

Women Acting Up: Liz Oster

Domestic violence victim turns hardship into helping others

By Annie Brokaw

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In April 2007, at the hands of her ex-boyfriend, Liz Oster, of Superior, became a victim of domestic violence.

One year later, 51-year-old Oster transformed that experience into something positive by starting Courage is Change, a Superior-based nonprofit designed to help end the cycle of violence and abuse by opening up lines of communication and fostering stronger communities.

"It happened for a greater purpose," Oster says.

After her assault, Oster says she started thinking about violence as a learned behavior.

"You only learn about relationships in your house," she says.

She also saw a need for women to talk about domestic violence and build a safe community. People arrive home, pull into their garages and close the doors. Who do they turn to in a crisis?

Courage is Change helps local women conduct Red Tent gatherings, a name taken from the book by Anita Diamant. Oster says the purpose of a Red Tent is to "open your home to your neighbors and get to know them," to create a community that women can fall back on, as opposed to a larger network of friends and family scattered around the world. Oster hopes to see Red Tent gatherings on a national level in the future.

Current Red Tent gatherings are for women. A men's club is in the works.

Courage is Change is also working on starting an after-school Red Tent club at Monarch High School in Louisville, to teach girls at a young age to be supportive instead of judgmental and cliquish.

"Women have been competing for so long that we don't know how to support each other. We have to stop doing that," Oster says.

Eventually, Courage is Change hopes to have similar programs in many area middle and high schools.

The nonprofit also hopes to create curriculum, such as an ethics course, for students, both boys and girls.

How to help

Courage is Change is funded by a grant from the town of Superior, as well as private donations. The nonprofit is looking for local donors, facilitators for the after-school clubs and volunteers for upcoming events. To learn more or to throw a Red Tent gathering, visit www.courageischange.org.

Save the date

Courage is Change will be hosting a fundraiser 5 p.m. April 14 at the Red Fish in Boulder. Tickets will cost \$100 with proceeds benefiting Courage is Change. The event will feature a live auction, a raffle and live music. To learn more, visit www.courageischange.org.

