

Clothesline Project at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale

by *Jackee Coe* - Oct. 19, 2010 09:35 AM
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Estrella Mountain Community College student Behnam Mazari wanted to raise awareness of domestic violence after an internship exposed him to male victims of abuse.

So the 30-year-old Goodyear resident created a T-shirt that reads, "Men cry too" for the Clothesline Project the college, Dysart and Thomas roads in Avondale, hosted last week as part of Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

"It shows that men are victims of domestic violence," Mazari said.

The Clothesline Project is designed to raise awareness about domestic violence. People who have been affected or know someone who has been affected by domestic violence decorate T-shirts to express their emotions. The shirts are hung on a clothesline as a testimony to the issue for others to see.

The Clothesline Project in Avondale

EMCC started its Clothesline Project in 2007 and has added new T-shirts every year. At first, shirts were donated by victims and survivors. This year, eight classes participated, adding 200 shirts to the 80 from the first few years. The shirts were on

display in the campus' Ceremonial Plaza through Monday.

"I think it's exciting to see how many people actually participated and put forth effort," said Carissa Valdez, 19, of Buckeye.

Valdez and Mazari are students in Olga Tsoudis' Gender and Society sociology class, which was one of the eight classes participating this year.

Valdez drew on experience from family members who suffered abuse.

"My main goal is to silence the demon or silence whoever is the abuser, whoever is trying to break the person down," she said. "I felt empowered (making the shirt) and just felt like I could really help somebody."

Classmate Marco Romaro, 20, of Phoenix, tried to illustrate experiences of friends who were victims of abuse but were too scared to talk about it. His message encourages women to get help so the abuse will stop.

"The main goal of domestic violence is to gain and maintain control of you," he said. "If you don't say something, he'll keep hitting

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you."

Tsoudis started the project at the community college as a way to bring awareness to the issue of domestic violence. She said the shirts are visual, and when displayed together, they are "quite powerful" and attract students' attention.

The number of students who reach out to faculty and staff for help with domestic violence increases in October while the shirts are on display, Tsoudis said.

"It touches so many people," she said. "People shouldn't have to live like that, and if we can empower them or help them in any way, I think that we should."

The Clothesline Project is one of several activities the community college is doing in honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month. It also is hosting a monthlong supply drive for the New Life Center, a shelter in Goodyear for battered women, and several lecture and panel sessions about domestic violence.

"We want to be able to highlight these sorts of things to bring awareness to the community," said Carissa Pool, a spokeswoman for the college.

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