took place at North Shore Middle School in the Hartland Lakeside School District. The Women's Center's Violence Prevention Advocate facilitated the program, which consisted of three meeting sessions per grade level. Each session focused on an age-appropriate topic such as Conflict Resolution, Healthy and Unhealthy Friendships, and Warning Signs in Unhealthy Relationships. Preliminary results of the pilot program are promising. 8th grade students in particular showed a significant increase in understanding of healthy versus abusive relationships after participating in the program.

"The Women's Center was happy to partner with the Hartland Lakeside School District on this initiative. The administrators were a tremendous source of support, and we look forward to working with them in the upcoming school year" noted Diane Ripple, The Women's Center's Director of Programs and Services. The Women's Center is looking to bring this program to school districts throughout Waukesha County.

About The Women's Center

Founded in 1977, *The Women's Center* is a non-profit human service agency that provides a wide range of free and comprehensive services designed to address the issues of domestic violence, sexual assault and abuse. These services include emergency shelter for abused women and their children, transitional living, 24-hour Hotline, group and individual counseling, onsite childcare, child abuse prevention programming, legal advocacy and employment counseling. The Center also provides Hispanic outreach, community education and violence prevention programs, information and referral services. In 2013, The Women's Center served over 9,000 individuals.

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*"A Warning to Teenagers Before They Start Dating," Jan Hoffman, New York Times, June 3, 2012