

# Men in white ribbons unite to stem violence against women

By Middlebury Campus

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Visitors to the New Library were met on Monday with a bulletin board providing information on the White Ribbon Campaign (WRC), which seeks to educate men about violence against women. The campaign, which relies on volunteer support and financial contributions from individuals and organizations, was begun in Canada in 1991 by a group of men who felt an obligation to speak out about violence against women. The group decided on the white ribbon as the symbol of men's opposition to male violence against females. According to the WRC's website, the white ribbon stands as a "personal pledge never to commit, condone nor remain silent about violence against women." The cause has grown rapidly and 16 years after its inception, it is the largest effort by men to speak out about the issue of violence against women. With thousands of volunteers, the WRC is continuing to expand and grow, and is now represented in 50 countries. The website explains that participation in White Ribbon committees is "open to any man who is opposed to violence against women, who is committed to equality between women and men, and who is committed to examining and challenging violence in his own life." Under the direction of John Beattie, who works with the counseling staff at the College on men's issues and issues of safety on campus, a group of College males adopted the cause in the fall, in an effort to "publicize the issue of violence against women, the opportunity and obligation men have to address this issue and to offer men on campus an opportunity to sign a pledge," according to Beattie. He added, "Too often, men, when this topic is raised, are seen as perpetrators or possible offenders, when in actuality men can be a very powerful positive force in confronting abusive peers." While the WRC at Middlebury is still in its early stages, Beattie said that they "have discussed a great many avenues they might explore," adding that he feels "confident that all of the men involved recognize the importance of the issue and share a commitment to keeping the topic a presence on campus." Some possibilities include working with local schools in the area, with the intent of expanding the cause to the greater community. Member Matthew Macfarlane '09 emphasized that the group was still in the planning stages but is planning to mount a bigger campaign over J-Term, after its initial meeting. Explaining his decision to join the campaign, he described it as "a really interesting idea, something that is not talked about and is very hush-hush," and an issue that should be examined and tackled from "a guy's perspective." Member Nick Ballen '09 echoed, "We felt that it would be a positive and fresh message to have an anti-domestic violence campaign run solely by men." Will Hunt '07.5, who is not a member of the WRC but who signed the bulletin board in the library, said of his reasons for supporting the cause, "I have friends and family who are victims of abuse and I've seen how devastating it can be. When I hear these stories and cringe at how monstrous these men are, part of me is wondering, 'Can I, as a man, band together with other men to prevent this from happening?' The White Ribbon Campaign operates under this ethic and I think it fills an important role in anti-abuse activism." It is the hope of Beattie and all the male members of Middlebury's White Ribbon Campaign to continue to raise and spread awareness both on campus and in the larger community. Beattie acknowledged the seemingly insignificant yet extremely powerful act of wearing a ribbon, stating, "Although signing a pledge to remain non-violent and to confront violence when it appears may seem like a small effort, being responsible examples for other men is certainly the single most important action a man can take."