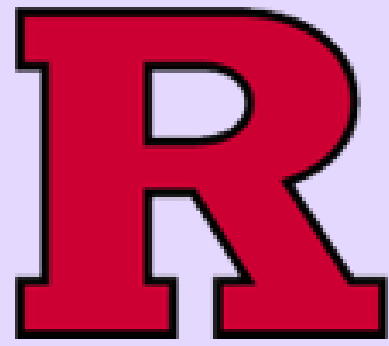


Empowering Women Veterans Through Hygiene Support



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Law and Advocacy
Policy Track
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RUTGERS–NEW BRUNSWICK

Institute for Women's Leadership

The Leadership Scholars Certificate Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program that prepares Rutgers undergraduate women to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders.

Leadership Scholars design and implement social action projects to expand their understanding of issues and problems and to develop leadership skills.

This project gives Scholars the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained about leadership, advocacy, and social change with the practical and experiential knowledge they have developed about a particular policy issue or problem through the field site placement. It also further develops leadership skills by giving undergraduates the opportunity to *practice* leadership *through* action.

To find out more please visit the Institute for Women's Leadership's website at <http://iwl.rutgers.edu>.

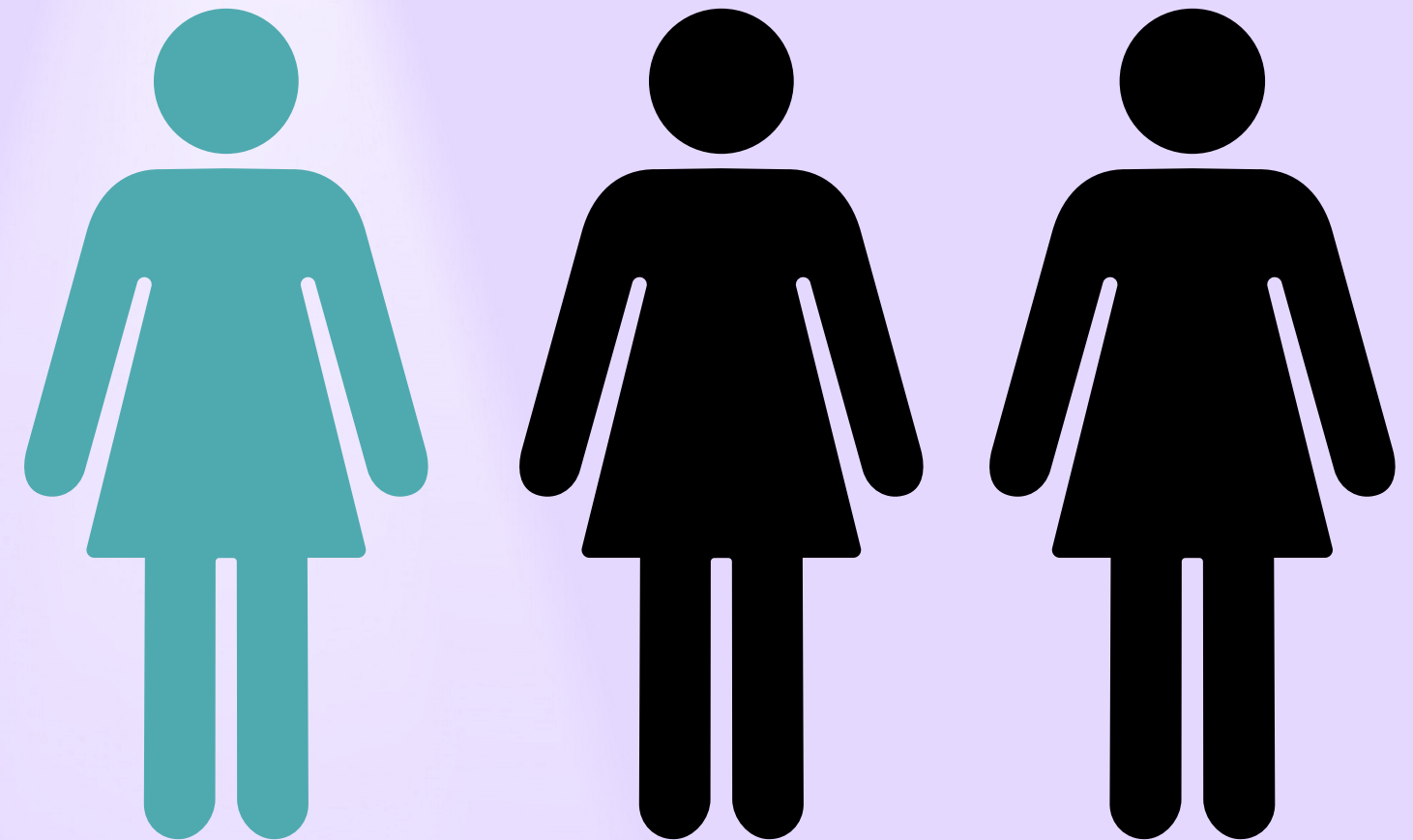
MISSION STATEMENT AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

To support women veterans who have experienced Military Sexual Trauma (MST) by providing essential hygiene products and raising awareness about the systemic and personal challenges they face.



Background Information

- What is Military Sexual Trauma (MST)?
- 1 in 3 Women report experiencing MST
 - Higher than national average
- Female MST victims are 9x more likely to develop PTSD
 - Increased risk for other health issues
- Only 30% of female MST victims report the crime to the D.o.D.



Scope and Purpose

1. **Address the unmet needs** of women veterans who have experienced Military Sexual Trauma (MST).
2. **Provide practical support** through hygiene care packages.
3. **Raise public awareness** about the systemic and personal challenges faced by MST survivors.
4. **Foster community engagement and advocacy** to bridge the gap between military and civilian understanding of MST.



Accomplishments

- **Care Packages Delivered:**

- Assembled and distributed 50 fully stocked hygiene care packages tailored to women veterans in the Lyons VA MST program.

- **Community Engagement:**

- Successfully partnered with the Rutgers Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services to host the event and amplify outreach efforts.

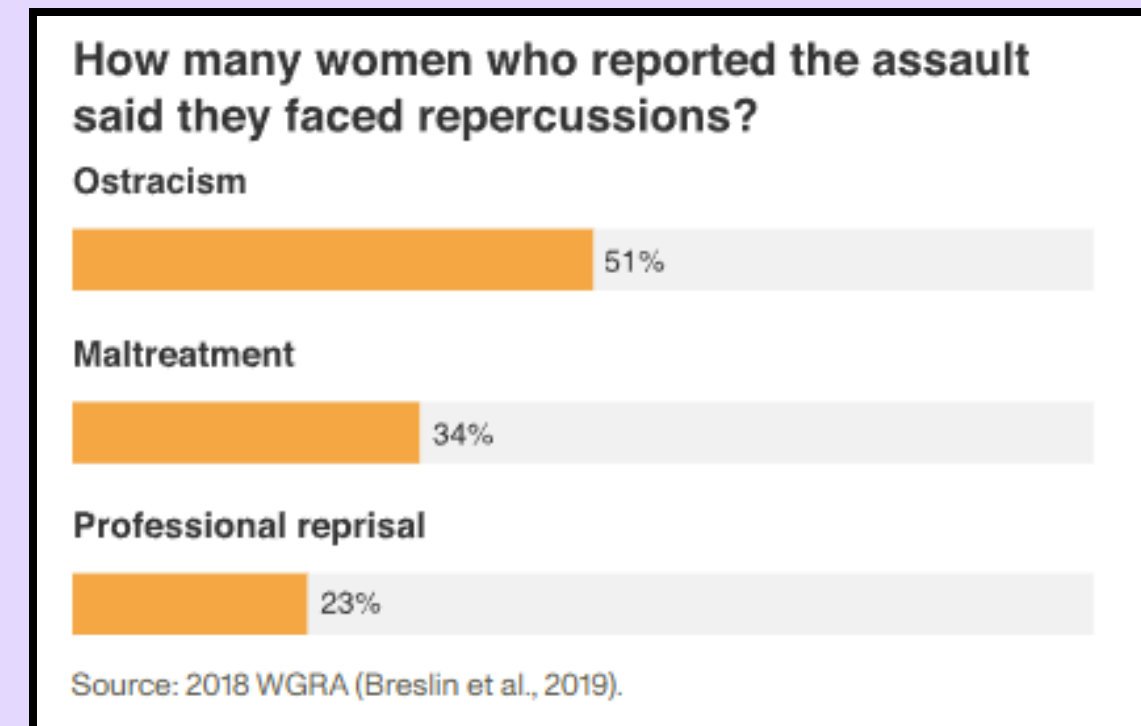
- **Event Highlights:**

- Hosted an event on November 6th that brought together volunteers, veterans, and community members to raise awareness and assemble care packages.
- Created a welcoming environment with food, decorations, and collaboration.



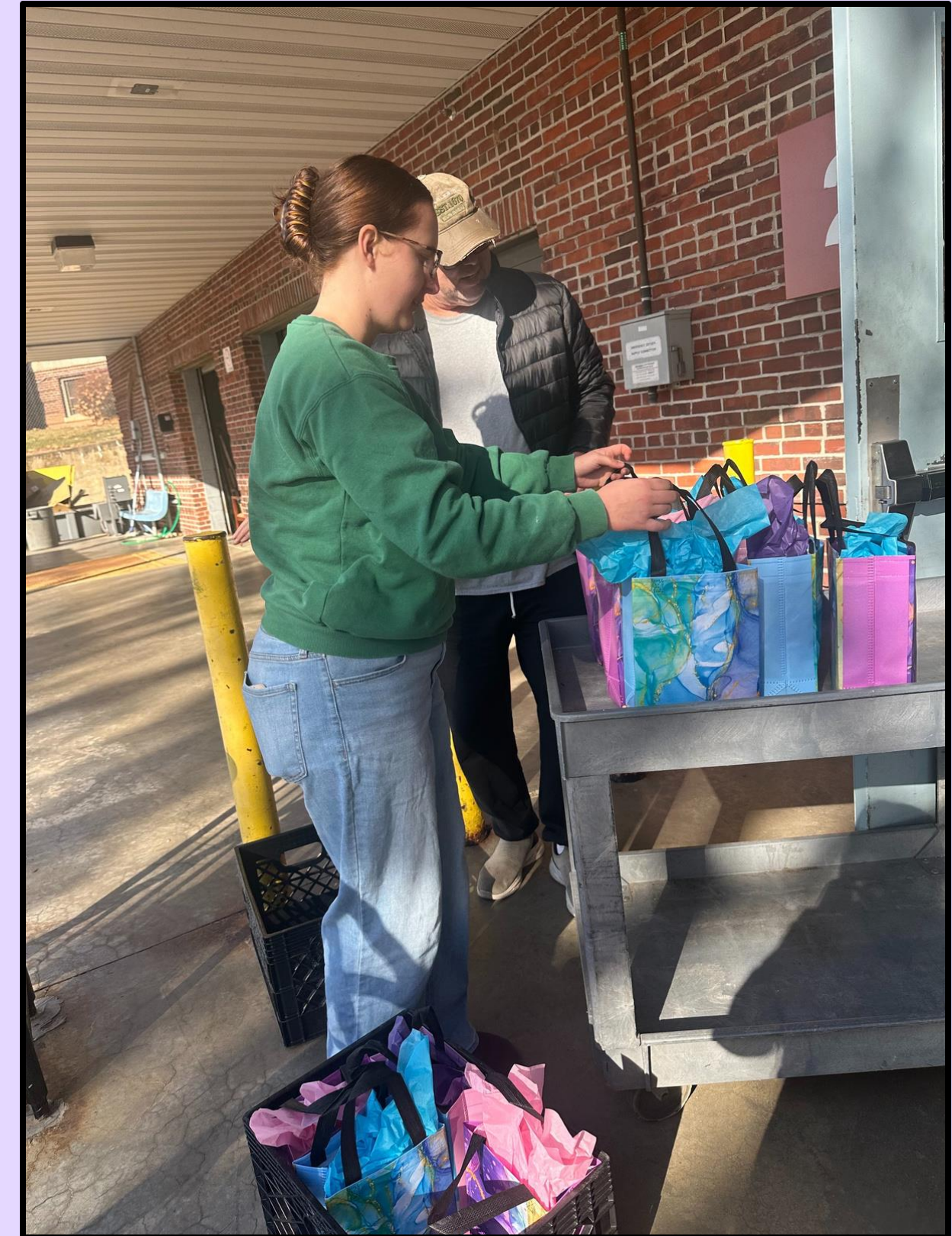
Research Foundations

- **Military Sexual Trauma: The Military's Silent Battlefield by Rosie Savage**
 - MST stems from systemic issues in military institutions
 - Barriers to reporting and receiving support due to fear of retaliation or stigma.
- **The Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences and Warfare Exposure on Military Sexual Trauma Among Veterans by Kimberly McCarthy**
 - Veterans with prior trauma, such as childhood adversity, are at higher risk of experiencing MST
 - Survivors frequently endure long-term physical and mental health effects, including PTSD, anxiety, and chronic pain.
- **Youth Activist Toolkit by Renee Gasch and Julia Reticker-Flynn**
 - Collective Action: Focused on engaging community members to create a network of support for MST survivors.



Feminist Leadership

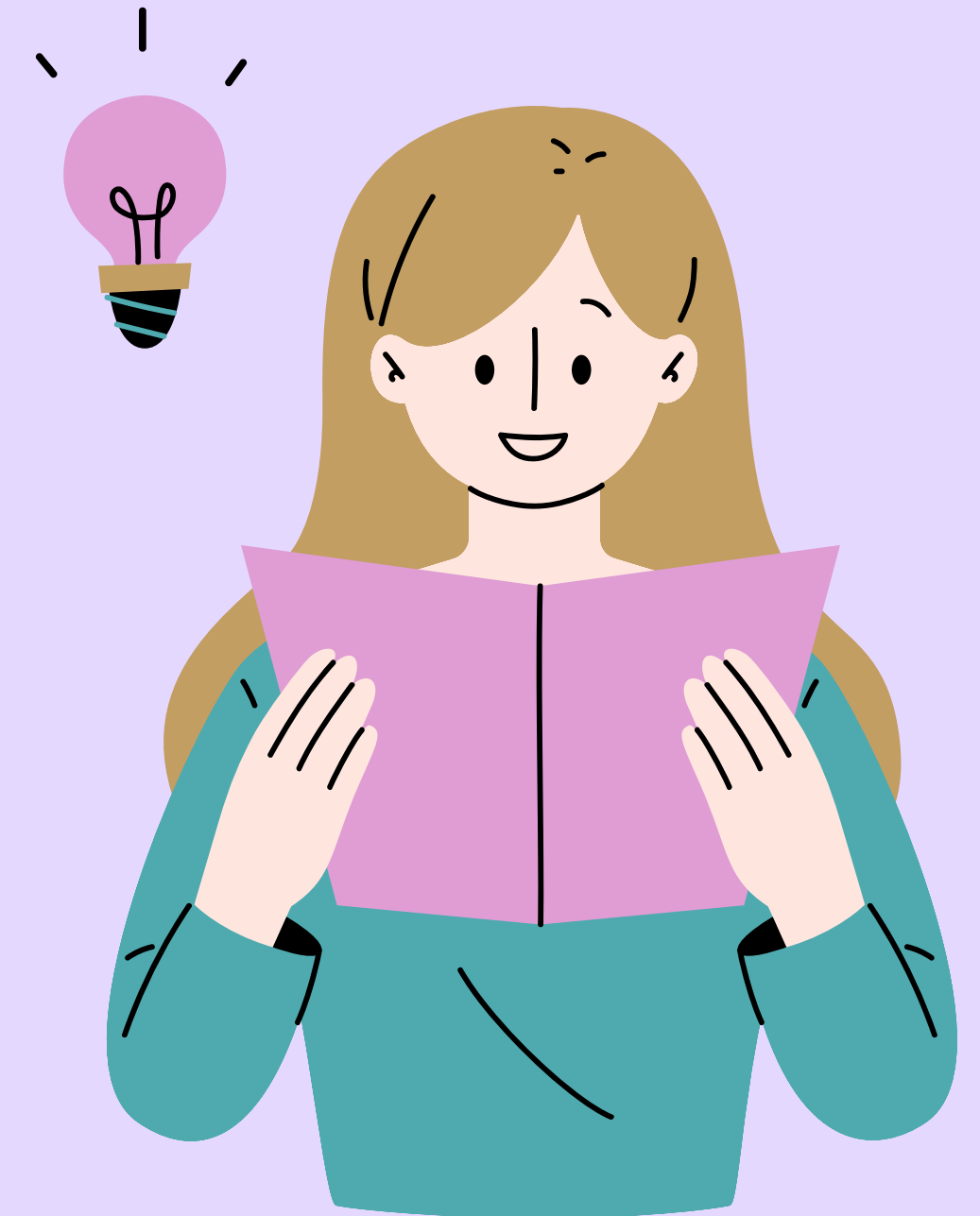
- **Centering Survivor Voices**
 - Designed the project based on the needs and voices of MST Survivors
- **Promoting Collaboration**
 - Engaged volunteers, donors, and community members to create a shared sense of purpose and collective action
- **Addressing Systemic Inequalities**
 - Raised awareness about the systemic gender inequalities and cultural barriers within the military that contribute to MST
- **Empowering Others**
 - Provided a model of feminist leadership that prioritizes collaboration, empathy, and action, hopefully inspiring others to engage in similar initiatives



Donation drop off at the Lyons VA Medical Center

Lessons Learned and Insights Gained

- **Adaptability is Key**
 - Learned the importance of adjusting goals when faced with challenges, such as the shortfall in donations.
- **Collaboration Amplifies Impact**
 - Partnering with the Rutgers Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services highlighted how effective collaboration can expand a project's reach.
 - Engaging volunteers and donors demonstrated the power of collective action in addressing systemic issues like MST.
- **Community Engagement Matters**
 - Community members' eagerness to learn about MST reinforced the value of education as a tool for advocacy.
- **Personal Growth**
 - Gained valuable experience in project management, resource allocation, and leadership.
 - Developed a stronger understanding of how to navigate obstacles in advocacy work while remaining committed to the mission.



Impact and Future Applications

- **Immediate Impact**

- For Survivors: Delivered 50 hygiene care packages, providing practical support to women veterans in the Lyons VA MST program.
- For the Community: Raised awareness about MST, fostering empathy and understanding among civilians.
- For Volunteers: Created a meaningful opportunity for community members to contribute to a critical cause.

- **Projected Impact**

- Increased visibility of MST may inspire more civilian engagement and advocacy for survivors.
- Raised awareness has the potential to contribute to long-term cultural shifts in understanding and addressing MST.

- **Future Applications**

- For Leadership Scholars:
 - Expand on this work by advocating for policy changes to improve MST survivor resources.
 - Create toolkits for hosting similar drives in other communities, ensuring sustainability and scalability of the project.
- For Community Advocacy:
 - Partner with other organizations to increase outreach and awareness, potentially turning this into an annual initiative.
 - Leverage community feedback to identify additional areas of support for MST survivors.





Thank
you!

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