Though Jonnae Taylor is only 15, the Rogers Park teen has already grown numb to street harassment—she has dealt with it daily since second or third grade. Taylor lives near Howard Street, where sexually explicit comments are frequently made by men who congregate outside storefronts and on street corners. Most women in the area know that walking on Howard means confronting catcalls like "Hey, sexy" and much worse. "It's part of our community," says 15-year-old Crystal Villanueva.

As part of the Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team (YWAT), Villanueva, Taylor and their peers are working to combat this problem. Over the past 11 months, the team has researched street harassment, compiled a report and developed a workshop to help other girls cope with harassment.

In 2002, Friends of Battered Women and Their Children (a Rogers Park domestic violence agency) teamed with Region 1 YouthNet (at the Rogers Park Community Council) and Howard Area Community Center to organize a teen forum during which many girls expressed concerns about rampant harassment on both Morse and Howard. In response, Friends of Battered Women secured a $5,000 grant from the Girl's Best Friend Foundation to launch YWAT. Region 1 YouthNet, Mariame Kaba (Friends of Battered Women's prevention and education manager) recruited eight girls, who researched harassment 20 hours a week for six weeks last summer. "Many of the girls initially thought there was nothing they could do," says Kaba.

Newly formed YWAT developed a survey, collected responses from 168 girls, interviewed 34 girls through focus groups, and compiled their results in a report, "Hey Cutie, Can I Get Your Digits?", which was distributed to key community stakeholders.

The report revealed that catcalling leaves most victims feeling "afraid, uncomfortable and powerless." Eighty-one percent of survey respondents also said they consider Howard and Morse to be the most unsafe streets in Rogers Park, 53 percent felt nothing can stop the problem, and 36 percent said harassment happens more than once a day.

Last December, group members presented their findings at Loyola University's Simpson Living-Learning Center (6333 N. Winthrop). The meeting was attended by more than 60 community members, including representatives of Ald. Joe Moore (49th ward), Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence, Chicago Department of Public Health, National Runaway Switchboard, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and other organizations.

Since completing the research, YWAT members have continued to meet every Thursday evening at Rogers Park Community Council (1530 W. Morse) to plan their next steps. The group now totals about 14 participants aged 13 to 18. "We're fed up," says Shauniece Armstead, 15. "Not a day goes by that we don't get stopped." Adds 16-year-old Jackquette Smith: "When a grown man tries 'getting' with you, it's sick."

The group continues to work on harassment and violence issues in the community, and plans to hold workshops to help elementary-school students cope with street harassment. YWAT is also working with local officials to push for

Members of the Young Women's Action Team meet every Thursday at Rogers Park Community Council.

By Jenna Narango (with Mariame Kaba)
Harassment
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safer streets. In April, the group met with Cook County Commissioner Larry Suffredin and State Representative Harry Osterman (14th District) to voice their concerns and discuss the possibility of launching a special campaign, "Respect for Women and Girls in Rogers Park". They also demanded better lighting and more police patrols on Morse and Howard.

Finally, YWAT is tackling the issue of teen dating violence, conducting research at Stephen F. Gale Community Academy, Roger C. Sullivan High School and St. Scholastica Academy, as well as five schools attended by YWAT members in other communities. As part of the effort, YWAT sponsored a poetry contest about teen dating violence and hosted a May 29 event celebrating the winners at Berger Park Cultural Center (6205 N. Sheridan). Youth ranging from 11 to 19 attended.

Kaba has high hopes that YWAT can help change the way girls and women deal with violence and harassment. As 15-year-old Emilia Whits puts it, "A lot of our friends are facing violence in their relationships. We are dealing with all the issues that affect girls in our communities and we want to do something!"

For more information about YWAT, contact Mariame Kaba at 773.274.5232 ext. 26.

Jenna Naranjo is a graduate student at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism.

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**SUMMARY OF YWAT SURVEY FINDINGS**

Total young women surveyed: 168

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

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<th>Age</th>
<th>22.6% between 10 and 13</th>
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<tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22% Latina/Chicana/Hispanic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10% Asian-American</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5.4% White/Caucasian</td>
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**HARASSMENT**

- 86% catcalled (Hey baby! Hey beautiful!) on the street
- 58% harassed by men or boys on street
- 36% harassed once a day or more
- 54% never responded to catcaller or harasser
- 53% felt helpless to stop harassment
- 60% felt unsafe walking in Rogers Park
- 61% of those who felt unsafe most uncomfortable at night (8pm to 12am)
- 81% deemed Howard or Morse as most unsafe streets in Rogers Park

**SCHOOLS ATTENDED BY RESPONDENTS**

- Roger C. Sullivan High (41) 24%
- Eugene Field Elementary (15) 9%
- Nicholas Senn High (15) 9%
- Stephen F. Gale Academy (14) 8%
- Stephen T. Mather High (9) 5%
- Albert G. Lane High (9) 5%
- Jordan Community Academy (8) 5%
- George B. Armstrong Elementary (5) 3%
- Joyce Kilmer Elementary (5) 3%

TOTAL 71%