



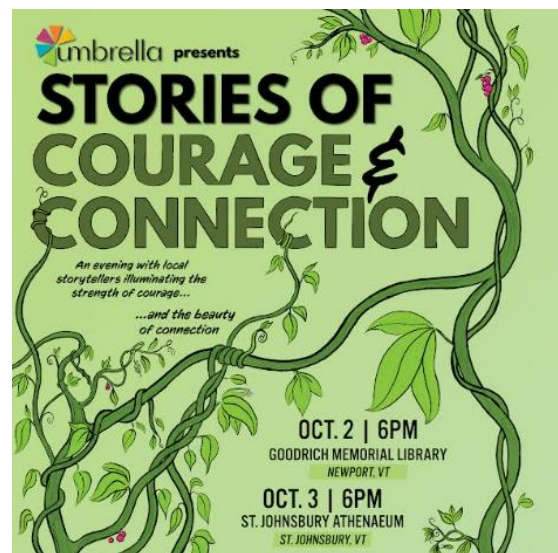
Amanda Cochran: A Time For Courage And Connection

"For the past several years, Umbrella has marked Domestic Violence Awareness Month by hosting a storytelling event. Each year, we select a unique theme and invite community members to share personal stories that reflect that theme. This year, we chose "Courage and Connection."

Every day at Umbrella, we witness the immense courage it takes for people experiencing domestic violence to leave an abusive situation. There are many barriers to leaving: financial instability, fear of increased violence, concern that their children might be removed from their care, and much more. In a society that still, in many ways, blames victims for their circumstances, the decision to fight for safety is an extraordinary act of bravery.

We also see courage in those participating in our Ignite Change Domestic Violence Accountability Program—individuals who are confronting their own past trauma, challenging harmful beliefs, and taking responsibility for the damage they have caused. In a culture that often discourages self-reflection and promotes control through violence, their choice to change is radical. They are working to rewrite the narrative, even when few role models exist to guide them.

At the same time, we see the profound power of connection. When we recognize one another's humanity and support people in becoming their best selves, we can change the course of their lives. We see this every day in the compassionate work of our staff, who help families move toward safety and stability. We see it in our support groups and in our shelter spaces. The more we connect, the more space we create for healing and safety.





These days, courage and connection can feel scarce, perhaps because our shared values have begun to erode. One of these shared values, espoused by religions, philosophies, and moral traditions, is that we are all equal and deserving of care. Any belief system—political or otherwise—that elevates one group over another fails that basic test. None of us is better than anyone else because of gender, race, economic status, ability, citizenship status, nationality, religion, or any other characteristic or life circumstance. The fact that espousing the value of equality can be seen as courageous in today’s world is telling and deeply troubling.

Let us be clear: claiming that some people are inherently better than others is not a political opinion. It is a moral stance—and one that stands in direct opposition to the values of any healthy, inclusive, and safe society.

Let us choose courage. Not the kind that comes from blindly aligning with a side or seeking power for its own sake, but the kind that comes from standing up for what is right, even when it is difficult. Let us choose connection. Not shallow alliances, but deep relationships rooted in empathy and shared humanity. Let us stand for something greater: the values that have always brought us together—the belief that we all matter, equally.

We invite you to witness stories of courage and connection in our community that will be shared next month. We hope you leave inspired to embrace both in your own life."

Umbrella will be hosting “Stories of Courage and Connection” on October 2 at the Goodrich Memorial Library in Newport, and on October 3 at the Athenaeum in St. Johnsbury. Both events begin at 6 p.m. Visit umbrellanek.org/domestic-violence-awareness.

Amanda Cochrane, of St. Johnsbury, is the Executive Director of Umbrella.