

Andy Thompson column: Teen comes to aid of victims of stalking

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Maria Georgen isn't one to rest on her laurels.

Last year, as part of her community service requirement at Xavier High School, the Neenah teenager developed a program that provided 20 backpacks to assist stalking victims to obtain evidence against their perpetrators. Her efforts drew high praise from the leaders of Christine Ann Domestic Abuse Services in Winnebago County and Harbor House Domestic Abuse Services in Appleton.

But Maria's project didn't end there.

After her project was publicized earlier this year, State Farm insurance agent Craig TeRonde sent her a note saying if she did the project again, he would make a donation. The result was the creation of another 20 backpacks for stalking victims in the area.

"At first, I thought it was my junior (year) service project," said Maria, who is now a senior at Xavier. "But then it grew into this big project.

Each backpack contains a notebook and pen, a whistle, flashlight, calendar, disposable camera and a small cassette recorder. Victims can use the items to chronicle events.

"Hopefully, it will give victims more confidence in reporting these kinds of cases," said Julie Fevola, executive director of the Christine Ann agency. "It's a great resource to have."

During the 10th annual banquet of the Women's Fund for the Fox Valley Region earlier this month, Maria gave a presentation to the nearly 1,000 attendees.

"A lot of people were inspired by Maria," said Becky Boulanger, executive director of the Women's Fund.

Fevola said Maria has shown an amazing degree of maturity and concern for those who are going through the anguish of being stalked.

"She has than sense of giving back to the

community," Fevola said of Maria. "She has that extra level of ambition to do good things.

"What a great young lady she is. And she is so humble. It gives you faith in the youth in the community."

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