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Teens help fight sex abuse

Young artists lend talents to Zacharias Center event

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GURNEE – The Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center showed off the sign with its new name on the day of the open house.

“Over 120 people showed up and we were not expecting that many,” said Jane Hunter, who is the director of community education at Zacharias Center.

“This went well beyond our expectations.”

The center’s youth program – Youth Allies C.A.R.E. (Creating A Rape-free Environment) – was in charge of the open house on April 5 at the center on Old Grand Avenue in Gurnee.

“This was all done by the kids,” said Sherry Ballard, youth leader of Youth Allies C.A.R.E.

The 15 group members mostly are students at Waukegan High School and got their art teacher to announce the open house to their classmates.

“Then the idea to have the art students donate their work to the center came about,” said 16-year-old Alondra Olvera, co-chairman of the group.

Fifty-six pieces of art were donated.

The collection of pictures, drawings and sculptures was displayed neatly in two of the center’s rooms for a silent auction.

Village President Kristina Kovarik took home two pictures. One in particular captured her interest.

“It’s the depiction of hope,” Kovarik said. “It makes me feel good when I look at it.”

The teenagers raised more than \$1,200 for the center.

“I think this has been the best open house we’ve had,” said Joe Howard, director of development at the Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center. “I was really inspired by the kids. They’re learning a lot about philanthropy.”

The group members also put on three skits, in which they showed situations of sexual harassment in the school.

“Sometimes teachers and students don’t understand that there are many forms of sexual harassment,” said Stephanie Gonzales, 17, a member of Youth Allies C.A.R.E. “When you call people names or talk about the way they look, that’s a form of sexual harassment.”

There also was a performance in which group members Terry Dejaresco, 16, played the piano and Marie Joveswauke, 16, sang.



Youth Allies C.A.R.E. co-chairwoman Erika Nunez helps Regina Yoggerst, 7, of Waukegan, with The Hands project April 5 at the Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center open house. (Yadira Sanchez Olson photo)

There was also a hands-on art project that the guests were invited to do. The Hand project involves a cloth and the participant's hand. The participant then writes or draws his or her thoughts on the cloth.

"We believe that each hand has [its] own story and that's what this represents," said 16-year-old Erika Nunez, co-chairman of Youth Allies C.A.R.E.

Kovarik said that the open house had great meaning because the students were so involved.

"It's very important that the youth is a part of this cause, it takes a lot of courage," Kovarik said.

For information on the Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center and Youth Allies C.A.R.E., call 847-244-1187 or visit www.zachariascenter.org.

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