

# Observer - Dispatch (Utica, NY)

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## EDITORIAL: For the Record – Working to End Dating Violence

Anna is no one you know. But she's someone we should all know about. Anna is a vibrant 17-year-old. Anna is a ghost in a bloody yellow dress. Anna is an amalgamation of many young women. Anna is the victim of an abusive relationship.

The one-woman play "The Yellow Dress" tells the story of Anna's death at the hands of her boyfriend. The play is fiction, but it exposes the ugly truths about dating violence. "The Yellow Dress" is a story too many young women know and it offers lessons not enough of them understand.

Thanks to a grant from the Central New York Community Arts Council, the YWCA of the Mohawk Valley was able to purchase a license for "The Yellow Dress" so it can be performed locally. This play is another important tool for building healthy relationships, and that is the key to eliminating domestic violence.

Ending dating violence begins with changing attitudes. That's what makes outreach efforts such as this play so very important. It's crucial to reach young women – and young men – as well as their parents and those who deal with the victims, such as police officers, family court judges and attorneys.

Watching a fictional drama of dating violence can be a nonthreatening way to explore issues that can be painful – ones that victims may be too ashamed to confront directly. "The Yellow Dress" and other works like it can be what opens the door to a vital discussion about relationships between parents and teens.

We must make sure that young teens understand what constitutes a healthy relationship. And they need that knowledge now when their first relationships are being formed.

For young women, it's critical to understand that extreme jealousy and possessiveness are not signs of affection, and that a slap or a push often lead to more serious violence.

Young men must understand that their girlfriends are not possessions, and physical violence is never acceptable.

It's important young people know that the adults in their lives – teachers, parents, coaches – share and model these beliefs.

The YWCA of the Mohawk Valley is working every day to stop domestic violence and help victims heal. The Y provides a range of age-appropriate community education programs about dating violence. It's knowledge that all of us need to have – because maybe Anna is someone you know.

### **Some Numbers**

- Women between the ages of 16 and 24 experience the highest rates of violence by a current or former intimate partner.
- Approximately one in five female high school students reports being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner.
- Forty percent of girls age 14 to 17 report knowing someone their age who has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend.
- During the 1996-1997 school year, there were an estimated 4,000 incidents of rape or other types of sexual assault in public schools across the country.
- Four women are killed by their male partners each day.

*Data from the Family Violence Prevention Fund ([www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org)) and Rosemary Vennero, YWCA of the Mohawk Valley.*

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