



Neighbours, Friends and Families campaign launched in Caledon

Tackling domestic violence

By Anneleen Naudts



FTP officially launched the Neighbours, Friends and Families campaign in Caledon. Pictured are Kathryn Creelman, executive assistant to Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones, Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson, Councillor Gord McClure, FTP Executive Director Norah Kennedy, Ailsa Stanners-Moroz of the Caledon Parent-Child Centre/Ontario Early Years Centre, and Caledon OPP Staff Sergeant and Program Manager Greg Sweeney.

It is possible a friend, neighbour or co-worker is the victim of domestic violence.

While the victim may be displaying signs of the abuse, people surrounding the woman may not recognize them, nor act on the suspicion that domestic violence is taking place.

Tackling domestic violence requires the help of the community, according to Family Transition Place (FTP), and it considers the first step to be enabling people to recognize the warning signs of abuse.

To raise awareness about the signs of domestic abuse, FTP launched the Neighbours, Friends and Families campaign (NFF) in Caledon and Dufferin last Wednesday.

The campaign raises awareness of the signs of woman abuse so that people close to an at-risk

woman or an abusive man can help.

Norah Kennedy, the executive director of FTP, remarked that NFF is a provincial initiative, active in 143 communities across Ontario. "We are proud to bring it to Caledon," she said.

Kennedy explained the need for the campaign is supported by the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (DVDRV), which examines evidence in the aftermath of a homicide resulting from domestic disputes.

In every case, someone close to the victim knew about the abuse and the escalating danger, but did not know how to help, concluded the committee.

"The greatest need (is) educating all members of the community about the warning signs of domestic violence and the appropriate action necessary to prevent it," stated the DVDRV committee. It added NFF is an example of how to raise awareness about the warning signs of woman abuse, safety planning as well as risk reduction.

Preventing domestic abuse is one of the key goals. "The NFF campaign is in essence turning the death review process on its head - moving from a reactive, reflective process to a preventative, proactive process," commented Kennedy.

While the DVDRV committee draws attention to homicides, the NFF campaign is also concerned with "the large number of women living with abuse on a daily basis," informed Kennedy. "Thousands of women suffer daily, out of public view."

NFF attempts to widen the circle of those able to help a woman experiencing abuse - her neighbours, friends, co-workers and family.

"This campaign is important because we are beginning to break through people's concerns about getting involved, saying too much, or doing too much, when, in fact, the facts are staring them right in the face - a woman they care about is hurt," remarked Kennedy.

She added lots of work, effort and involvement of many people is needed to cause a shift in the public attitude toward woman abuse.

"We have challenged the idea that woman abuse is a private matter. We have begun to think differently. We are recognizing and acknowledging the fact that, far from being a private matter, woman abuse is everyone's business," she stated.

Through FTP, there currently are 28 trained staff available to deliver presentations and spread the word. To date, 28 presentations have taken place, to 500 attendees at churches, women's groups, health and safety committees, employee groups, colleges and fitness centers.

FTP has also distributed almost 10,000 brochures, which are available in 12 languages.

"It is our hope that through this program we can enlist the help of many more community members and truly see this campaign as a key part of the strategy to eliminate violence in our community," declared Kennedy.

The paradigm shift has been likened to the shift that has been observed in the attitude toward drinking and driving. Whereas getting behind the wheel after consuming alcohol was deemed acceptable not long ago, the public attitude toward drinking and driving has shifted drastically.

Today, it is unacceptable to consume alcohol when driving, and people recognize an obligation to prevent others from drinking and driving as well. "Drinking and driving is, quite rightly, no longer socially acceptable," said Kennedy.

The aim of NFF is to instill an attitude similar to that of drinking and driving, by making it

everyone's responsibility to prevent domestic violence. "The NFF campaign is about making this paradigm shift," added Kennedy.

"When preventing domestic violence is finally acknowledged as something that is everyone's responsibility, we know we will have been successful."

The campaign is a partnership between the Ontario Government, Ontario Women's Directorate and the Expert Panel on Neighbours, Friends & Families, through the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children.

Councillor Gord McClure, who attended the launch on behalf of Mayor Marolyn Morrison and Caledon council, extended support for the program and thanked the volunteers and staff of FTP for their ongoing work.

Kathryn Creelman, executive assistant to Dufferin- Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones, presented a letter from Jones in which she expressed her familiarity with, and support for NFF.

Dufferin - Caledon MP David Tilson, who said he had just come from discussing the prevalence of domestic violence in today's society, commented the parallel between drinking and driving and domestic abuse was fitting.

Ailsa Stanners-Moroz of the Caledon Parent-Child Centre/Ontario Early Years Centre, said that upon moving to Caledon, she recognized domestic violence was happening in more than one family living on her block. "(This) brought it home to me that domestic abuse is happening," she said, adding that one of the women murdered by her husband used to come to the Parent-Child

Centre.

Caledon OPP Staff Sergeant and Program Manager Greg Sweeney said he too supported the campaign, adding officers "would like to attend fewer and fewer cases of domestic violence in the future."

If you would like to help end woman abuse in the community, or support someone you know, phone FTP at (905) 584 4357 or (519) 941 4357, or e-mail nff@familytransitionplace.ca. Visit www.familytransitionplace.ca for more information.