



CJ Marshall | The Houstonian

## GCJD combines art with awareness for Ignite the Night

**ABIGAIL VENTRESS**  
Senior Reporter

Last night, the Global Center for Journalism and Democracy hosted their biggest sexual assault awareness event for their Start by Believing campaign, Ignite the Night.

"We had a really passionate group of people that showed up," Executive Director of the Global Center for Journalism and Democracy Kelli Arena said. "According to folks who have done this in the past years in support of sexual assault awareness month, we are told that we have gathered the largest crowd ever."

Arena welcomed the crowd with a brief introduction of the order of the events planned for the night and welcomed University Police Department Officer Keith Underwood to the stage to share a personal story. Underwood shared the story of his first response to a sexual assault crime and discussed the importance of dealing with sexual assault properly.

"It's really hard as a victim, and I've been there twice actually, to come up and tell your story; it's really hard to tell someone something that is so intimate," graduate student in the forensic science department and sexual assault survivor Morgan Yourgal said. "When the first response

is 'why did you put yourself in that situation?' it makes it really hard, so instantly victims blame themselves and that's the worst thing they can do."

An Austin-based band, Rattletree, was welcomed to the stage next to perform music from Zimbabwe in southern Africa. Rattletree recently won "Best World Music" at the Austin Music Awards, and encouraged the audience to be engaged, dance to the beat and demonstrated how they make their rhythms.

"I think my favorite part was when the musicians played because it was very different and I'd never seen anything like it before," junior Amy Armstrong said. "It was very entertaining."

NobleMotion Dance followed Rattletree with a contemporary dance duet choreographed by Dionne Sparkman Noble and Andy Noble. The dancers, Jared Doster and Victoria DeRenzo, projected the importance of trust within a relationship.

"It was really diverse, and I like that they brought something that could bring out everyone from around campus because there was something for everyone," sophomore Morgan Dietz said. "It was really well-rounded and it came together well."

CoMeTry also performed at the event with a combination of both poetry and stand-up comedy. They did a variety of poems and

appropriate comedy bits that went along with the general themes of sexual assault awareness month.

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- Morgan Yourgal  
Sexual Assault Survivor

"I liked the variety of things they had going on," Education Coordinator for the Huntsville SAAFE House Victoria White said. "I know that sexual assault can often times be really heavy content, so CoMeTry being there to lighten the mood, [while] still promoting the message of non-violence and self-acceptance and self-love was amazing."

The crowd consisted of a variety of students, faculty and entertainers. Several organizations attended to show their support for the cause.

"I came [to Ignite the Night] because it's a modern issue and I feel like the event provided new information on the topic," freshman Matt Lopez said. "I think having the comedy there really gave a relief to the topic and added a lot as well."

NobleMotion Dance provided another dance choreographed by Andy Noble and performed by Brittany Thetford Deveau. The performance showed the stages of progressing confidence throughout a victim's journey toward healing.

"For me, this event is an awesome time for students and faculty to come together to show their solidarity for victims," White said. "I really appreciated the variety of the show, and I think that the students did an awesome job by coming out to support the event. And shout out to the committee that put this together and publicized as much and as hard as they did to get this turn out tonight."

According to White, rape is one of the most underreported crimes. White also said it is not unusual for victims to avoid coming out publicly about their assault.

"For those students who have been victimized, sexually

assaulted, or raped to see pictures circulating around the school website—to see articles in papers like the Houstonian—to have their faculty, their classmates, and their advisors coming together and saying 'what happened to you and every other victim is not okay; you didn't deserve that and we want you to know that we stand behind you and we are really pushing for and hoping the best for you and your process and your journey to healing' may mean so much to a victim who never felt comfortable or confident enough to come out," White said. "To see the support they're given by events like Ignite the Night is tremendous."

After all of the performances, White and Melanie Jackman from the Montgomery County Women's Center gave closing remarks and the participants prepared to march as a group in honor of sexual assault awareness and the survivors. Participants were given glow sticks to wear around their necks as they walked to the courthouse where opportunity drawings for prizes such as a free self-defense class were drawn for.

"The actual cause itself, victimization, is why I came out," sophomore Ross Phillips said. "It succeeded my expectations a lot; I didn't know it was going to be that good."

## Why we should #StartbyBelieving: Listen to the victims



**MORGAN GARZA**  
GCJD

It's 2016, and yet many survivors of sexual violence are still made to feel as if they are responsible for the assault, or worse.

The way a person responds to someone who reports a sexual assault can make a dramatic difference in the healing process, and in whether or not that crime is reported.

That's why Sam Houston State's Global Center for Journalism and Democracy chose to support the 'Start by Believing' project. The movement is dedicated to changing the way society responds to rape and sexual assault in their communities.

"The campaign was first brought to our attention by the University Police Department as a possible candidate for a national

movement to join when discussing the topic of sexual assault," Jesse Starkey, the program manager for the Global Center for Journalism and Democracy said. "We need to change the message of how people treat survivors."

Victim advocates say knowing how to respond is critical, because a negative response can worsen the trauma and allow perpetrators to get away with their crimes.

If a survivor is accused of lying, or of causing the assault, he or she will be less likely to report.

Sexual assault experts say one failed response can amount to five more victims. That's because

rapists attack an average of six times.

The "Start by Believing" campaign started in 2011, and has grown rapidly.

According to the organization's website, more than 130 communities in the U.S. and many others around the globe are involved. On April 6, the campaign is declaring the very first, worldwide Start by Believing day.

The website suggests involvement through making a commitment to start by believing on social media. In addition, supporters can build their own

campaigns and share their personal stories. More instructions and tips are available on [startbybelieving.org](#).

Start by Believing is sponsored by the End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI), an organization dedicated to improving the criminal justice response to violence against women on every level.

Join GCJD and Start by Believing.

## Sexual Assault Awareness Month #startbybelieving

### What is the Global Center for Journalism and Democracy?

**ANGELA THEIS**  
GCJD

The Global Center for Journalism and Democracy works to strengthen communities by training and engaging journalists, civil society, students and educators. GCJD supplements this effort by raising awareness of relevant issues in the local community through media campaigns, demonstrations and events.

Run by former CNN journalist Kelli Arena, the Executive Director of GCJD, the center focuses on nurturing democracy and civic engagement through journalism.

Every semester the Global Center partners with The Houstonian to advocate for their particular social justice cause or aspect of civic engagement through a series of articles written by students and community members.

This semester the center is focusing on Sexual Assault Awareness Month and the Start by Believing Campaign. April is

Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and this campaign is a public awareness campaign designed to change the way we respond to rape and sexual assault in our communities.

The effort will be aimed at educating citizens and law enforcement to respond in a more productive way so that reporting of the crimes increases. #StartByBelieving will feature a variety of events throughout April.

The goal of this partnership is to inform the Sam Houston State community on various aspects of sexual assaults and the people they effect through educational articles written by students, as well as firsthand accounts from a victim and a local law enforcement officer.

The center will be shedding a light on topics often stigmatized by the public. By bringing attention of these issues to the Bearkat family, Arena hopes that students and the community will realize this is a community effort.

"This is a problem we must strive to conquer together," Arena said on the topic of sexual assault.

Past causes and campaigns have

included immigration, mental health awareness and modern day slavery. With every passing semester, the Global Center hopes to continually foster education and understanding of issues that affect every level of society.