

Dane County Exec. Parisi: Joins Rape Crisis Center Executive Director Erin Thornley Parisi to highlight 20th anniversary of Denim Day

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Today, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi and Rape Crisis Center Executive Director Erin Thornley Parisi held a press conference to highlight the 20th anniversary of Denim Day, a day to raise awareness for Sexual Assault Awareness Month. The county partnered with the Dane County Rape Crisis Center to call public attention to sexual assault by asking employees to wear denim to help fight misconceptions and raise awareness about sexual assault.

“Sexual assault is a pervasive and truly heinous crime. It’s our job as a community to continue fighting against misconceptions and raising awareness to tackle this issue head on, not only during Sexual Assault Awareness Month but every month of the year,” said County Executive Parisi. “We wear denim to stand in solidarity and to let survivors of sexual assault know that they are not alone. We are here for you and we support you.”

Of the many support services and programs RCC offers, its youth counseling and advocacy focuses on serving Dane County youth between the ages of 12 and 18 who are victims of sexual assault. RCC counselors can meet with the youth at RCC’s main office or, more often, at their school. One RCC counselor specifically works with the school districts of Madison, Middleton, and Monona, another serves the remaining school districts in Dane County.

The RCC also offers a range of presentations to middle and high schoolers regarding healthy relationships, consent, sexual assault, bystander intervention, and how to support a survivor. The RCC says schools have been inundating its office with requests to help address the pervasiveness of sexual assault. In addition to the services RCC provides, the organization is asking the community to stay on top of addressing the issue.

“We are as busy helping those who have been assaulted as we are trying to prevent the epidemic of sexual assault. At any given school hour, we have two staff helping students heal from their assault and at least two more in front of middle or high school classes helping them understand the basic concept of consent. This work is critical,” stated RCC Executive Director Thornley Parisi.

Denim Day has been observed for the last 20 years on a Wednesday in April during Sexual Assault Awareness Month. The day was triggered by a ruling in the Italian Supreme Court when a conviction for rape was overturned because the justices felt since the victim was wearing tight jeans, she had to have helped remove them, and therefore she consented. The women in the Italian Parliament came to work in jeans the day after the ruling in solidarity with the victim. Wearing jeans on Denim Day has become a symbol of protest against the misconceptions around sexual assault.

RCC services are free and provided to any victim of sexual assault and their support network regardless of age, gender identity or other status. Community education and outreach is designed to increase community awareness of the Rape Crisis Center’s free services and to create partnerships and community ownerships of the underlying beliefs and attitudes that have normalized sexual assault. To access services, you can call the 24/7 helpline at 608-251-7273 or La Linea at 608-258-2567.