



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

## Community Gets Sexual Assault Defense Training at SAAM Event hosted by Sanders

JAMES SANDERS JR. April 26, 2019



In recognition of April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month, Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-Rochdale Village, Far Rockaway) his 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Sexual Assault Defense Training on Thursday, April 25, 2019 at the Richmond Hill Block Association in Richmond Hill.

The event aimed to educate community members on how to protect themselves from becoming the victim of a sexual assault. Information on resources for survivors including support services, counseling, and legal rights were also presented. There was an interactive

Brazilian Jujitsu self defense training conducted by Red Dawn Combat Club.

“Sexual assault is a serious crime that affects the physical and emotional well-being of survivors long after the attack is over,” Senator Sanders said. “We are here to raise awareness of this type of violence and do our part to educate as many people as we can in an effort to prevent future incidents from occurring, and to encourage those who have been victimized to seek help.”

One in three women and one in six men has experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime, according to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, which cites data from the FBI and Journal of Traumatic Stress. It is estimated that there is one sexual assault every 90 seconds in the United States.

When it comes to what constitutes a sexual assault, two of the biggest factors are consent and incapacitation, according to Sgt. Christopher Winiarz of the 102<sup>nd</sup> Precinct. He explained that once a person clearly communicates that they do not want a sexual act to be initiated or continue it must stop, or it becomes illegal. Also, when someone is incapacitated to the point where they are not able to convey non-consent of a sexual activity either verbally or physically and it still occurs that is also illegal.

The centerpiece of the event was a live safety demonstration conducted by Michael Botier of Red Dawn Combat Club, located in Fresh Meadows, along with four of his students whom he brought with him. He taught attendees how to fight off an attacker and break free from being choked, pinned to the ground or trapped in a small space such as a car or apartment. He said the three key elements of defense are grip, position and escape. Many attendees, like Karen Tumielewicz, of Richmond Hill volunteered to try the moves they learned and practiced with Botier his students. “It was fun,” she said.

“Thank you for this important information you provided,” said attendee Lisa Holder Crawford. “I brought my 14-year-old daughter tonight and she took away a lot and wishes that she brought her friends. My daughter is still practicing the moves.”

Providing statistics on sexual assault and its psychological effects was Dr. Coralanne Griffith-Hunte, a human trauma and industrial psychologist and the Long Island Director of Human Trafficking & Domestic Violence for Not On My Watch organization. Almost 18 million women have been raped in America since 1998, according to Griffith-Hunte, adding, that 13 percent of female rape survivors will attempt suicide, and one in six American women has survived an attempt, or completed rape, in their lifetime.

Connie Pacheco, president of Recoveries R US, a vocational training program, located in Inwood, New York, bravely shared her own personal story of survival. After many years of being sexually assaulted, first as a child by family members, and then later in life by strangers, Pacheco said she blamed herself for being victimized and felt embarrassed and ashamed.

Pacheco started using drugs in order to cope. Eventually she sought treatment which helped turn her life around. She also took self defense classes and continued her formal education, which boosted her self confidence. The most significant turning point, however, occurred after Pacheco’s now ex-husband physically attacked her, grabbing her by the neck and attempting to choke her. She quickly and instinctively fought back, elbowing him to the face and breaking his nose.

“I decided right then and there – I am nobody’s punching bag,” she said. “I am not anyone’s possession. I am a human being. I am a woman. I have a lot to offer, and I matter.”

We would like to extend special thanks to Richmond Hill Block Association for allowing us to use their space to host the event. We would also like to thank our community partners: One Stop Richmond Hill Community Center, Sheltering Arms, Richmond Hill-South Ozone Park Lions Club, Indo-Caribbean Alliance, South Asian Fund for Education, Scholarship and Training (SAFEST), and Richmond Hill Economic Development Council.