Deanna Kepka was thumbing through the phone book when she happened on the name of the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network.

A board member of a student community service organization at Northwestern University, Kepka was searching for organizations that could use the unpaid help of a group of enthusiastic and altruistic Northwestern students.

She had found one.

The Battered Women's Network happened to be working on a special project -- the Silent Witness Exhibit.

Building on an exhibit created three years ago in Minnesota, volunteers around the country are constructing life-sized wood silhouettes.

Each represents one woman killed in a single year by a partner; each will bear a plaque telling the woman's story.

The project is intended to offer a graphic representation of the human toll taken by domestic violence. The silhouettes will be exhibited in at least 47 states, then at a Silent Witness National March in Washington in October.

In Illinois, where the project is being coordinated by National Council of Jewish Women, the Battered Women's Network was working on identifying women to be represented by silhouettes.

And before long, members of Organized Action by Students Invested in Service at Northwestern were working on it too.

The network estimates that 100 women are killed every year by domestic violence in Illinois. The students thought finding their stories would be easy. It wasn't.

"Domestic violence isn't really cataloged anywhere," explained Katrina Weimholt, incoming OASIS president, who with Kepka directed the efforts of about half a dozen Northwestern students.

"The only way we were able to research it was by looking through newspapers, most of which . . . are not accessible by subject. You have to scan through an entire year and look at every headline."

They drove down to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where they read a year's worth of the local paper in a weekend at the library.

They scrolled through rolls of microfiches of Springfield and Joliet papers. They went from the Northwestern library to the Harold Washington Library to the Oak Lawn Public Library. They ended up searching a year's worth of eight newspapers.

At first, they were shocked -- partly by how little space the stories rated.

"They were only police blotters," Kepka said. "I don't think we found any that were front page or in-depth stories. It's a pretty common occurrence, not headline-making like some other murders."

They were deeply shaken at the stories: Guadalupe Weber, shot by her boyfriend with a crossbow. Angela Butler, strangled by an ex-boyfriend, bound with electrical cord and 75 pounds of weights and dumped with their 5-month-old son into a canal. Evelyn Ward, stabbed 20 times by her ex-husband and dying in her son's arms.

"A lot of the women were very young, which was very scary," said Weimholt. "Some were 18 or 19. I'm 19."

But they kept reading. And they stopped being shaken.

"At first, the stories were all so shocking," said Weimholt. "We were, like, `Listen to this one!' `Listen to this one!' Then I think we got desensitized."

"After you read all these stories, you become somewhat immune," said Kepka, 21, a sociology and communications student.

The students ended up supplying the stories for 24 of the 27 silhouettes in the Illinois exhibit. "The project could not have happened without them," said Jennifer Welch, executive director of the Battered Women's Network.

At 3 p.m. Sunday, the Illinois Silent Witness Exhibit will be displayed at a public memorial service at the James R. Thompson State of Illinois Center.

The silhouettes, made by students at Evanston Township High School and Homewood-Flossmoor Community High School, will remain on display through June 15.

It is time for other people to find the stories shocking.