



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contacts:

Helga Luest, WJ, 202-550-5678

Carla Capizzi, Rutgers, 973-353-5263

Art Project at Rutgers University in Newark Provides Unlikely Partners with a New Understanding of Self-Inflicted Violence

University, Federal Government, and Nonprofit Collaborate in Cutting Edge Learning Project

Newark, NJ (February 6, 2009) – In an innovative classroom art project at Rutgers University in Newark, the most culturally diverse university in the country, college students are learning about the taboo topic of self-inflicted violence and will turn their comprehension into a visual “glass book.” This visual representation will then travel to the Washington, DC area this spring to broaden national and federal leaders’ understanding of self-injury and trauma at a conference of the Center for Mental Health Services’ National Center for Trauma-Informed Care, a technical assistance center of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. As national leaders consider approaches to implement trauma-informed care in state mental health systems, the glass books will present a cutting edge approach to a field and city dominated by words as the primary means of communication on trauma. On February 12, 2009, national trauma expert Ruta Mazelis will convene with the students to critique and discuss their creation at Rutgers.

WHO: Book Art students
Nick Kline, Rutgers Newark professor and photographer
Ruta Mazelis, expert on self-inflicted violence
Helga Luest, Witness Justice president & CEO

WHAT: Glass Book Critique and Project Discussion

WHERE: Rutgers University-Newark, [John Cotton Dana Library](#), Dana Room, 4th floor

WHEN: Thursday, February 12, 2009, 3:30-5:30 p.m. (4:30 p.m. photo op)

“The students have given us some incredible insight on how learning happens with regard to trauma issues, and this informs us as we look at creating a cultural shift in human services across the country to one that is trauma-informed and more healing for survivors.” commented Helga Luest, president & CEO of Witness Justice. “Their creative process with community involvement has really given us a lot to consider with regard to these creative paths to healing and learning that can do something that language cannot. This has the ability to reach people and take them to a different place, adding a new dimension to how we communicate to others and foster change.”

“By facilitating a community-oriented learning experience at Rutgers, we’re already able to speak to numerous stakeholders, including the state and federal agencies involved,” said Ian Watson, chair of the Department of Visual and Performing Arts at Rutgers University-Newark. “This project is an unparalleled experience for students and truly demonstrates the worth of community-focused learning.”

The project was conceived by Nick Kline, after many discussions about community and nonprofit work with childhood friend Helga Luest. Kline said, “This project has been fulfilling in unusual ways. I’ve learned a great deal about an issue that affects many trauma survivors, and I’ve been able to facilitate that learning between my students, a national trauma expert, and with mental health administrators throughout the country. Through this project, I’ve seen how the strength of collaboration with communities translates into a fuller learning and life experience – and not just for students.”

At the start of the semester, Kline provided his students a sample of research and writings on self-injury. He also connected with Newark-based nonprofit, [GlassRoots](#), to bring another community component into this project while giving students the unique experience of creating a book made of glass. Kline also invited his students to e-mail questions to self-injury expert Ruta Mazelis. Their challenge, to create a glass book on the topic has led to thought-provoking dialog in the trauma field, reaching outside the field’s normal comfort zone and popular thinking, and informing how to express this issue creatively.

In addition to the event, the class, along with Luest and Mazelis, will tour an exhibit on [Hysteria](#) that recently opened at the university’s Paul Robeson Galleries. The exhibit looks at how women have been depicted, over centuries, with regard to mental health, pathologization, and institutionalization.

Luest and Kline continue to explore ways the department collaboration can expand and benefit students, university, nonprofits, federal agencies, and communities. She is currently working with Rutgers graphic design and multimedia professors on Witness Justice’s outreach materials and also to determine how to best create a dynamic means of communicating beyond the confines of language. Witness Justice will continue to use the glass book project to educate trauma survivors and stakeholders through its myriad outreach measures.

Witness Justice is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide support and advocacy for victims of violence and trauma. For more information, please visit www.WitnessJustice.org.

###