

—Slug:.....COMM-0849.opin.inter.zargo  
—Contributor.....Conner Zargo  
—Contributor email.....connerz09@windhamcentral.org  
—For section.....Voices/Interview  
—Format.....Opinions - Interview  
—Dateline.....Townshend  
—Article Number:.....42898

**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Conner, this is a really good interview. I did the same light editing as I do with interviews we run in The Commons, mainly removing filler words ("right?"). This will be in tomorrow's newspaper. Would you like to do some work for us? I'm also happy to help you and your fellow Rooster journalists if you would like. All the best, Jeff

**HEADLINE ELEMENTS:**

#####BEGIN HED#####

1 Abusive relationships are common and sometimes hard  
2 to see

#####END HED#####

#####BEGIN SUBHED#####

3 A student newspaper interviews a domestic violence  
4 outreach advocate who works closely with students in schools

#####END SUBHED#####

5 TEXT BODY:

#####BEGIN TEXT#####

6 THERE ARE RELATIONSHIPS that people may think are not  
7 abusive, but they may actually be harmful because people may  
8 not be aware of the signs of abuse. In 2023, 24% of all homicides  
9 were determined to be domestic violence-related. In 2023, 24%

10 of all homicides were determined to be domestic violence-  
11 related in Vermont.

12 One in four women in this country will experience  
13 intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime, according to  
14 [Oregon Health & Science University](#), and one in three teens will  
15 experience an abusive relationship. This means that there is a  
16 likelihood that a number of female students at Leland & Gray will  
17 have experienced domestic abuse before graduation.

18 Recently, our school newspaper, the *Rebel Rooster*,  
19 spoke with an outreach advocate who works closely with  
20 students in schools.

21 Angela is an advocate at Women's Freedom Center, the  
22 local domestic and sexual violence organization serving both  
23 Windham and southern Windsor counties in Vermont. The  
24 organization's goal is "working toward ending men's violence  
25 against women while offering support and advocacy to all  
26 survivors of domestic and sexual violence, as well as prevention  
27 and educational activities."

28 Here is our interview with her.

29 \* \* \*

30 **Rebel Rooster:** What is the availability for teens, boys,  
31 and teen girls when in need?

32 **Angela:** We provide emotional support as well as safety  
33 planning. So that would just mean helping someone look at their  
34 situation and identify who are the safe people in their life, where  
35 are the safe places that they could go if they need to, who can  
36 they talk to, whether at school or at home. So that would be a  
37 couple of our options there.

38 We do have a shelter, but we don't shelter people under  
39 the age of 18. In Brattleboro, we have an agency, Interaction,  
40 where we would typically point someone who is 18, 19 and  
41 looking for shelter. They're really set up with a lot of really helpful  
42 youth resources and have youth shelter and youth housing.

43 **R.R.:** What can young males do in relationships to  
44 prevent intimate partner violence?

45                   **Angela:** Wow, that's such a good question. I think that  
46                    really the biggest thing that would be helpful that I hear from  
47                    survivors is bystander intervention.

48                    There are so many reasons why someone might not say  
49                    anything — because they think it's not my business or someone  
50                    else is going to take care of that. Right? So we hear from survivors  
51                    all the time that they wish that at some point someone had said  
52                    something to them.

53                    It really concerns being an ally and not being afraid to  
54                    use those tools that would allow one to appropriately and safely  
55                    intervene.

56                    **R.R.:** So if I was witnessing something, would I talk to the  
57                    person that was getting abused, or would I try to get an adult  
58                    involved? What would be the first best step?

59                    **Angela:** That's another great question. And that one's  
60                    tough because it can really depend.

61                    A lot of that knowledge of when to step in and how to  
62                    step in would need to come from students, from young people  
63                    learning that material from parents and educators, and people  
64                    like me who go into the community and talk about these things.  
65                    Because ultimately, what always matters first is safety. That's our  
66                    number one priority.

67                    And so, when I talk to students and younger kids about  
68                    knowing when we can handle something versus when we need  
69                    outside support — maybe, like you said, from an adult — really  
70                    what I talk about is what we're feeling in our bodies. Because our  
71                    own instincts tend to be really great judges of the kind of help  
72                    that we need to be seeking out.

73                    So for example, if someone is being sexually  
74                    inappropriate, or making a gender-based comment about  
75                    someone in a school hallway, it might feel like you have the  
76                    energy, you have the courage, to approach that person and say,  
77                    "You know, that really wasn't cool."

78                    Or approach the person who the comment was made  
79                    about and just offer them some support and say, "I heard or I saw

80 what happened. Are you OK? Is there anything I can do to offer  
81 you some support and solidarity?"

82 And then on the flip side, there is that other alarm bell  
83 within us that we see things like physical violence. It's typically  
84 not safe for us to to intervene to either party, so that might be an  
85 opportunity where we go and seek some support from from an  
86 adult.

87 At least that's the language that I use when I'm talking to  
88 younger students, but it's really such a dynamic place, and it  
89 takes a lot of practice to be able to have those skills to intervene.

90 **R.R.:** What are the best ways to support a friend who has  
91 been through sexual assault and domestic violence in their life?

92 **Angela:** Offering an ear and listening. An understanding  
93 that there's so much judgment in the world and so much  
94 judgment and bias that we carry just as people having grown up  
95 in society. Just chatting with a friend and just being able to  
96 provide a non-biased, non-judgmental listening ear can be such a  
97 comfort.

98 **R.R.:** Over the time that you've been working at the  
99 Freedom Center, what are the best things that you could share  
100 with everyone?

101 **Angela:** Hmm. I guess I would say that more people than  
102 we suspect are walking through the world today with the  
103 experience of gender-based violence, sexual violence, or intimate  
104 partner violence. And before I started working here, that wasn't  
105 really something on my radar.

106 But now when I step into a room, it's definitely on my  
107 mind, and it helps put me in the perspective of [understanding  
108 that] survivors aren't alone. And the more that we talk about  
109 domestic violence and intimate partner violence, the less alone  
110 we are.

111 **R.R.** What are some signs that someone might be in a  
112 domestic violence relationship?

113 **Angela:** I would say that a really big sign that I see,  
114 especially among younger folks, is isolation.

115 So maybe someone is seeing their friends less and less or  
116 they're not going to practice anymore. They're missing things that  
117 previously might have made them really happy [and] hobbies  
118 that they loved that start to fall through the cracks and that can  
119 definitely be something to keep an eye out for.

120 And then maybe the lack of personal space, [like]  
121 someone is having their tech kind of monitored and they can't  
122 have followers on Instagram of a different gender or they can't  
123 hang out with certain people because the partner disapproves.

124 **R.R.:** How do you think we should talk about consent in  
125 schools?

126 **Angela:** Do you talk about it at all now? Not a lot.  
127 Consent has a couple different components, right? At the  
128 very least, talking about consent at all is a great start, but I have  
129 an acronym for you. So in the business here, we say consent is  
130 FRIES. F stands for "freely given." R stands for "reversible." I  
131 stands for "informed," meaning you know the full extent of what  
132 you are consenting to. E stands for "enthusiastic," meaning it's not  
133 like an "I guess" or "maybe"; it's like a "Yes, 100%." And then S  
134 stands for "specific."

135 So again, it's like "I consent to holding your hand today.  
136 That doesn't mean every day."

137 **R.R.:** Is the workshop that you teach at schools free for  
138 the school? And what do you talk about in them? And have you  
139 tried to reach out to Leland & Gray to do a class or something  
140 there?

141 **Angela:** I have tried to reach out to Leland and Gray  
142 several times and followed up. I've not heard back from them.

143 The workshops can be really specific, and they can be all  
144 ages. So the youngest classroom I've been in is fourth grade, and  
145 we talked about boundaries and consent. And the oldest, you  
146 know, still a school-based classroom.

147 I'll often sit with the educators and say, "What's going on  
148 for your students? What are the main problems?" And a lot of

149 what we know about dating violence is that these problems can  
150 start earlier in friendships.

151 And so me going in and working in elementary schools is  
152 really a collaborative effort to end intimate partner violence  
153 before it starts, and being able to talk about friendships and  
154 boundaries and setting boundaries on the phone or in person in  
155 the classroom.

156 **R.R.:** What is one thing that you would teach to prevent  
157 intimate partner violence?

158 **Angela:** So one thing I really like to talk about with the  
159 students is brain chemistry. In grades six through eight, that's  
160 prime puberty time, when the brain is really changing and the  
161 bodies are really changing. And it's really easy for teenagers to  
162 become addicted to things because oxytocin is a lot more  
163 impactful.

164 I'm not a brain scientist by any means, but what we  
165 know about the cycle of healthy and unhealthy relationships is  
166 that oxytocin that is this love chemical in our brain that gives us  
167 butterflies and makes us really giggly or stay up late and like to  
168 think about my feelings and daydream.

169 And then when the relationship maybe starts to settle in  
170 or go downhill, for some people that oxytocin tanks. We want to  
171 do whatever we can to get that oxytocin back. And so a big part,  
172 especially for teenagers who are really susceptible to this, is that  
173 we become addicted to that cycle. The oxytocin builds and then  
174 it plummets, then we're without it and we want to get it back.

175 And that translates to feeling really loved and getting that  
176 affection. And then when it goes away, we want to do whatever  
177 we can to get it back, even if maybe our brain knows better. Still,  
178 we are run by those chemicals.

179 So I like to bring that information to students to help  
180 them recognize when they feel like they're out of control or they  
181 are losing control of the situation or their relationship, that it's not  
182 just made up, it's not just them. This is a real thing that all of us  
183 experience, and there are ways to cope with it.

184           **R.R.:** What is the biggest piece of advice you could give  
185           to the younger generation that are in relationships?

186           **Angela:** Advice is tricky, but I would say my hope for  
187           students and, or for the younger generation is that we all get to a  
188           spot where we can really trust our instincts and we can feel safe  
189           enough and held enough by our communities that we are armed  
190           with the knowledge of what we need and what we deserve when  
191           we go into friendships and relationships. And we are armed with  
192           the resources that we might need to move away from  
193           relationships that are not serving us.

194           My hope for the younger generation is that they're able  
195           to really cultivate those resources and that I can help them do  
196           that.

197           \* \* \*

198           THERE IS A LOT OF SUPPORT at Leland & Gray for students  
199           who are experiencing difficulties. According to social worker  
200           Alicia Carey, "In this building, every adult is a mandated reporter,  
201           which means anyone who suspects abuse or neglect is legally  
202           required to report it."

203           She is also a staff member in a "non-disciplinary role," so  
204           she can "focus on building trusting relationships and creating a  
205           safe, comfortable space for students." Students can reach out to  
206           Alicia or other trusted adults for help.

207           Here are some resources that students can access:  
208           • *Women's Freedom Center* (serving Windham &  
209           Southern Windsor Counties): 24-hour Crisis Hotline (Windham  
210           County): 802-254-6954. Services: Emergency shelter for survivors  
211           and children, safety planning, advocacy, hospital and legal  
212           support, emotional support and counseling, referrals for  
213           additional services.

214           • *Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence*  
215           (statewide coalition/helpline): Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-  
216           228-7395. Sexual Violence Hotline: 1-800-489-7273.

217                   • SEVCA (Southeastern Vermont Community Action /  
218   Community Resource Center; for housing, basic needs support,  
219   utility/energy assistance): Toll-free number: 800-464-9951.  
220                   • Emergency/crisis resources: If there is immediate  
221   danger: 911 — *always first call if safety is at risk.*  
222                   • For housing crisis outside shelter-specific agencies: call  
223   Vermont's General Assistance Emergency Shelter system at 800-  
224   775-0506, or contact the local Economic Services Division office  
225   (in Brattleboro, 232 Main Street) for help.

226                   \* \* \*

227                   *Editor's note: As a matter of policy and because of the*  
228   *sensitive and too-often-dangerous nature of their jobs, Women's*  
229   *Freedom Center staff do not publicly disclose their full names,*  
230   *and The Commons gives them rare anonymity in these pages.*

231                   *Stories presented as interviews in this format are edited*  
232   *for clarity, readability, and space. Words not spoken by interview*  
233   *subjects appear in brackets.*

#####END TEXT#####

BIO/COATTAIL:

#####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL#####

234                   **CONNER ZARGO** originally conducted this interview for  
235   the *Rebel Rooster*, the student newspaper of Leland & Gray  
236   Union High School, where it appeared in the Jan. 9 issue.

#####END BIO/COATTAIL#####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

#####BEGIN MAXISSUE#####

237                   0

#####END MAXISSUE#####

LINKS:

#####BEGIN LINKS#####

238

#####END LINKS#####

VIDEO:

#####BEGIN VIDEO#####

239

#####END VIDEO#####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

#####BEGIN LOGLINE#####

240

#####END LOGLINE#####