

# Taking notice of human struggles

## Human Rights Week to shed light on global and national issues

Story by Martha Landry and Rachel Streich

An array of on-campus events drew attention to human rights on the UW-Eau Claire campus this week in an attempt to engage students in issues happening at home and around the world.

On-campus organizations, including The Human Trafficking Abolitionists, Amnesty International and International Justice Mission, put together Human Rights Week, featuring workshops and sessions addressing current issues from modern day slavery to suppression in North Korea.

“I think that ignorance is very harmful,” Nikki Hanto, sophomore member the Human Trafficking Abolitionists, said. “If people don’t know about an issue, they can’t do anything to stop it.”

Along with the goal of informing students, the events emphasize taking action, Kristine Rivall, co-chair of the Human Trafficking Abolitionists, said.

In previous years, Human Rights Weeks has not seen high attendance, so this year organizers reached out to students with more advertising initiatives like whiteboard messages and posters. They also arranged to have slideshows of facts and statistics about human rights issues in Davies Center throughout the week.

On Tuesday night about 30 students attended the Exploring Project Unbreakable event in Davies. Project Unbreakable is a mission to give sexual assault survivors a voice by writing quotes from their attackers on posters and whiteboards. The survivors take photographs and post them on the internet.

Kayla Olson, the coordinator of the event, said the event also discussed rape culture and how any students can help combat sexual assault. Olson, a sophomore social work major, said bringing genders together was also a point of the event, because males are often blamed in sexual assault discussions.

“What we are trying to do is bring awareness to (rape culture) and strengthen,” Olson said. “We aren’t bringing men down, we are strengthening women up. ... Bring everyone up together.”

With events continuing through the week, more than 25 students attended the Liberty in North Korea event on Wednesday night in Hibbard. Liberty in North Korea is a movement based in Los Angeles that helps rescue refugees from North Korea and gives them support in resettlement.

The students watched LiNK’s documentary, “The People’s Crisis,” which exposes citizens suffering under North Korea’s oppressive regime. It specifically shows some of LiNK’s rescue missions. After the film, three representatives of LiNK answered questions about the movie and about their experiences in the organization through Skype.



SPEAKING OUT: On Tuesday, about 30 students gathered for the Project Unbreakable event in Davies. They listened to stories about sexual assault and discussed rape culture. © 2014 Martha Landry

Hailey Kiefer, the event's coordinator, said it is important for people to see and understand the human story of people's struggles in North Korea, rather than just the political aspects.

"It's a really critical situation that's not covered in mainstream media, so I think getting people aware, especially people on college campuses whose voices tend to be heard, is huge," she said.

By attending the Human Rights Week events not only can students have the chance to learn more about human rights subjects, but leaders of the workshops can also gain new knowledge.

Brie Sweeney, a sophomore and facilitator of the workshop titled Porn Realities, said she has been able to gain a fuller understanding of the topic of pornography in society as it correlates with violence against women and human trafficking. (Porn Realities begins at 5 p.m. Friday in Hibbard Hall.)

She said the other workshops cover a variety of subjects, but they all tie together, shedding light on problems everyone can work to fight against.

Emerson Freybler, a freshman history education major, said he is excited for people to learn more about these issues.

"In our culture it becomes really easy to live comfortably," he said, "And forcing yourself to learn about these things is really a way of growing as a person."