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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: March 12, 2021

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SUBJECT: 'WHAT WERE YOU WEARING EXHIBIT' AT THE THYEN-CLARK CULTURAL CENTER

EXHIBIT DATES: APRIL 1st – 18th, 2021

Jasper Community Arts is pleased to partner with Crisis Connection Inc. to present a special exhibit on display in the atrium at the Thyen-Clark Cultural Center, "What Were You Wearing?".

The "What Were You Wearing?" Survivor Art Installation originated at the University of Arkansas in 2013. Created by Jen Brockman and Dr. Mary Wyandt-Hiebert, the project was inspired by Dr. Mary Simmerling's poem, What I Was Wearing and is one of many projects worldwide working to address this specific rape myth. This myth is one of many pervasive narratives utilized to blame survivors and justify perpetrators.

The stories utilized were donated by survivors and are used with their consent. The clothing in the Installation is not the actual clothing worn by the survivor, they are recreations of the stories that were donated.

The goal of the Installation is for participants to see themselves reflected in not only the outfits, but also the stories. This realization moves us away from blaming the victim for violence and places responsibility where it belongs, on those who caused harm.

It is the hope that survivors who experience the Installations feel heard, validated, believed, and know that the assault was not their fault.

On May 24, 2013, Dr. Wyandt-Hiebert and Ms. Brockman attended a conference hosted by the Arkansas Coalition Against Sexual Assault in Little Rock, Arkansas. The conference packet included the poem What I was Wearing. Dr. Simmerling wrote the poem in the early 2000s and received a registered copyright in 2005.

Deeply moved by the poem, Dr. Wyandt-Hiebert and Ms. Brockman began to brainstorm ways to create a visual representation of the poem during a break at the conference. Throughout June 2013, Dr. Wyandt-Hiebert and Ms. Brockman contacted Dr. Simmerling during the summer of 2013 and was given permission to utilize her poem in connection with the Installation.

In September 2013, the Student Union Connections Lounge was reserved to host the first "What Were You Wearing?" Survivor Art Installation for Sexual Assault Awareness Month to be held April 2014. From September 2013 and onward, student-survivors at the University of Arkansas voluntarily shared brief descriptions of what they were wearing when they experienced sexual violence via personal interviews with Dr. Wyandt-Hiebert and Ms. Brockman. These descriptions were used to

recreate the outfits worn during the assaults. Clothing for the Installation was donated by Peace At Home Thrift Store in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Dr. Wyandt-Hiebert and Ms. Brockman had worked as sexual violence and intimate partner violence survivor advocates for over a decade when the Installation was created. The installation was born out of an advocacy lens. The question, “what were you wearing?” was pervasive for most survivors.

Dr. Wyandt-Hiebert and Ms. Brockman wanted to create a project that would place the work of bearing witness to this question’s answer back on the shoulders of the community and humanize the survivor in the answer.

To ask the question, “what were you wearing?” cost the questioner nothing, there is no labor in making this statement. However, the survivor must pay dearly in not only their answer; but also, in the burden of self-blame.

The Installation challenges participants to engage with the universal connection we have with clothing and reflect on what gives this specific rape culture myth so much power. To put clothing on is so basic and common, to take that action and conflate it with pain and suffering taints not only the individual outfit for the survivor; but also, calls in to question all simplistic and normal behaviors as dangerous.

The Installation asks participants to understand that it was never about the clothing and the act of shedding those clothes is never enough to bring peace or comfort to survivors. The violation is not simply woven in to the fabric of the material, it is a part of the survivor’s new narrative. If only ending sexual violence was as easy as changing our clothes. Instead, it requires all of us to evaluate what enabled us as individuals and as a society to ask, “what were you wearing?” in the first place.

For more information on the Installation exhibit please contact Crisis Connection Inc.’s office at 812-482-1555. If you are in need of immediate assistance, please call Crisis Connection Inc.’s 24/7 helpline at 1-800-245-4580.

The galleries at the Thyen-Clark Cultural Center, located at 100 3rd Avenue, Suite A, Jasper, IN 47546, are open to the public Monday through Friday from 9:00 am to 5 pm, Saturday from 10:00 am to 2 pm and Sunday from noon to 3 pm. School groups, clubs and students are welcome. Admission is free.

Jasper Community Arts is a department of the City of Jasper. JCA is supported by the Friends of the Arts, Inc., the Indiana Arts Commission, The Arts Council of Southwestern Indiana, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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