

Conference to help Vermont girls avoid violence

Natalie Diblasio, • Free Press Staff Writer • Monday, August 30, 2010

Women between the ages of 16 and 24 are three times more likely to be victimized by sexual assaults, personal safety expert Paul Henry Danylewich said, and he hopes his conference can do something about it.

Organizers are preparing for The Vermont Girl Conference, a traveling violence against women awareness event for girls ages 14 to 19, coming to The Essex this fall.

"Our goal is to empower young women with the resources that will help them recognize and avoid violence early on," Danylewich said.

The Nov. 4 conference, created by Danylewich and The White Tiger Group, a group of self-defense instructors, covers sexual violence, abusive relationships, sexual assault prevention, self-defense, drug rape, stalking, harassment, date rape and party safety, according to a news release.

"Kids hit the high risk age group when they are 16," Danylewich said. "Half of teenage relationships experience violence, and if we can educate them early, we can get them to make healthier decisions. We want them to know the warning signs of a controlling person. We have had moms lose daughters because they didn't realized they were in violent, abusive relationships."

This year, guest speakers will include survivors of abuse, safety experts and female musicians who have survived and escaped from controlling relationships, organizers said.

Two years ago, Girls Conference made its first appearance in Vermont, attracting about 200 people. Danylewich said he expects to exceed that number this year.

"I know for the girls that will attend, it will change their lives," Danylewich said. "It will make them stronger girls and give them the resources to make better choices. It isn't covered in the school curriculum in high school, but this information can mean the difference between life and death."