

Laura's House & the H.E.A.R.T. Program

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Teens Learn the Dangers of Domestic Violence.

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month and Laura's House, a local program that has made much needed strides in eliminating domestic violence in Orange County, is celebrating its 20th anniversary. A state-approved agency launched in 1994 in memory of a fatal case of abuse, Laura's House has cared for 3,500 battered women and children and has provided services—ranging from counseling to legal assistance—to over 45,000 individuals involved in cases of domestic violence.

“In Orange County, nearly 40 percent of domestic violence emergency calls are made by children,” said Margaret Bayston, CEO and executive director of Laura's House. “This heartbreaking statistic illustrates the serious need for the programs, education and services which Laura's House has provided to women and their families for the past 20 years.”

One valuable service to area young people is the Healthy Emotions & Attitudes in Relationships for Teens program, simply called H.E.A.R.T. One in four teenagers is involved in physically abusive relationships in Orange County. H.E.A.R.T. is an interactive workshop that focuses on teaching

teenagers about healthy dating, as well as the signs of and repercussions of being with an abusive partner.

“Dating abuse is a topic that is extremely relevant but rarely discussed between parents and their teens,” said Marissa C. Presley, prevention education specialist for Laura’s House. “Oftentimes teens are unaware of the abusive relationship they are in until they learn the red flags. That’s why Laura’s House developed H.E.A.R.T.”

The emphasis is on the variety of abuse. From possessive behavior to verbal attacks to sexual coercion, H.E.A.R.T. teaches teens that although physical abuse may not be present, feelings of inadequacy, self-harming, eating disorders or substance abuse can still occur in a relationship where one person devalues the feelings and safety of the other.

In co-ed workshops, teens are taught not only how to defend themselves from dangerous relationships but also how to identify abusive patterns they themselves are exhibiting that they may not be aware of.

“Our goal is to provide supportive service programs that will prepare our clients and their children to live independent and violence free lives.”

For more information on Laura’s House, you can visit their website at www.laurashouse.org. Or, in the case of an emergency, you can call their hotline at (866) 498-1511.

By Tyler Hardy