

## Consent conversation is a step in the right direction, but cannot stop there

Sex without consent is never okay. This certainty unites all of Guilford's recent efforts toward changing students' approach to consent.

The issue is not an easy one to solve, especially with many varied and conflicting approaches. However, because of the conviction of everyone working on this issue, Guilford is on its way toward a much-improved approach to sex, communication and accountability.



**BY CLARE FORRISTER**  
STAFF WRITER

"We have people unified in promoting (consent) in a society that has a hard time with that issue," said Assistant Dean of Career and Community Learning Alan Mueller. "But, there are more areas to educate and teach advocacy. Where are the places that we're not reaching? Who sees this as just a t-shirt, and who sees that it is a way of living?"

Things are looking up, but this uphill battle will only ever reach victory if people take advantage of the momentum and continue working together to reach the goal of a safer, more informed campus.

Last spring, after Guilford was placed on the list of colleges under federal investigation for policies toward sexual assault, the administration began making changes. However, the change started even earlier than that with a letter written by Sexual Assault Awareness Support & Advocacy to the administration last fall demanding an improvement in campus policy.

Now, Guilford is committed more than ever to educating students about consent, creating an ongoing dialogue, and going through the proper motions when something goes wrong.

"I'd like students to understand that our primary focus is supporting them and assisting them and that we investigate as much as (necessary) to get the answers that are out there and to make a solid decision," said Interim Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students Jen Agor in an email interview.

The problem is being tackled from different angles, such as that of the administration, the judicial system, student affairs and students themselves. All sides must cooperate to create an effective response to the problems of the past.

This year's consent campaign is one such effort. It aims to coordinate educational activities about consent into one comprehensive plan. Everyone should get behind the campaign's cause.

"(The point of the campaign is) to promote consent and prevent sexual violence by encouraging consent as a positive and necessary part of all sexual relations,

and relations in general," said sophomore Molly Anne Marcotte, a peer health and wellness educator who works on the campaign.

Marcotte points out that one hindrance to survivors of sexual assault is that they don't know where to seek help.

"It is important to continue promoting information across campus about the ways in which we support survivors," said Marcotte in an email interview. "Many students, survivors or otherwise ... are simply unaware that Guilford has such extensive support options available."

Change has begun, but for students' sakes, it must continue.

"The conversation needs to be ongoing," said Julie Winterich, chair of women's, gender & sexuality studies, in an email interview. "For students, that means having honest conversations about gender, expectations about partying, hook-ups and sex, and under what conditions one can and cannot give consent."

Many forget that issue of consent is not only about sexual assault. Consent applies in many situations.

"Consent is an agreement," said sophomore and treasurer of SAASA Colin Nollet. "It just isn't one-sided. A lot of the time people say 'you need to ask for consent,' but you also need to give it. It's about communication because you can't assume you know what the other person's thinking."

Junior and SAASA member Marek Wojtala is concerned about sexual assault on Guilford's campus but can see a positive outcome ahead.

"I'm hopeful," said Wojtala. "What's making me optimistic right now is President Jane Fernandes recognizing that this is a huge issue. And, I think Guilford's hand is kind of forced, after being named as being under review for how we handle sexual assault. They have to do something about it."

Guilford is not the only college grappling with this issue.

According to The New York Times, President Obama gave a speech on Sept. 19 about sexual assault on college campuses. Obama called for "a fundamental shift in our culture."

Guilford has already begun that shift.

"All colleges need to have these conversations," said Winterich. "I believe Guilford is well-poised to show leadership about how to have these open discussions across our community."

Practicing consent means giving and having the freedom to say no. That freedom is essential, and if Guilford continues to rally around it, we can pave the way to a college community that is safer and better for everyone here.

## Bureaucracy endangers mental health care in North Carolina

**"Jail is no place for people with mental health problems, but that's where too many of them are ending up right now. That's where we're putting them because we're not given the money to do what we'd like to do, what we really should be doing for them."**

**Kay Cashion, Guilford County commissioner to the News & Record**

The North Carolina state government is weighing the fate of public mental health care facilities and potentially shutting down locally controlled centers in a bid for "efficiency."



**BY BANNING WATSON**  
STAFF WRITER

The state of North Carolina currently hosts nine state-run local management entities (LMEs), but that number could be dropped to four as soon as next year if the proposed consolidation passes the General Assembly.

This bid for consolidation comes as a result of ongoing budget cuts, with another nearly \$25 million cut from the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services 2014-15 budget, which funds the LMEs.

Many people, including mental health care professionals, believe this cutting and consolidation is a mistake and is going to cause serious damage to the North Carolina population as a whole through knock-on effects in increased crime, recidivism, homelessness and use of the jails and prisons to house the mentally ill.

This round of proposed consolidation follows on the heels of previous efforts, including the forced merger of Guilford Center into the Sandhills Center in 2013. Around that time, the director of the Guilford Center stepped down, citing budget cuts and damage to patient care.

One unintended result of this merger was that many people lost access to care and, with nowhere else to go, landed in the local justice system.

"Jail is no place for people with mental health problems," said Kay Cashion, Guilford county commissioner to The News & Record. "But, that's where too many of them are ending up right now. That's where we're putting them because we're not given the money to do what we'd like to do, what we really should be doing for them."

Keep in mind that this is just the effect of two small organizations being merged. It is difficult to imagine the effect of more extensive consolidation across the entire state.

Some LMEs such as Coastal Care, serving five counties in eastern N.C., don't know exactly what to expect from the consolidation or whether there will be personnel reductions.

"It's in the weeds right now," said Kate Murphy, communications specialist and media representative for Coastal Care. "The individuals receiving services are our top priority."

Other LMEs such as Eastpointe, covering 12 eastern N.C. counties, seem more optimistic about the change.

"Ultimately, consolidation will provide a number of benefits, including cost savings for the state," said Penny Casto, media representative for Eastpointe, via email. "Providers will benefit from standardization and streamlined processes."

There is, so far, very little evidence to suggest that savings can be achieved without significant loss of access to quality care.

As for streamlining procedures, Victoria Whitt, chief executive officer of Sandhills, and Casto begged to differ. Loss of local input is a big red flag.

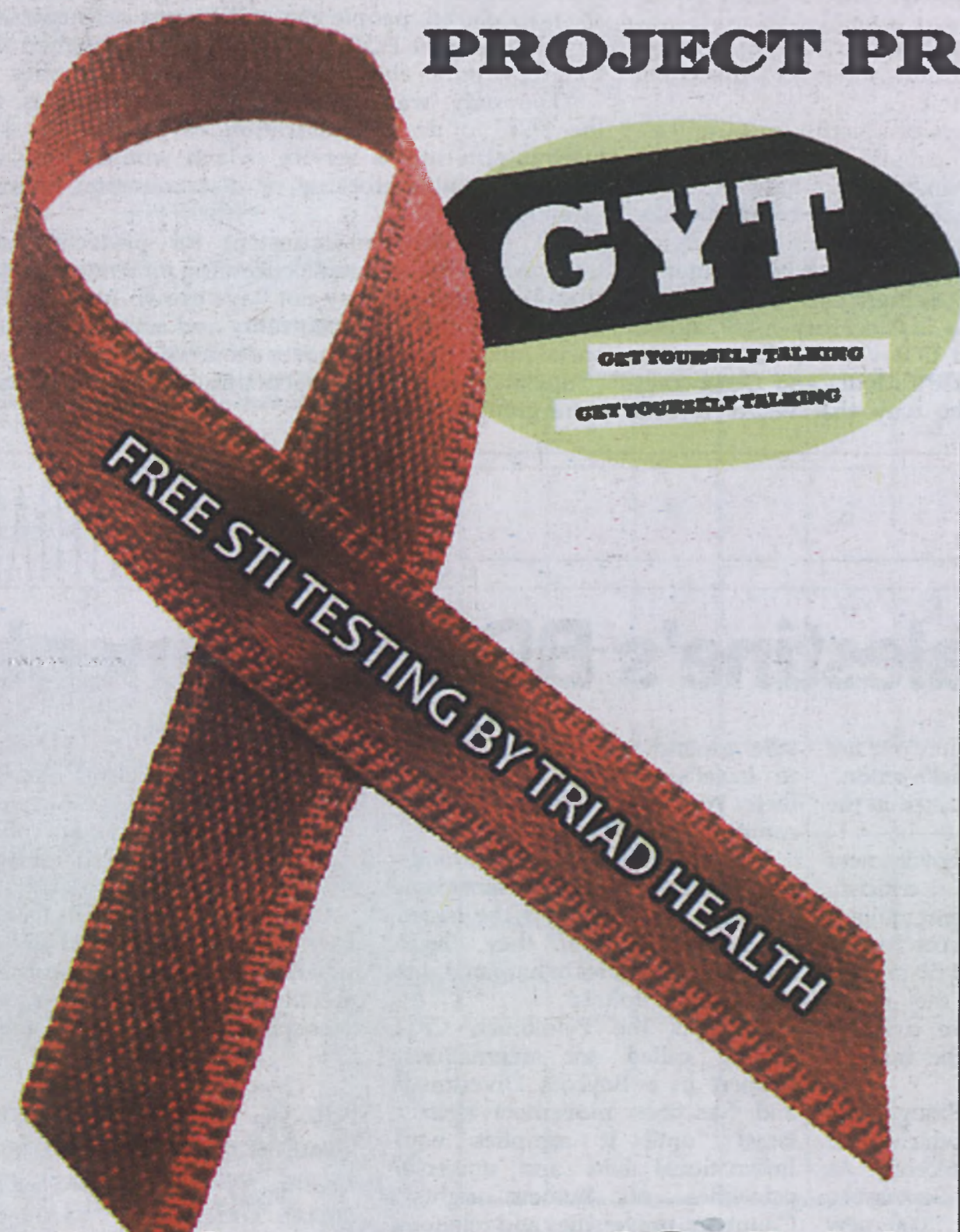
"Bigger gets away from local management and makes it harder to keep management in the community," Whitt said.

The major problem is that many people are not well-informed on this issue and, as a result, it's happening quietly, relentlessly and without public approval.

Cathie Witty, counselor for the center for continuing education, expects it will keep happening unless we, as a community, speak up.

"It's the state legislature strangle-holding part of the budget they think they can get away with," said Witty. "Which they can if Guilford's not going to take a stand and fight back."

## COMMUNITY AIDS AWARENESS PROJECT PRESENTS:



**Wednesday**  
**Oct. 1**  
**Community Center**  
**10 a.m. - 1 p.m.**

**SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR PARTICIPATING PARTNERS**



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