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WKU activities set to focus on sexual assault prevention

- SUBMITTED 2 hrs ago



A month of activities focused on sexual assault prevention through awareness and education will kick off on Tuesday. Ten events will take place at Western Kentucky University with additional community events all coordinated by a campus and community planning committee spearheaded by the WKU Counseling Center and Hope Harbor, a sexual trauma center in Bowling Green.

“The events are planned to bring awareness to this issue as well actively engage our community to get involved,” said Elizabeth Madariaga, Sexual Assault Services coordinator in the WKU Counseling Center. “The level of involvement of each person can depend on where they are at personally and emotionally. So, if this is important to someone, but because of being a survivor, they can’t voice that they are a survivor, they can still attend events and show the support at the levels they feel comfortable. Events can give a sense of community, togetherness, support and advocacy.”

The WKU Kick-Off from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesday will feature spin wheel games and provide resources and giveaways to build students’ knowledge of the subject. The Sexual Assault Prevention Month Proclamation Signing will follow at 1:30 p.m. also in Downing Student Union on the first floor. At Healthy Days on Wednesday, students can learn about Hope Harbor’s resources and view the Clothesline Project. The Clothesline Project originated in Massachusetts and tells stories of survivors.

The Intercultural Student Engagement Center will feature the Ink Exposed: A Healing Journey exhibit in their gallery beginning April 1 and run through April 30. The Ink Exposed exhibit will feature photographs of tattoos from survivors of sexual assault along with their stories. The survivors will include local women along with a few stories from women in other parts of the Kentucky.

“Through SAPM events, students will learn steps they can take to reduce acts of sexual violence through being a positive bystander and encouraging healthy sexual respect for themselves and others,” said Melanie Evans, coordinator for Sexual Assault Services in WKU’s Office of Student Conduct. “Students will also learn about campus and community resources available for individuals who have experienced sexual violence.”

This is What an Advocate Looks Like provides a way for students to learn about bystander prevention at 5 p.m. April 4 in Downing Student Union, room 3020. Londa Stockton, Community Educator from Hope Harbor, will go through some of the Green Dot bystander training in order to better prepare students for possible situations. The session will have additional speakers from the WKU Counseling Center and WKU Student Conduct. The first 50 students to enter will receive a free T-shirt.

On April 11, faculty and staff are encouraged to attend Handling Student Disclosures of Sex & Gender-Based Discrimination and Harassment, a session led by Madariaga and Evans, at 11 a.m. in Downing Student Union, room 2124.

“Participants will learn how to helpfully respond to student disclosures of sex and gender-based discrimination or harassment and understand how to report disclosures based on the mandatory reporting requirements,” Evans said.

There are a few student fundraisers at WKU for Sexual Assault Prevention Month, and Walk a Mile in Her Shoes™, taking place April 3, is the largest fundraiser during the month of April for Hope Harbor. The Interfraternity Council organizes this event each year. Fraternity members raise money and walk up and around campus in red high heels. The event is part of a national initiative, according to walkamileinher shoes.org, to raise awareness about the serious causes, effects and remediation’s to men’s sexualized violence against women.

First Things First will provide students, faculty, staff and community members an opportunity to showcase their talents to increase sexual assault awareness. The production is directed by WKU student Kelsey Redding of White House, Tennessee, a Hope Harbor Crisis Intervention Intern, and consists of original poetry performances discussing themes of empowerment, race, gender, body image, sexual violence, healing and recovery. Admission is \$7 also benefiting Hope Harbor, Inc.

Take Back the Night, the largest event during Sexual Assault Prevention Month, takes place on April 25. The event begins at First Christian Church with guest speakers and music, then participants walk one mile to raise awareness. Individuals and groups can register online by April 9 at www.wku.edu/heretohelp/sapm if they would like to receive a free T-shirt to wear to the event. This event is open to all ages.

The month will end with Namaste, yoga led by Dr. Loretta Dye, Counseling & Student Affairs associate professor. Campus and community members are welcome to attend at 5:30 p.m. in the Mahurin Honors College-International Center, room 1101.

Anyone who is unable to participate in person can still show support by watching the Instagram Live on April 8, wearing teal on Mondays or denim on April 24. Each Monday, the committee encourages supporters wear teal and use #WeWearTeal on social media to raise awareness. The Sexual Assault Prevention Month Q & A will take place on Instagram @WKU and Facebook Live through the WKU Counseling Center page. This short segment will be facilitated by WKU student Ava Ferguson of Bowling Green and will feature Melanie Evans from WKU Student Conduct and Officer Tim Gray from the WKU Police.

“Sexual Assault Prevention Month activities are important because it gives the community a chance to show its support for survivors as well as its stance against sexual violence,” Stockton said. “SAPM events are also a way of starting that conversation with people around us that sexual violence is not OK, but it is okay to talk about it, how to prevent it, and where to reach out for help.”

The campus and community collaboration for a full month of sexual assault awareness and prevention month activities begin in 2008. The planning committee for Sexual Assault Prevention Month includes WKU Counseling and Testing, Hope Harbor, WKU Student Wellness, Gender

and Women's Studies, Barren River Area Safe Space (BRASS, Inc.), WKU Housing & Residence Life, WKU Student Activities, Barren River Area Child Advocacy Center, WKU Public Affairs, South Central Kentucky Community and Technical College.

Full details on the events and a copy of the flyer can be found online at www.wku.edu/heretohelp/sapm.

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