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## Interview: Break the Chain Apparel

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When Tammi Burns escaped an abusive relationship at home, she realized that the issue was larger than her own situation. Drug or alcohol addiction, violence and verbal abuse it seemed, were issues that many people she knew had faced or dealt with. Determined to take a stand and help empower victims of abuse, Burns created a clothing line with a message – and cause. The result is Break the Chain apparel. With t-shirts, hoodies, baseball caps and bumper stickers, Break the Chain sends a message of hope to the victims, perps and strangers among us. Using fashion as her podium, Burns' message is being heard loud and clear. What better way to show your fashion sense than by knocking some sense into your community? *Corduroy* sent writer Meredith Mulligan to interview Burns, to find out the inspiration behind the company, and how we can all do our part to break the chain of abuse.



### What is Break the Chain apparel?

Clothing with a voice. What we do is speak out against domestic violence, child abuse, and addiction without actually talking, but by getting dressed.

### Why do you think clothing is the best outlet for people to express themselves?

When you go to the grocery store, a football game, an exercise class, or even a bar, and you see a t-shirt, you always react; you always want to know what it says. Why not put a message of hope and change on the backs of people instead of mindless chatter? You don't know who is reading the message. It could be anyone—a victim, a perpetrator. But it will reach someone.

### If you weren't using clothing as a voice against violence and abuse, how else would you be speaking out against it?

There are many people advocating against domestic violence, many large companies with large campaigns. I chose clothing, and that is what I will continue to do. We bought a 16-foot cargo trailer, which we use for projects around the community called "Fill the Trailer." It was bought and wrapped with our logo in ghost writing with words like violence and abuse. It is like a traveling billboard used for something phenomenal. It is kind of like a giant superhero. We fill it with food for food banks, or clothing for clothing drives. It has enabled other business and other people in the community to band together, stand up together and say we are not taking this anymore, and make a difference. We have given the community a voice.

### Since starting your company in 2006, Break the Chain has been a mostly locally-based operation. However, you do have an online presence. What are your plans to evolve the brand and message nationally?

At this point we sell online nationally ([www.breakthechainapparel.com](http://www.breakthechainapparel.com)) and we ship nationally, so we are a national company. We don't have national outlets, but I definitely want to do that, to build a brand name so people know who we are.

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I don't want to get carried away with our message, and not know what to do with it. It takes a seed to grow a business. We have built an awesome company with roots. I say, 'clean up your own backyard first.' Everyone should take a look at their own community, and start there to fix it. The United States definitely has great organizations that do just that, and that is what I am trying to do with Break the Chain.

**While Break the Chain is the core of your business, you have also started Project Change Reaction. Tell us a little about this venture, and the schools that benefit from it.**

Project Change Reaction started at home as a test to see if we could reach the kids. They are our future. They have a condensed version of these social issues in their schools. Bullies, verbal abuse, all sorts of issues they deal with as kids. So, what better way to get them to wear [a message against these social issues] than to get them to design it?

A friend of mine is a teacher at a middle school. We spoke to the teachers to find out what issue they are dealing with mostly. They are having a tough time with verbal abuse. So, we challenged 60 students with a contest: come up with a slogan and design. The winning slogan was "Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones, But Sometimes Words Are Worse."

*[Editor's note: Thus far, Break the Chain has introduced Project Change Reaction (PCR) to four schools, all in Oregon. Each project results in a winning t-shirt slogan and design, all of which are sold online. Break the Chain will next introduce Project Change Reaction to Three Lakes High School, a correctional facility for young females.]*

***What inspires you to continue carrying these social messages?***

I am a domestic violence, verbal abuse and rape survivor so this is my way of saying there is life after that. Stand up; you're not alone. Put this shirt on and walk with me. I think it is really important to know that if you have been addicted, you can move above that. It truly is a message of hope. Not everyone is a victim, not everyone has been addicted or been an alcoholic, but a majority of us has known someone that has had that problem. It is speaking without saying a word. And we are able to take proceeds to help other people. We are starting a movement that we want other people to follow. I am not a multimillionaire; I am a regular person. Regular people do great things every day.

For more information, visit [www.breakthechainapparel.com](http://www.breakthechainapparel.com)

- Meredith Mulligan

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