

# Group receiving more calls about teen dating violence

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Phones at the Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team have always been busy.

But they're ringing off the hook these days in the wake of singer Chris Brown's attack on his superstar girlfriend, Rihanna, and the couple's reported reconciliation.

Just last week, "The Oprah Winfrey Show" came calling for the team's expertise on teen dating violence and the pop couple's recent troubles.

But the attention has also been frustrating, the youth-based program director Daphnee Rene said. She's grateful there's more focus on teen dating violence but is bothered by a heavy emphasis on just Rihanna's plight.

"I think it's so disrespectful



Chris Brown    Rihanna

to the average young woman going through this," Rene said, citing a 2004 survey in which 62 percent of respondents reported they know other teens who are or have been in abusive or violent relationships.

The survey was among the issues addressed at a conference the six-year-old group coordinated for girls at DePaul University on Saturday.

"I really don't like myself," a teen girl wept during a self-esteem workshop. Another insisted that some dating vio-

lence is justified, leading to some head-shaking. Team member and Lane Tech student Chelsea Whitis, 17, also brought up a problem the group has combatted since its inception in 2003: "Street harassment and sexual assault is a big issue in the neighborhood that we come from."

The Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team's awareness campaign on the matter resulted in improved lighting on two of the neighborhood's streets and an alliance with businesses to deter loitering.

Since then, the team has taken its campaign to more neighborhoods and has hosted poetry slams, filmed documentaries, published anthologies and led forums addressing other concerns of teen girls.

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March 16, 2009  
Chicago Sun Times