



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 20, 2010

Contact:

Helga Luest: p: 202-550-5678

National GlassBook Project Begins by Breaking Barriers in New Jersey

Rutgers University students create art objects that lessen mental health stigma and discrimination

Newark, NJ – A national effort is underway to lessen the stigma and discrimination that occurs when survivors of violence and trauma respond to difficult life events by coping in ways that are often misunderstood. The GlassBook Project, a joint initiative of Rutgers-University in Newark’s Department of Arts, Culture and Media, and Witness Justice, will be launched at a campus reception on Jan. 28, 2010. The goal: To reshape how people generally think about and respond to survivors and individuals with mental health concerns, shifting the question, “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?”

Informed by individuals who live through traumatic experiences and then respond with self injury, addiction, eating disorders, isolation, hyper-vigilance, and more, students, who are enrolled in a book arts course taught by Rutgers-Newark faculty member Nick Kline, create books made of glass about the trauma response topic. The books are then exhibited in communities to tell the stories of survival and to build understanding. The NJ State project will focus on changes in relationships that occur following domestic violence, which is significant because this impacts a survivor’s support network, health and wellbeing.

The initial collection has been on exhibit nonstop since March 2009, and in October the books were the showcase exhibit at SAMHSA’s Voice Awards at Paramount Theater in Hollywood. The Glass Book Project was even highlighted as one of the best mental health innovations in the country by the journal *Mental Health Weekly*.

The New Jersey Governor's Council on Mental Health Stigma has recognized the potential of this project and is collaborating with project partners, making New Jersey the first state in the country to implement the Project, with many community partners statewide supporting the effort, and numerous other states wanting to follow suit. The state has committed to supporting exhibits featuring the students’ work in numerous venues throughout the state. The initial collection of glass books on the topic of self injury are currently on exhibit in the John Cotton Dana Library, on the Rutgers-Newark Campus, through March 1, 2010.

Exhibition and Event Information

Date: Thursday, January 28, 2010

Time: 4-6 pm

Location: Dana Library, Rutgers University-Newark, 185 University Avenue, Newark, NJ

RSVP Requested: to Christine Ingram: cingram@andromeda.rutgers.edu [mailto:](#)

Some of the more notable speakers and attendees at the reception include:

- **Steven Diner**, Chancellor, Rutgers University-Newark
- **Celina Gray**, Executive Director of the NJ Governor's Council on Mental Health Stigma
- **Sandra Estepa**, Region II Coordinator for the Office of Women’s Health/DHHS
- **Nick Kline**, Artist, Conceptual Creator and Instructor, Rutgers University-Newark
- **Helga Luest**, Founder/President & CEO, Witness Justice
- **Congressman Donald Payne** (D-NJ), US Congress (remarks read)
- **Yvonne Pressley**, New Jersey State Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health Services
- **Carol Vacile**, New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, Office on the Prevention of Violence Against Women, Division on Women

- **Student artists from the first collection (self injury) and the NJ State project (changed relationships after domestic violence)**

Further Information

The GlassBook Project began in January 2009 when students in an elective book arts class were challenged by Nick Kline, artist and conceptual creator of the GlassBook Project -- who also teaches at Rutgers -- to listen to survivors who self injure, and then create books made of glass on the topic. The four-week effort was transformational – not only to the students, but even to state mental health commissioners as the books made their way to federal meetings.

With the recognition and support from the Center for Mental Health Services, SAMHSA/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Project received seed money to develop a GlassBook Project curriculum that could be implemented nationally. Funding for the national implementation is something the GlassBook Project partners are working hard to achieve so that every state and territory in the country can and will participate.

The GlassBook Project is a program of Witness Justice and Rutgers University-Newark, Department of Arts, Culture and Media. Witness Justice is a national nonprofit organization providing support and advocacy for survivors of violence and trauma. Rutgers University is the state university of New Jersey, with the Newark campus being the most culturally diverse in the country. Curriculum development for the GlassBook Project was funded by the Center for Mental Health Services, SAMHSA/DHHS. More information about the GlassBook Project and images of the glass books from the first collection on self injury can be found at www.GlassBookProject.org.