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Women, allies convene to 'Take Back the Night'



Photo/Callie Lipkin

Vicki Victoria, left, sings a song she wrote called "Take Back the Night" while University staff interpreter, Marla Nelson, signs the lyrics to the audience during the "Take Back the Night" rally in front of Coffman Union.

V. Paul Virtucio
For The Daily

Voices of strength intermingled with silent sobs, colored signs reading "No More Human Oppression" fluttered and the lyrics, "Give me tomorrow/And take back the night," filled the early evening air.

The Program Against Sexual Violence hosted its annual "Take Back the Night" rally and march at Coffman Union on Wednesday, drawing a crowd of nearly 200.

Ralliers listened to readings and poetry about sexual violence

issues, including the debut performance of "Take Back the Night," a song specially written by Vicki, a local performer, for the nationally known event.

"Tonight is a night of empowerment for sexual assault survivors and allies," said Jackie Nguyen, a College of Liberal Arts senior and organizer of the event. "It gives them a forum, a specific night and day to say what's on their minds. Hopefully, we've been able to raise awareness so that people realize it affects everyone."

The evening rally and march symbolically addressed the fact

that about two-thirds of rapes and sexual assaults occur between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., according to statistics compiled by the Program Against Sexual Violence.

"It's a time to reclaim the evening," said Nikki Wright, a member of the program. "It's a forum where women and allies can empower themselves, take action, speak out, reclaim their space in day and night — just to have a voice."

Jessica Shimmin, a CLA junior who attended last year's rally as an ally, returned as a victim with a message of determination to end sexual violence.

"Rape happens to people like me," Shimmin said. "Rape happened to me. I'm more conscious, less trusting and at times more fearful. I'm strong, I continue to struggle and I will continue to fight."

The evening's speakers clarified the fact that everyone can be affected by sexual violence and rape.

Linda Wolford, director of the University's Diversity Institute, and Sue Lindgrin of the Disabled Student Cultural Center addressed the crowd, speaking about the prevalence of sexual violence for women with disabilities.

"I think it's trying to bring attention to the fact that women with disabilities are not thought about when discussing sexual violence, even though the rate of violence against women with disabilities is twice that of nondisabled women," Wolford said.

Emmanuel Ortiz, a sexual vio-

lence activist who became involved because someone close to him had been a victim, spoke about the need to see the value of all human life and stressed that assault against women is also against men.

"We have to begin to understand the value of human life," Ortiz said.

Ortiz went on to criticize the U.S. military action in Yugoslavia by saying that no matter the crime, area or person, life is valuable.

"The people that died in Yugoslavia are no less important. They're simply more relevant," he said.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 840,000 women in the United States were raped or assaulted in 1996, the most recent year available. In Minnesota, the

Criminal Justice Center reported that 2,441 women were raped in 1997.

On campus, instances of criminal sexual conduct — the category in which University Police group rapes and sexual assaults — were 14 in 1997 and 10 in 1998, averaging 11 instances each year between 1994 and 1998.

"(The rally) allows the PASV's name to get out," said Stacy Greenfield, staff advisor for the event. "The fact that it gets out is an opportunity for those who have been survivors or who will be survivors to have the knowledge where to go."



Photo/Callie Lipkin

Biochemistry sophomore Sanaya Bharucha inscribes anti-violence messages on Coffman Plaza Wednesday evening before the "Take Back the Night" rally.