

New group launched to give hope, help to abused women

by David Meyer

GUELPH -

A new group was launched here on Nov. 6 to help people recognize abuse of women - and how to do something about it.

Neighbours Friends and Families is a province wide campaign with grassroots ambitions, according to Guelph and Wellington coordinator Erin Crickett.

She said the idea is to have each person commit to telling one other person about the group, and spread the word one person at a time.

She said Neighbours Friends and Families is designed to teach people how to recognize the signs of women's abuse, and what to do when they see those signs.

Crickett said in many cases, people are afraid to speak out because they fear they will make the situation for the victim worse than what it already is.

Neighbours Friends and Families will offer workshop and provide strategies to ensure that women who need help get it. She said the challenge to the more than 60 people there in the square that day was to tell just one other person.

Guelph Mayor Karen Farbridge reminded the audience that when the issue of women's abuse was first brought up at Queen's Park years ago, it was met with laughter. Those days are gone, and Farbridge said she is proud to lend her support to the group.

She said Guelph has always been a caring city, and city residents bringing food and clothing to the homeless who built shelters in the square as a good example of that. She also lauded the caring nature of residents, citing the Maclean's magazine survey that showed Guelph with the most volunteers per capita in Canada.

But, she said, most people "don't know what to do," when they see women abused.

She said that Neighbours Friends and Family will be giving people access to information and strategies to help them help victims.

Provincial campaign coordinator Alfredo Marroquin said Neighbours Friends and Families will "empower people to act."

He said in the community, in Canada, and around the world there are still women who are victims of violence, and told the 60 people in attendance "We have to start where we are."

He also invited men to join in the effort "We men need to work harder, in more solidarity with this movement," he said.

The organization will provide communities with information such as:

- how to recognize the warning signs of woman abuse;
- how to support women and other community members who are affected by woman abuse; and
- locate supportive resources in the community.

Here are some suggestions for people who see signs of abuse:

- talk to her about what you see and assure her that you are concerned. Tell her you believe her and that it is not her fault;
- encourage her not to confront her partner if she is planning to leave. Her safety must be protected;
- offer to provide childcare while she seeks help;
- encourage her to pack a small bag with important items and keep it stored at your home in case she needs it; and
- know that you or she can call the Assaulted Women's Helpline, your local shelter, or, in an emergency, the police.

There are many other ways of helping abused women, and the new group will provide advice.

"NFF is about building the capacity of all members of our community to respond to women abuse, by recognizing the warning signs, becoming familiar with referral sources," said Guelph and Wellington Women in Crisis Executive Director Sly Castaldi.

For more information on the group, visit the website www.neighboursfirendsandfamilies.ca or telephone 519-826-4771, or to leave a message, 519-836-1110, extension 305.

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