

32 shirts reveal stories in BC3's first Clothesline Project

April 12, 2017



Tim Hartel, of Petrolia, who studied electronics technology and metrology at Butler County Community College from 2012 to 2016, and Monica Swaney, a Saxonburg resident and BC3 fine arts major, color a T-shirt April 12, 2017, as part of BC3's first Clothesline Project.

(Butler, PA) Of all the colors at her disposal – in 1-ounce bottles of aqua, brown, forest green, mint green, mustard, navy blue, orange, pink, silver, violet and yellow 3D fabric paint, and in burnt umber, lime green and sky blue markers – Mikaela Dunkle chose two others.

Black. In a marker.

Red. In 3D fabric paint.

Her message, like the 31 others created on shirts over two days as Butler County Community College exhibited its first Clothesline Project as part of the “It’s on Us” campaign against domestic and sexual violence and bullying, was as direct as the colors she chose.

KNOW MORE, Dunkle wrote, all letters in thin black marker except for the much wider NO in KNOW, written in 3D red fabric paint.

Under KNOW MORE, in 3D red fabric paint that raised from the surface of the lime green T-shirt, she printed: 1 in every 4 women are sexually assaulted.

“I chose red for the word no to emphasize the meaning of the word no,” said Dunkle, an 18-year-old BC3 freshman and registered nursing student from Butler.

Dunkle was among the BC3 students who viewed shirts hanging from a clothesline in the lobby of the Student Success

Center, and among those whose creations replaced a display that began at the Women’s Center at Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania.

“I believe participating in this project shows that we stand together as a whole on this issue,” Dunkle said.

On behalf of Pennsylvania’s 14 community colleges, BC3 President Dr. Nick Neupauer in January 2016 signed Gov. Tom Wolf’s “It’s On Us PA” pledge, the first statewide campaign to address the crisis of sexual assault in schools and on college campuses.

Female students are four times more likely to be a victim of rape or sexual assault than males, ItsOnUs.Org reports. It adds that only 20 percent of female student victims age 18-24 report to law enforcement; and among college women, nine in 10 victims of rape and sexual assault knew their offender.

Monica Swaney and Tim Hartel sat across from Dunkle inside the Student Conference Room, at a long table filled with art supplies and folded T-shirts and polo shirts and children’s shirts, all canvases upon which students would express their feelings.



Briana Gloeckl, a volunteer and outreach advocate with the Victim Outreach Intervention Center (VOICe) in Butler, is shown April 12, 2017, in Butler County Community College’s Student Success Center, site of BC3’s first Clothesline Project.

Swaney, a 19-year-old Saxonburg freshman majoring in fine arts, chose a white T-shirt tie-dyed with tan, forest green and hints of blue to create a camouflage feel, one enhanced by Hartel's black-marker filled profile of a female's head – reminiscent of the downward-looking POW-MIA symbol.

“Believe” and “support” were written in engraved cursive above and below a green-marker filled ribbon, and “survivors” in all-capital black marker letters.

“People are so scared to open up when sexual assault happens,” Swaney said. “It’s good to show that we can be an open and supportive community.”



Mikaela Dunkle, a Butler County Community College freshman and registered nursing student from Butler, colors a T-shirt April 12, 2017, as part of BC3's first Clothesline Project.

Her shirt would later hang alongside others in three rows stretching across nearly two walls inside the Student Success Center lobby, reading:

No does not mean yes – the word “not” underlined three times.

Men can stop rape – “rape” the only word in red, and appearing to be spattered.

Stand with survivors – the “a” in stand shaped like a ribbon.

Love does not harm.

Love with a heart, not a fist.

I dream of a happy day. A day when the beatings go away.

Loneliness. Bruises. Scared. Afraid. Stupid. Fat – all in white letters and scattered on a black shirt, only the word “pain” in red.

Hands are for holding, not for hurting.

Don't be afraid to speak up and fight.

Trust is so easily shattered and dreams forever broken.

I told her to stop. She kept on hurting me. Men get hurt too.

I was raped and there is no excuse for it.

The bruises you gave me may look like they healed and went ... but they remain to be a permanent part of me.

My mom was raped on a regular basis from the time she was six. The rapist was her alcoholic step-father. I love you, mom.

“It is very chilling,” Swaney said. “So many people. There were so many, I was really emotional as I looked through them. Each one was amazing.”

Added Dunkle: “The shirts that told of a personal experience of sexual assault stuck in my mind most because it is incredibly brave to be able to speak of such a tragic even in your life and it is mesmerizing that they are able to speak out about it.”

“It was kind of sad,” said Hartel, 23, of Petrolia, who studied electronics technology and metrology at BC3 from 2012 to 2016. “For the most part I’m assuming that the people taking part in the exercise had some kind of abuse happen to them or someone they know.”

He and Swaney both said they did.

“They’ve come a long way,” Swaney said, “and I’m proud of them for opening up about it.”

The Clothesline Project began in Hyannis, Mass., in 1990, when, according to the organization’s website, “a member of the Cape Cod’s Women’s Defense Agenda learned that during the same



T-shirts created by Butler County Community College students as part of BC3's first Clothesline Project are shown April 12, 2017, in the Student Success Center.

time 58,000 soldiers were killed in the Vietnam War, 51,000 U.S. women were killed by the men who claimed to love them.”

Since that time, “thousands of Clothesline Projects have been created across the United States and worldwide to allow survivors of sexual violence to express their emotions while on the path to healing,” said Ivory Dunlap, a BC3 academic counselor, retention specialist and assistant professor.

The Clothesline Project allows BC3 to “honor the men, women and children who have been directly or indirectly affected by sexual violence. The impact of the Clothesline Project can be seen in the sheer number of T-shirts together, showing that sexual assault and sexual violence are not individual issues.”

500 schools, 1,100 events since inception

Nationally, more than 275,000 individuals have taken the “It’s On Us” pledge since President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden launched the campaign in September 2014. Nearly 500 schools in 48 states have hosted a total of 1,100 “It’s On Us” events.

“It’s On Us PA” will engage education leaders as well as students, teachers, families and communities to make a personal and public pledge to play a role in preventing, addressing and responding effectively to sexual violence, according to Wolf’s office.

Briana Gloeckl, a volunteer and outreach advocate with the Victim Outreach Intervention Center (VOICe) in Butler, operated an information table during the Clothesline Project.

Most of the shirts created at the Women’s Center of Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania had been replaced by those made by BC3 students.

“On the second day, we had taken down the Slippery Rock shirts and moved them to the side,” said Gloeckl, a volunteer and outreach advocate with the Victim Outreach Intervention Center (VOICe) in Butler. “At the end the BC3 shirts were the biggest display. It wasn’t someone else’s display any more. It became BC3’s. It started becoming personal.”

The Clothesline Project also represented an “eye-opening” and learning experience for those who viewed it, Gloeckl said.

“Some people were asking questions, like, ‘Is that really how it happens?’ and ‘What services do you provide?’”

VOICe operates a 24-hour hotline, crisis counseling, an emergency shelter and housing programs, legal and medical advocacy, children’s services, and prevention and community education – as was the case at BC3.

“Once it became personal to the college, that is when it had more of an impact,” Gloeckl said.

The messaging on the shirts can help victims in that “a lot of sexual assault and domestic violence victims are not believed by their families or their support systems when they attempt to get help,” Gloeckl said. “Having that voice, anonymous or not, to be able to say, ‘This happened to me’ allows them to be believed and to have their thoughts out there in the world.

“For some people, it brings up a lot of emotions. A lot of people think this is a general issue and I am not impacted. For those who have been impacted, a mom who has been sexually assaulted in the past, or someone who was sexually assaulted their whole childhood, this display will strike a chord. Some of the people teared up.”

By hosting the Clothesline Project, Dunkle said, “BC3 ... has brought attention to many students about the effects of sexual assault and has given a passion to create change. Many students learned things that day that will affect their lives forever. I was so happy to be able to be one of those students and take part in this amazing event.”