

The Silent Witness National Initiative

How the Initiative Began

In 1990, a group of women artists and writers, alarmed by the growing number of women in Minnesota being murdered by their partners or acquaintances, joined together with several other women's organizations to form Arts Action Against Domestic Violence. They felt an urgency to do something that would speak out against the escalating domestic violence in their state, something that would commemorate the 26 women whose lives had been lost in 1990 as a result of domestic violence.

The First Silent Witnesses

After much brainstorming, they decided to create 26 free-standing, life-sized red wooden figures, each one bearing the name of a woman who once lived, worked, had neighbors, friends, family, children – whose life ended violently at the hands of a husband, ex-husband, partner or acquaintance. A twenty-seventh figure was added to represent those uncounted women whose murders went unsolved or were erroneously ruled accidental.

The organizers called the figures the Silent Witnesses (the original 27 witnesses). [Names of the 26 women can be accessed on the Silent Witness National Initiative web site: <http://www.silentwitness.net/default.htm>]

The Debut

On February 18, 1991, more than 500 women met at a church across the street from the Minnesota State Capitol with the newly-constructed Witnesses lined up at the front of the sanctuary. The women formed a silent procession escorting the figures single file across the street, up the steps and into the State Capitol Rotunda for public statements and a press conference. The sheer volume of space the figures occupied spoke of their power and the loss. The Silent Witness Exhibit was officially launched.

The National Initiative

Inspired by the impact of the Exhibit, project supporters, Janet Hagberg and Jane Zeller, determined in mid-1994 to set a larger goal, namely the formation of a national initiative dedicated to the elimination of domestic murder, starting with the creation of Silent Witness exhibits in communities across the country. Within one year, a total of 800 Silent Witnesses had been created to represent women who were killed as a result of domestic violence in seventeen states. By October 1997, exhibits had been established in all 50 states.

The Goal

The Silent Witness Initiative seeks to promote peace, healing and responsibility in adult relationships. The Initiative's goal is to reach zero domestic murders by 2010 through successful community-based domestic violence reduction efforts.

Join the Effort

To find out how you can become involved, please contact:

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Information was obtained from the Silent Witness National Initiative web site.