February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month

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Madison—Victim advocates acrossWisconsin are set to ramp up prevention efforts to curb intimate partner violence among young people. February marks the third-ever Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month.

Teen dating violence, which advocates define as a pattern of destructive behaviors used to exert power and control over a dating partner, is increasingly recognized as a widespread problem. One in three teens in the US is a victim of physical, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner. This rate is higher than all other forms of youth violence. Over half of teens, 57-percent, know someone who has been physically, sexually, or verbally abusive in a dating relationship.

Advocates say the awareness month provides both opportunities to support current victims and a chance to intensify efforts to encourage healthy relationships among teens.

“Teen victims are often isolated and unwilling to seek help because they are afraid of peer pressure or the reaction of adults,” said Patti Seger, executive director of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV). “Despite these challenges, it is critically important that we address teen dating violence. Teens represent the next generation. If abuse in teen relationships goes unchecked, these patterns will likely continue as teens grow into adults. But, if we can cultivate healthy relationships and values among young people, we can reduce violence now and in future relationships.”

Many events and outreach efforts will take place across the state during February. Local domestic violence victim advocacy organizations will be holding teen dating violence awareness dances, poetry readings and art shows. One agency is asking teens to use their creativity to get the message out. The organization is holding a contest for teen-produced awareness videos.

“We are seeing a remarkable level of enthusiasm,” said Seger. “Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month is not just another thing on the calendar; it truly represents a month of activity aimed at reaching teens and fostering the values necessary for their generation to thrive.”

Organizers believe these events will help mobilize teens and community members. The momentum will continue as Wisconsin holds the second Summit on Teen Dating and Sexual Violence March 12 through the 14in the Wisconsin Dells. More information can be found at http://www.wcadv.org/2012-teen-summit-ride-wave-end-teen-dating-and-sexual-violence .

“February is a great springboard to the Teen Summit next month,” said Seger. “The energy and engagement around the state in February will galvanize resolve to end dating violence for the next generation.”

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