



Grand Rapids

The YWCA will empower women, promote diversity and advocate for justice and equality.

For Immediate Release
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Kent County Hosting Ground-Breaking Educational Initiative

*De-Bunking Stereotypes Among Professionals
Will Lead to Better Responses in Non-Stranger Sexual Assaults*

The image of a rapist lurking in a darkened alley waiting to attack an unsuspecting victim is a well known one. Stories of stranger-rapes are far more likely to appear on our local news and receive attention from law enforcement and prosecution. However, the reality is far different, and victim advocates note greater hesitation among victims to report, and communities to actively respond, when the victim and assailant know one another.

The YWCA and the Kent County Sexual Assault Response Team are working to address this and recently received national attention for their efforts from End Violence Against Women International (EVAW International) which provides training and expert consultation regarding crimes of sexual assault and domestic violence. **Hoping to expand on Kent County's success as a collaborative model, EVAW International chose Kent County to host its groundbreaking educational conference, "Making A Difference", on Tuesday, November 8th and Wednesday, November 9th.**

The educational initiative is significant to Michigan's progress related to sexual assault investigation and response. Workshops are designed to clarify the often misinterpreted behavior of victims and assailants. Based on this participants will learn better strategies for interviewing, documenting and court testimony.

Carla Blinkhorn, YWCA President/CEO, noted the conference's goal, "Those who attend will gain a stronger understanding of the unique dynamics involved in non-stranger-rapes. The result will be a community better equipped to evaluate cases based on evidence rather than assumptions of consent attributed to the relationship of a victim and assailant."

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Over 150 participants representing law enforcement, prosecution and victim advocates from across Michigan plan to attend the conference which will be held at the **Kent County Health Department (700 Fuller Avenue NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503) on November 8th and 9th (8:00 am – 5:00 pm).**

In 2003, there were approximately 3,485 rapes, attempted rapes and sexual assaults reported in Kent County.¹ Approximately 70% of patients who reported to the YWCA Nurse Examiner Program in 2003 indicated that they knew their assailant.

For further information about the Making A Difference conference, please call 616.459.7062, ext. 121. Interviews with Sgt. Tim Williams (Grand Rapids Police Department-Family Services Team) are available by calling 616.456.3421. Additional interviews with presenters, Joanne Archambault (retired Sergeant, San Diego Police Department) and Anne Munch (Supervisor, fast track domestic violence unit, Jefferson County Colorado—District Attorney's Office) can be arranged upon request. Opportunities to film conference activities can be arranged as well.

1. *Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau and The Health of Kent County, 2005, Kent County Health Dept.*

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