

YWCA candlelight vigil marks domestic violence



Attendees share a moment of silence during the annual Domestic Violence Candlelight Vigil held at the YWCA. (Roger Wilson / Times Community News)

By **Connie K. Ho**

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Candles lined the stage, lighting life-sized cutouts of a mother and child.

The darkened room at the YWCA in Glendale flickered with dozens of candles, quiet for a moment of silence as people lowered their heads as part of a vigil Thursday night to raise awareness of domestic violence.

The event, hosted by the city's Commission on the Status of Women and the YWCA, coincides with October being Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

"This is an important event; we all understand the issue and it's a major issue. It has nothing to do with culture or income or age or anything else," said Glendale City Councilman Frank Quintero. "We're going to work and we're going to minimize it every year."

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cluding the Armenian Relief Society and

"I am happy to see that organizations are collaborating together to empower, to inspire, to prevent and to educate community members more and more, each and every year," said ARS Chairwoman Lena Bozoyan.

The presentation included a performance by the Jayvee Dance Center, whose dancers moved to the song "To Build a Home," and a reading of a poem in Armenian, Spanish and English.

"To have the dancers be a part of it and add that wonderful artistic element — that was so compelling," said Lisa Raggio, director of development at the YWCA.

The YWCA focuses on helping families fleeing from domestic violence and connects them with various resources. The program currently serves around 140 clients, many of whom reside in Glendale and Burbank, say officials.

"We are slowly but surely creating a space where those individuals who are being served feel safe, supported and empowered," said Karyna Gonzalez, who works with those clients at the non-profit.

"It is our hope to continue to provide opportunities for self-discovery, independence and opportunity and skills to live a life free from violence," she added.

Clients are assigned case managers, given the opportunity to enroll in classes on themes such as domestic violence education and emotional management, and offered counseling and legal services.

"I learned to open up. I learned to share emotions, which has always been difficult for me, and also to be OK accepting help or learning to ask for help," said Joanne Meraz, a graduate of the program, in a phone interview on Friday.

Meraz, 40, currently residing in Pasadena and working at a university, visited the YWCA in 2011 and enrolled in the program shortly after.

"As a female in an abusive relationship, you tend to shut down and you become afraid and doubtful of yourself and everything around you," she said. "Without institutions like the YWCA, there's no doubt that it would make it difficult, almost nearly impossible, to walk away from such a negative part in our life."

Connie K. Ho is a freelance writer.

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