

BC3 students stand up to violence

Behind each Clothesline Project T-shirt, a story of hurt and healing

April 13, 2018



Shirts created by BC3 students as part of the Clothesline Project are shown April 11, 2018, in the Student Success Center on BC3's main campus.

(Butler, PA) The reverential silence reverberating throughout the second-floor lounge of Butler County Community College's Student Success Center is interrupted only by the voices behind 32 shirts, the toddler's cyan-, magenta-, burgundy- and green-dotted long-sleeved size-4 that reads "It shouldn't hurt to be a child"; the girl's vintage black blouse with a ruffled hemline that states, "Hands are not for hitting."

BC3 students patronizing the college's bookstore, or visiting its financial aid, registration or academic advising offices pass quietly by the shirts, pinned to three cascading clotheslines for

three days, many of them inquiring of Briana Gloeckl about the college's participation in The Clothesline Project, which creates awareness about domestic and sexual violence.

Gloeckl, the volunteer and outreach advocate with the Victim Outreach Intervention Center, Butler, distributes literature headlined "How we respond to sexual violence matters" and "Sexual harassment: What to know and how to help" as Gabby Lisella and John Paul Schnur, BC3 students and among the clothesline artists, recount their own experiences as victims.



John Paul Schnur, a BC3 general studies major from Butler, is shown April 11, 2018, with his "Be the ripple of change" shirt that he created for BC3's Clothesline Project.

"A lot of people asked, 'What is going on?' and talked to us at the table," Gloeckl said. "I think it is very rare to have an info table and you are sitting there and you can tell they care and are actively listening to what you are saying. I feel like we have gotten a lot of that here at BC3. Normally, it is like, 'OK, can I have a pen for free?'"

Lisella and Schnur wrote messages on T-shirts as part of BC3's second observance since 2017 of The Clothesline Project, part of the national "It's on Us" campaign against domestic and sexual violence. BC3's 2017 Clothesline Project debuted with the assistance of shirts provided by Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. BC3's 2018 project featured shirts inscribed with messages created only by BC3 students, such as Lisella and Schnur.

"My clothes do not determine my consent"

For Lisella – herself, she says, a survivor of sexual abuse – the Clothesline Project serves as a form of catharsis.

"It helps me ... all these different messages," she said. "I definitely feel a sense of community. It is a very powerful testament. So many people have been through it. And it is good to support people who have not been ready to talk about it yet. It is very encouraging to see that so many people right here on campus understand what someone has gone through."

Lisella, a Jackson Township fine arts major, wrote in black marker upon a red V-necked, short-sleeved T-shirt: "My clothes do not determine my consent."

"Usually when someone will say, 'Oh she was asking for it,' they will talk about someone's clothes, like if they were too revealing or too short," Lisella said. "But that does not mean that they want sex. The length of my skirt is not a signal of promiscuity."

Schnur, a freshman general studies major from Butler, said he agrees.

“Just because a girl or a guy is half-naked, that does not mean they are saying I want to sleep with you,” he said. “They are saying, ‘I am proud of who I am. And I want to show that off to the world.’ Guys can be like, ‘Oh, that girl is being trashy.’ I tend to disagree. I look at it more as I think she is just trying to show, ‘Hey, I am beautiful and I want the world to know this.’”

“If any of my friends, even close friends that I have known for years, in any way disrespected a girl or a guy, for the way that they are dressed or the way that they are acting, I would say something. It has always been that part of me that I can’t let that happen to someone. I was bullied as a kid, so seeing that type of interaction gets to me and I can’t sit back. I have to say something.”



Gabby Lisella, a BC3 fine arts major from Jackson Township, Butler County, is shown April 11, 2018, with her “My clothes do not determine my consent” shirt that she created for BC3’s Clothesline Project.

“Be a ripple of change”

Schnur said he was bullied in the fifth grade, after he changed schools and became the “new kid.”

“Kids bullied me. Picked on me. I guess for being new,” he said. “I am not entirely sure why. It was more mental abuse, I think. I was a tough kid. I grew up on a farm. I kind of had those boulder shoulders that they talk about. It wasn’t really the physical punishment that made me feel insignificant. It was all the mental abuse I constantly suffered through.”

While he said the taunting left an emotion scar, he realizes “that it was just a bunch of kids. I can’t let it get to me.

“When I think about going through something as minor as bullying, then I try to imagine if I was a woman who has suffered through sexual abuse, it just makes me feel even worse that I would pity myself when someone is going through something like that,” Schnur said. “And that is what makes me want to stand up and make a change.”

His “Be a ripple of change” T-shirt reflects his belief that “for most people, it is hard for them to stand up and talk about something,” Schnur said. “Whether it is personal to them or personal to someone they know. Once they see someone else take that first step, it kind of makes them realize, since someone else is doing it, and they are strong enough to stand up, maybe I myself can find that strength to stand up as well.”

“Don’t sit back and let it happen”

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.

It’s On Us in 2018 planned to be represented on 1,000 campuses nationwide. Its goals are to recognize that non-consensual sex is sexual assault; to identify situations in which sexual assault may occur; to intervene in situations where consent has not or cannot be given; to create an environment in which sexual assault is unacceptable and survivors are supported; and to create social movement by asking people to take a pledge against sexual assault.

“If you see something about to happen or happening,” Schnur said, “don’t sit back and let it happen.”

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 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.”

“We don’t want there to be violence”

Survivors of domestic and sexual violence, Gloeckl said, will benefit from a culture that enables them to be comfortable addressing that which happened to them.

“They don’t talk about it for years and it affects them,” she said. “Being able to process through and being able to heal from it is something that is invaluable to a lot of people. So making a culture that allows that is amazing.

“That doesn’t mean that they aren’t still faced with disbelief or maybe it didn’t happen that way or maybe she was asking for it. Our job as advocates is to put ourselves out of a job. We don’t want there to be violence in the world.”

VOICe operates a 24-hour hotline, offers crisis counseling, an emergency shelter and housing programs, legal and medical advocacy, children’s services, and prevention and community education.