

The Tribune Triangle

News

NCCADV celebrates 30 years

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DURHAM – Kit Gruelle is a 35-year domestic abuse survivor. She said victims who live with their abuser "develop a finely tuned antenna," and she vividly recalls her own time period: "three years, three months and 20 days" in which she endured physical and sexual abuse.

"He was a Vietnam veteran in the Marine Corps," Gruelle said. "He was very skilled at combat, and he was also a weight lifter. He used to say daily how he was trained to hunt people down and kill people, and if I ever tried to leave, he'd hunt me down and kill me."

Since the mid-1980s, Gruelle has been involved in the movement against domestic violence. Statistically, victims are most likely to be murdered at the point where they are trying to leave the relationship. Still, she said the No. 1 question people ask is "Why do they stay with those men?"

"And I say to them that they stay because they want to stay alive," she said.

On Aug. 18, Gruelle received the first Peace Award in her name at the N.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence's 30th anniversary event. The award recognizes an advocate who has gone above and beyond to provide direct services to domestic abuse survivors.

Gruelle was surprised with the award at a special presentation at Sarah P. Duke Gardens in Durham that was attended by advocates, allied professionals and survivors. "I'm still shocked," she said. "There were just all these incredible women there who have done this work so long and have given so much of themselves; their blood, sweat and tears and their sweat equity, and I just couldn't believe that this award was given to me."

Co-Executive Director Beth Froehling listed Gruelle's accomplishments. "From the local level where she coordinated the Bridges Program in Chatham County, a coordinated criminal justice response to domestic violence where she was instrumental in the creation of the Interagency Domestic Violence Unit; to her statewide efforts to raise awareness with the media and strengthen legislation, including the creation of felony strangulation in N.C.; to her work on the national level as an esteemed trainer, educator and consultant, Kit is a powerhouse of information, ideas and spirit," she said.

Following the presentation, a preview was shown of "Private Violence," a documentary Gruelle is producing.

"I'm producing the film to address the 'Why doesn't she just leave?' question," she said. "And to talk about the movement, and the inherit wisdom and strength of survivors. I came up with the name for the film because it's a private form of violence that has huge implications for all of society."

With support from allies, the NCCADV has provided training to over 28,000 community advocates, supported and/or drafted over 50 pieces of legislation and answered over 40,000 technical assistance calls just in the last 10 years of its existence. The NCCADV is the only statewide nonprofit organization focused solely on domestic violence.

"It is NCCADV's goal to continue providing innovative information, training, advocacy and technical assistance, as the work that we do evolves over the next 30 years," board co-chair Chimi Boyd-Keyes said in a release.

Coastal Federal Credit Union and Sarah P. Duke Gardens sponsored the event.

"We wanted to help celebrate and commend those that have given 30 years to protect the lives of men, women and children who have been touched by domestic violence," Priscilla Awkward of CFCU said. "We would like to be the financial support system for not only the organizations, but also the survivors that they reach every day."

Gruelle still needs \$40,000 in funding to finish "Private Violence." The short film version will be used as a fundraiser to help complete the full-length film. To receive a copy of the short film, send a \$50 check to NCCADV with "Private Violence" in the memo. For more information, visit www.nccadv.org.

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