

Be the Peace... Make A Change

“What if all women and girls AND men and boys throughout Lunenburg County could have satisfying relationships without violence, control or disrespect for one another?”

Purpose

“Be the Peace... Make A Change” is a grassroots community peace-building initiative that aims to reduce relationship violence against women and girls in Lunenburg County and surrounding communities in Nova Scotia. Status of Women Canada has awarded funding for this project to Second Story Women’s Centre **to engage community partners in developing a coordinated community response to violence against women and girls over the three year period from April 2012-March 2015.** The project is based on collaborative partnerships, community engagement and inclusion of men and boys as essential partners with women and girls in ending relationship violence.

Background

There are many terms used to describe violence against women—“domestic violence” “relationship violence” “gender-based violence” “intimate partner violence.” It includes physical, verbal, emotional, psychological abuse and sexual assault. It most often involves dynamics of power and control of one person over another. It affects younger women and older women and knows no social, economic or cultural boundaries, though Native women, disabled women, rural women are at greater risk. Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of violence, whether they have experienced it directly or witnessed it in their families. Violence in relationships affects us all.

Some of the statistics are staggering. In Nova Scotia we have one of the highest rates of sexual assault in the country, and over half of these are against girls under 18 years old. Most incidents of violence- physical, sexual, verbal, emotional are never reported.

Relationship violence is not a women’s issue- it’s a community issue, a public health issue, a human issue- a product of the structures, and social and cultural environments we create and support. And it costs Canadians over \$7 billion a year, (Chronicle Herald, December 2012). It is complex, elusive and often hides in secrecy, shame, fear, stigma and guilt. Men and boys are also affected by violence in complex ways, and so they are equal partners in the solutions.

Goals

And so it “takes a village...” This project aims to engage as many people, agencies, organizations, institutions as possible in collaborative efforts to raise the public and private

discourse about the issue of relationship violence and to take purposeful action together to address it.

Many passionate people have joined in this initiative-- either as concerned citizens, or as members of community groups, government agencies, schools, faith ministries, legal institutions, law enforcement agencies, municipal councils, women's advocacy groups, health service providers, and those who work everyday to serve, support and help those affected by violence. Together we can discover "what else?" we might accomplish together, that none of us can achieve alone.

Beliefs and Assumptions

This project is guided by the belief that our work together can make a difference.

At the same time we recognize that the issues, like human beings, are incredibly complex and steeped in stereotypes, misperceptions, judgments. There is a range of institutional, structural and social barriers that limit community effectiveness in this issue, and there has historically been division between philosophies, practices and approaches. The issues therefore, merit a quest for understanding and learning about different perspectives; honest inquiry that both asks hard questions and also unearths the knowledge and wisdom inherent in our communities and practices; and a considered response that is multi-faceted, community-based and truly collaborative.

We believe that men and boys are integral to eliminating violence against women and girls by seeking their rightful share of responsibility for challenging and changing dynamics of violence in intimate and family relationships.

There are times when it takes an entire community to make a change.

This is one of those times.

We cannot do it without you.