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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

It's 2018. Isn't it Time?

Join Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center in ending sexual abuse by being an ally; affecting change

GURNEE, IL, February 1, 2018 -- A nationwide conversation launched on social media and energized by #MeToo, and most recently #TimesUp, is driving both challenging and positive changes in dealing with sexual harassment and abuse.

It's time for everyone to join that conversation.

Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center (ZCenter) staff members know that silence breeds the stigma around sexual abuse. Silence is abuse's greatest ally.

As prevalent as sexual violence is, discussing the topic often is thwarted by misplaced shame, or because the subject is too uncomfortable. People may choose not to report or seek help for sexual assault for fear of retaliation, fear of not being taken seriously, or a variety of reasons. Survivors may deal with physical and psychological effects of sexual violence on their own, because they do not feel safe to disclose or that they will not be believed. Even though years may pass before a survivor seeks help, healing is possible with the right support.

Now is the time to bring the issue into the light.

Survivors of sexual abuse need to share their experiences without facing shame. It is not their burden to educate the community. It's time for roles to be reversed: to focus on holding abusers accountable for their behavior. It's time to talk about social norms and institutions that enable and support sexual violence.

The first step on the path to change is awareness of how epidemic the problem is.

In the United States there are 321,500 victimized by rape and sexual assault (ages 12 or older) every year.¹ One in 3 women experience some form of contact sexual violence in their lifetime. One in 6 men experience sexual violence in their lifetime.²

Sexual abuse and assault affect survivors and everyone who loves them. Sexual violence has far-reaching effects on everyone, and does not discriminate between race, sex, age, economic status, education, or geography. For survivors, it impacts their whole lives: family and friends, education, employment and faith communities.

ZCenter's clients range from three-year-olds to clients in their 90s, and represent all communities throughout Northeastern Illinois.

"We want to create a shift in social norms," says Jennifer Yonan, Executive Director of ZCenter. "You wouldn't stand by and accept racial remarks to go unchallenged. We are in a day and age where degrading sexual comments should not be overlooked. We are here to serve survivors of sexual assault and abuse. We are here to affect change in the community by providing resources. Fortunately, there are many ways to be an ally."

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Press release: Isn't it Time? continued

You can make a difference.

A proven way to safely prevent an incident of sexual harassment is “bystander intervention.” An active bystander can recognize an environment in which another person is being targeted, harassed, bullied or victimized, and be willing to step in to redirect the activity.

How to change the environment? Interrupt and change the topic of conversation, check in with the person being targeted, or speak up against unacceptable actions.

Be alert to communication. Actively question any language that blames the victim. Be willing to challenge stories in the media, storylines in entertainment, and casual conversations that seem to support rape culture, or collectively demean any sector of our population.

“We can all be part of the solution,” says Yonan. “We must be willing to examine our own thoughts, beliefs and experiences and recognize where there are opportunities to grow and learn.”

By being aware of the problem, taking meaningful action, supporting survivors by allowing their voices to be heard, and accessing tools to prevent sexual assault, we can create change. It’s time to eliminate sexual violence in our community.

For additional resources, visit zcenter.org

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Resources:

1. Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network www.rainn.org/statistics/scope-problem
2. National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2010-2012 State Report, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention, Centers for Disease Control, 2017

About Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center

ZCenter was built on the courage of survivors, staff, volunteers, and donors, and has been serving the community as a non-profit center against sexual assault and abuse since 1983. Now operating from two locations, Gurnee and Skokie, ZCenter provides places where survivors of sexual violence can heal, and mobilizes the community toward action to end sexual violence. Services are available free of charge to all survivors regardless of race, gender, language, ability to pay, sexual orientation, or religion. For more information, please visit ZCenter.org.

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