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'Bandana Project' to Spotlight Sexual Exploitation of Farmworker Women

Residents of more than 40 cities across the country will take a stand against the sexual harassment and abuse of farmworker women on April 3 as part of the "Bandana Project," a partnership between the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and community groups, universities and other organizations.

The Bandana Project

Raising Awareness

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The SPLC and partners in these cities will invite members of the farmworker community and others to decorate bandanas that will be displayed in museums, community centers and schools as a symbolic gesture to raise awareness of the sexual exploitation of these vulnerable women.

The project has adopted the bandana as a symbol of solidarity to end this abuse because many farmworker women use bandanas on the job to cover their faces and bodies in an attempt to ward off unwanted sexual attention that often leads to rape.

The exhibits will be launched on April 3, the national day of action for Sexual Assault Awareness Month. This year's theme is sexual assault in the workplace. Exhibits will be on display throughout the month of April.

The problem has received little public attention but is well-known to farmworker women, many of whom remain silent about sexual exploitation on the job. William R. Tamayo, regional attorney for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in San Francisco, wrote in a 2000 report that "the sexual harassment of farmworker women is a widespread problem." In an earlier survey of farmworker women in California, 90 percent of the women questioned said that sexual harassment was a major problem on the job.

"Often in these precarious situations, farmworker women are ashamed for themselves and their families and afraid of losing their jobs," said Mónica Ramírez, project director for Esperanza: The Immigrant Women's Legal Initiative of the SPLC. "Through this project, we try to bring a sense of hope, confidence and the will to be brave. It is our wish that these women will see our encouragement as a sign that they no longer have to suffer in silence."



Partnering organizations include: Alianza de Mujeres Activas, California Rural Legal Assistance, California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, Dolores Huerta Foundation, The Farmworker Women's Institute of the Farmworker Legal Services of New York, Inc., Líderes Campesinas, Loyola University Chicago's Gannon Scholars Program, National Sexual Violence Resource Center, Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force, Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Purdue University Latino Cultural Center, Purdue Latino Faculty and Staff Association, Purdue University's CARE: Communities Against Rape Initiative, Redlands Christian Migrant Association, Southeast Georgia Communities Project and Victim Rights Law Center.

"With the help of our partners around the country, we will shed light on this serious problem," Ramírez said. "It is our goal to send the message to workplace abusers that we will fight to stop the abuse of farmworker women, because no one should be forced to give up their dignity in order to feed their family."

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The Bandana Project

Raising Awareness

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What can I do to help?

Join us by raising awareness about this epidemic because no one should be forced to give up their dignity in order to feed their family. Help us send the message that we will not tolerate sexual violence in the workplace or any place. You can help further this movement by planning a bandana display and/or educational community event in your area about this issue.

What materials do I need to host my own bandana display?

Bandanas

- Plain white cotton bandanas are used for this project. They are 21-1/2 x 21-1/2"
- You can contact Esperanza to find out if we can send you some white bandanas to start your display. We have a limited number of supplies but we are happy to help our partners start their display if we have enough bandanas to share.
- You can also buy white material and cut bandanas to the same size. We ask that you use a white cotton material and that it be the same size as the official bandanas used by Esperanza in order to keep them uniform with the other bandanas being created throughout the country.

Art supplies

- You can use permanent markers to decorate the bandanas or any other art supplies that your group would like to use.

How are they hung?

- Given that farmworker women wear bandanas that are folded into a triangle, the bandanas have been decorated and hung this way. - Bandanas have been hung on wire or string for display. They have been fastened with clips or with clothespins.
- They have also been thumb tacked to walls for display.

Where to Hang the Bandanas

- Bandanas have been hung on the walls of meeting rooms, in the lobby of participating offices, in the entrance or waiting area at schools, and in museums.
- The displays can be set up in health clinics, public libraries, or any other public display area. They can also be hung in an open area by setting up a wire or string between two poles or wooden blocks and clipping the bandanas to the wire or string.

Suggestions for Planning an Event

- Host a community decorating party. You can decorate the bandanas with a group of community members or co-workers. You can then hang these bandanas in your office lobby or in another public place like a library, health clinic, school, or church. Contact Esperanza for a copy of the Bandana Project poster to hang along with your project display. Supplies are limited.
- Plan a Community Event. Collaborate with area anti-violence organizations, sexual assault coalitions or networks, legal services offices, private attorneys, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or other state anti-discrimination agencies to plan an educational forum so that community members know what their rights are in the face of sexual harassment and sexual assault in the workplace.
- Host a networking reception. Invite farmworker community members, grass roots organizations, religious groups, union representatives, legal services advocates, state and local anti-violence organizations, federal and state government agencies and healthcare providers to a meeting or reception so that they can connect.
- Hold a health or community information fair. Set up informational tables after a local church service, parent meeting, or at popular community location (for instance, a popular store or health clinic).
- Host a house meeting. Organize a group of friends and community members to meet in a small group at someone's home to discuss the problem of sexual violence.

Media

- Reach out to the press to educate them about this problem and to inform them about the community events/bandana display that you are hosting. Farmworker women are often ignored and marginalized. This silence always abusers to prey on them. By speaking out publicly against this abuse, we can send a message to workplace abusers that sexual violence in the workplace will not be tolerated.