

SURVIVORS: students pave future

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"We've done them in the past and students don't regularly come," Wolfson commented on the lack of support groups. "A few students get interested in and then there's nobody else to keep the group going so we don't do that."

Wolfson noted that the counselors do offer one-on-one sessions for students who want counseling.

Pennell felt differently. "The counseling, in general, is almost kind of a joke the way the system is. It's the system, not the people in the system, it's the system," he noted. "They don't seem to use empathy."

After two terms of difference and miscommunication, Wolfson is interested in helping Link's dream bloom into a reality.

"This is not a club," Link firmly stated. "This is a support group that Ellen (Wolfson) is going to be involved with."

Now Link is faced with a brand new wave of challenges: getting the word out about their first meeting, which will be held on the April 28 from noon to 1 p.m. in CC127, and getting the students to come in.

"I don't want anyone to be ashamed or afraid or in anyway inhibited from coming to this meeting," Link stressed. "If they don't want to be acknowledged outside of the meeting, I won't acknowledge them."

The first meeting is about finding out what the community of CCC wants from this support group. Such things like what days and times would work best and what format should be used.

"Groups are run lots of different ways," Wolfson stated. "Groups run like an AA group where it's everyone who has a commonality and they're just checking in and then sharing with each other. Some groups are run where they want speakers and they want to read a book together, they want to assess each other's situations. It just depends on how this group wants to form."

"This is just an initial... 'Hey what do you want from this?' meeting," Link said.

"I think it would help," student Sarah Cook said. "I think that even having one person there for you saying, 'I know how you feel.' That's someone you can talk to. Someone who is right there, looking you in the eyes and saying, 'Talk to me please because I need help too.' That's what it's about."

But, like all good things there are complications. One of the problems Wolfson and Link are facing is whether this sexual assault support group should be co-ed.

"The biggest concern... men and women?" Link asked. "Are we okay with the one universal understanding group?"

"There are groups that are formed where women feel like they just want to have women who have had similar experiences be there and discuss the issues around what happened and where the barriers are in their life and feel like having men in the group might be intimidating or they might feel too vulnerable," Wolfson stated. "If it ends up being mixed we may never know who would've joined it if it isn't."

"That's one question we want answered by the community," Link said.

"Anyone is welcome, in my opinion," Link said. "I will not turn away anyone who says 'this has affected me and I need help.' I'm not going to say, 'Well it didn't happen to you.'"

"Everyone gets a chance," Cook stated. This means even if you're a family member or a friend of someone who has been assaulted, they can attend the meetings.

"And don't believe men can't be raped too," Pennell said. "Men can be raped just as well as women."

"You could be a big giant," he continued. "(A) muscle-bound wrestler who knows all the escape techniques and (rapists will) find whatever personal thing is wrong with you and they'll use it to make you feel vulnerable, to make you feel scared and make you feel like you can't get out of it. Like it's inevitable and once your body gives, once your mind gives up on your body, it's a free for all."



Nick Kornafel Clackamas

Sarah Cook (left) and Elizabeth "Libby" Link (right), both students who are concerned about the lack of a sexual assault support group on campus, meet in the community center.

"The longer you don't deal with it, the worse it is when you do, and the more damage you could do to yourself," Pennell warned.

"It hurt the entire family," Cook said when recalling the time her sister-like cousin was raped when she was 15. She explained how her cousin became heavily addicted to drugs and would steal from other family members.

"It was the worst thing," Cook explained, "and I kept saying, 'Please, you know, I want to spend time with you. I wanna be your family, but you can't be on drugs and be around me because it's just not you.'"

Her cousin ended up staying two-and-a-half years at a women's correctional facility in Wilsonville to deal with her addiction. She's married now and has a family of her own, but it's still hard for her to have intimate relations with her husband.

"And, all because of one night, 10 minutes of her life," Cook stated. "So, even once can break apart an entire family not just one person. Everyone who loves them."

"I'm the go to guy, the therapist of the group, so I hear everyone's everything," Pennell said.

Because of the role he has in his group, he is used to answering late night phone calls from his friends; he relates one of the most jarring stories he remembers from five years ago.

"She was scared out of her mind," he remembered her saying. "'What am I doing? I can't stop. It hurts.'"

He was only 18 at the time and did the only thing he could think about doing - a three-way call to 911. He apologized to them for not knowing where she was and relayed to them what his friend had told him.

"The operator basically kinda took over," he recalled. "I was there for moral support, especially when she started going, 'I don't want to talk to you; I want to talk to Mitch. I don't want to talk to you; I want to talk to Mitch.'"

Between him and the 911 operator they got his friend to calm down, file a report and get her to the hospital. Since then, Pennell has acted as the go-to guy/therapist of his group of friends.

"The first time I was raped I was three, four at the oldest," Link began. "I didn't know what was going on. I didn't know what it was. I didn't know what sex was. I didn't know what he was doing. All I know is now I can't handle facial hair. If my boyfriend kisses me and his facial hair is too long, I freak and that's not fair. He's really understanding but I don't like that."

think my mom could handle... "That was absolutely horrible," she continued. "I remember in great detail. I didn't realize it was wrong because I was taught you can be naked in front of other women. I was only 13. I didn't know about the men when growing up."

"Third time I was raped, in my early 20s and it was my roommate," Link stated. "I did that for revenge. That was really bad. (The rapist) was my roommate, but his fiancée gested it, she was the master. And unfortunately, the fiancée was a former CCC student. That's what met her."

But, Link is not forming a support group to feel good about her. "I'm doing this because I know there are other people who've been through what I've been through and I know how much hurt," she explained. "They're to be feeling it too; crying the same tears, having the same nightmares, living with the same pain I live with."

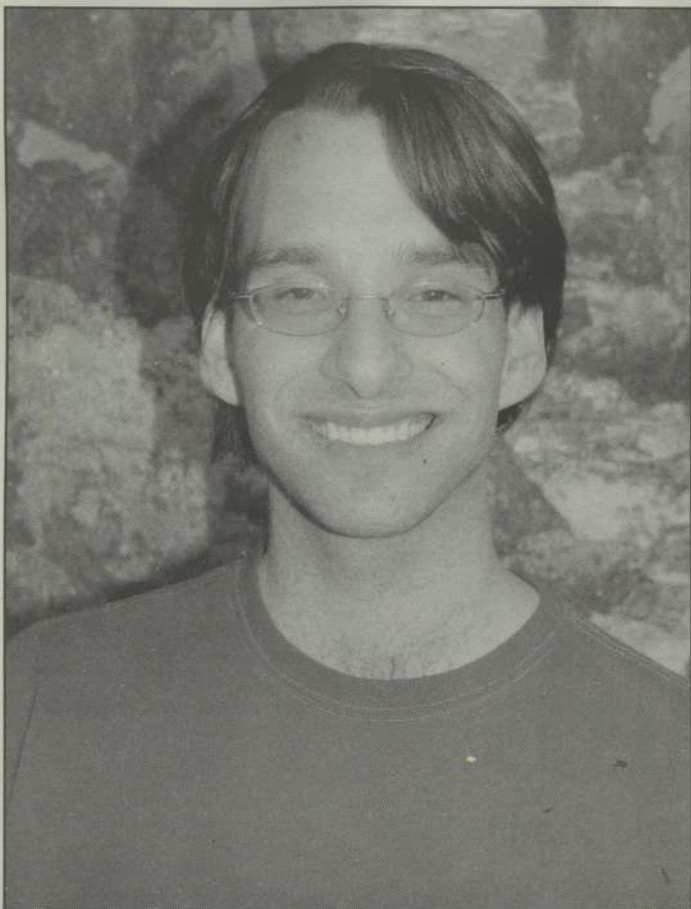
"It's all painful, it's all horrible and none of it should have happened to any of us," Link stated, "but we all need each other because there's victims and survivors. I'm a survivor. I want to help the victims become survivors, 'cause I know that all can be. They just don't know how to be."

It is Link's dream to build a support group, have it become a permanent resource for both low students, as well as for students who have not yet graduated at CCC.

"I don't want anyone to be ashamed or afraid or in anyway inhibited from coming to this meeting."

Elizabeth "Libby" Link Student

"Second time I was raped, I was eight, and it was by a woman," she recalled. "I went to my mom and said I didn't like her games, 'cause she called them games. My mother told me 'Play her games anyway, she's a guest in this house.' And, I still to this day can't bring it to myself to tell my mom what her games really were, 'cause I don't



PENNELL

Sexual Assault Support Group
 First meeting
 April 28
 Noon - 1 p.m.
 CC127