Demanding R-E-S-P-E-C-T in Chicago

Have you ever been catcalled, cornered, or followed when you are on the street? Do boys and older men stare from cars or yell out obscenities as you walk by? Well, 16-year-old Ronnett Lockett and the other girls from the Young Women's Action Team of Chicago (YWAT) have had these problems and they decided that enough was ENOUGH! They stood together and started a movement to stop street harassment in their area.

Teen Voices: How does your Action Team describe street harassment? What does it include?

Ronnett Lockett: Street harassment is when you are catcalled on the street or when someone is doing something that makes you feel uncomfortable when you are walking down the street. When boys try to talk to you and you feel uncomfortable, that's street harassment.

TV: Was it a personal experience that got you interested in dealing with street harassment? If so, what was it?

Ronnett: Every day somebody would say "Hey, shorty, you look good," or "Let me get your number," and it was really aggravating. Even at six in the morning when I'm going to school, people would try to talk to me.

TV: During the time of your participation with YWAT have you seen anything improving?

Ronnett: I have because the men don't do it as much and there aren't that many people hanging out on the streets anymore because the police are out there watching them. So, I can see a lot of improvement.

Survey Says...

The Roger's Park Young Women's Action Team has really done their homework on street harassment! Not only did they decide to fight back, they even wrote a report called Hey, Cutie, Can I Get Your Digits? In this report, they surveyed 168 neighborhood girls in Chicago between the ages of 10-19, and came up with these stats.

- **86%** said that they have been catcalled on the street.
- **58%** said men or boys have harassed them.
- **36%** of those respondents who have been harassed said that this happened once a day or more.
- **53%** felt like they could not do anything to stop street harassment.
- **60%** felt unsafe walking around in Roger's Park.
- **61%** of those who felt unsafe were most uncomfortable at night (8:00 P.M.-midnight).
Ways to Fight Back

Do you want to take action against street harassment, but not sure what to do? First, always consider your safety. If you are in a situation in which you feel unsafe at all, remove yourself from it as quickly as possible. Don't take chances if you are at all unsure.

If you feel safe enough to respond to your harasser because you are with a group of friends or family, and if you are in a place where you will not be alone with your harasser, do the following:

**Name the behavior:** For example, “Do not slap my butt. That is harassment.”

**Name the perpetrator:** “You, the driver of the blue pick-up, do not stare at my breasts.”

**Use confident body language:** Look the harasser in the eye, speak in a strong, clear voice.

**Do not apologize or ask a question:** Don’t say, “Excuse me...” or “Would you...?” or “I’m sorry, but...”

**Do not get into a dialogue with the harasser:** Do not answer any of the harassers’ questions. Simply repeat your statement or leave.

**Do not swear or lose your temper:** For many harassers, the goal is to get a rise out of you. Seeing you get angry or upset just encourages them to continue to harass both you and other people.

These suggestions were adapted from a flyer by the UK Anti-Street Harassment Project.

TV: Do you enjoy being part of this program, and what are you getting out of it?
Ronnet: I love the Young Women's Action Team because all of us have a lot of different ideas and we are all leaders. We have a very good group, and I get a lot out of it. I developed my leadership skills, and I can talk in front of people now. We perform, we have poetry contests, and we also have “He Say, She Say” conferences where we talk about different things that bother both genders.

TV: What made you or the other girls decide that enough was enough?
Ronnet: I think it’s the fact that it’s done so much and so often. It’s bad enough that grown men try to talk to us, but they are even trying to talk to little girls. That's nasty and sick, which is why we do what we do.

TV: What are people saying about your work? Do they enjoy it, or do they disagree with it?
Ronnet: Some people say that we are man-bashers, but it kind of depends on who you are talking to. We also get a lot of positive reactions because we’ve been on the news and in the newspapers so people understand what we are going through and most of them enjoy it.

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**ESCALATION OF STREET HARASSMENT**

| Following, threatening, grabbing, groping, intimidating, raping |
| Ho, you ain't shit! |
| Oh you think you all that! |
| Can't you take a compliment? |
| Come on give me a smile! |
| You look good! |
| Hey Ma! |

This ladder created by the Rogers Park YWAT shows how small comments can escalate to threats and violence.