

## **The Mary Foundation together with Danish youth fight dating violence**

**Dating violence has many faces. Every year, 40,000 young Danes are yelled at, shoved, controlled or sexually violated by their partner. In order to do something with this problem and the silence surrounding it, we have to broaden our knowledge and understanding of what dating violence is and how we can help the youth in ensuring their relationships are healthy ones. Decision makers, opinion leaders, teachers and students were among the conference participants who were motivated to continue the discussion and debate with their peers in order to find new ways to prevent and reduce dating violence.**

Copenhagen, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009: The Mary Foundation's conference at the Royal Library aims to increase focus on the problem of dating violence in Denmark. Danish and international experts presented the most recent knowledge and research in the area for more than 300 attendees, which also included participants in The Foundation's Youth Think Tank.

Dating violence is very often associated with silence and taboo. The young victims often feel completely alone with the problem and isolated socially. They keep silent and feel shameful and guilty because they chose the wrong partner.

"We were shocked when The National Institute of Public Health last year published a report stating how large and how overlooked the problem of dating violence is in Denmark. Dating violence is linked with silence, shame and guilt. We hope through listening to the youth and actively involving them; so it is their meaning and words that help us to better understand the problem, its extent and consequences; we can reduce the level of taboo associated with dating violence. We want to work with the youth to find new ways to prevent and reduce this violence", said Her Royal Highness The Crown Princess in her opening address.

Five months ago, The Mary Foundation established a Youth Think Tank. More than 500 young people were invited from schools, universities and workplaces to contribute to the better understanding of dating violence by sharing their views and experiences. These contributions were collected primarily through web based questionnaires and focus group interviews.

Today's conference aims to support the valuable work being conducted by a number of experts, institutions and organizations in the area of dating violence. In addition, the participating schools leave the conference with new knowledge and material to create class discussions of the problem. This gives the students the opportunity, for example to hold a theme day where the students set the agenda with support from their teachers, parents and other important influencers.

The Mary Foundations Conference was held today from 9 am – 1 pm. It included input from The Foundation's Youth Think Tank, an opening address by H.R.H. The Crown Princess and a speech by the Danish Minister of Justice. Participants also heard from Danish experts and a representative from Liz Claiborne Inc. – a United States organization renowned for its work with respect to domestic violence and dating abuse.