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WESTERN NEWS

Domestic violence support agencies given financial boost

By Heather Travis

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The Ontario government is committing \$1.5 million to supporting victims of domestic abuse and prevention programs.

The announcement was delivered Friday by Attorney General Chris Bentley at The University of Western Ontario's [Centre for Research and Education on Violence against Women and Children](#).



Attorney General Chris Bentley looks on as Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, Deb Matthews, discusses the importance of supporting victims of women's abuse.

The funding will be allocated to 42 domestic violence community co-ordinating committees across Ontario, in the amount of \$800,000 annually. The co-ordinating committees include representatives from women's service agencies, such as shelters and family services, the justice, health and education sectors, as well as other partner services.

"This is about people who have been victims of domestic violence or might be in the future, unless ...," says Bentley. "We are talking about helping people in desperate situations."

In addition, the committees will receive \$700,000 designated for special projects, including the [Neighbours, Friends and Families](#) public education campaign to raise awareness about the signs of women's abuse.

"It's been said London is at the cutting edge of work on violence against women," says Deb Matthews, Ontario Minister Responsible for Women's Issues. "You have inspired the government to get our act together.

"We really have to put women and children at the centre of what we do," she adds.

The Neighbours, Friends and Families campaign, originally developed in London, Ont., is currently operating in more than 140 communities in Ontario. However, the added funding will allow it to spread throughout the province, says Matthews.

"It teaches neighbours, friends and family what are the warning signs (of abuse) ... and what to do if you are concerned," she says.

By supporting this program, Matthews says the provincial government is "taking a big step forward."

Chair of the London Co-ordinating Committee to End Women Abuse, Bonnie Williams, choked up as she spoke about the impact the funding will have on its membership.

"We do make safer, stronger communities and together we are making a difference," she says.

Khalil Ramal, MPP London-Fanshawe, and representatives from several local domestic violence support agencies were present for the announcement.

Among them was Emilie Crakondji, executive director of [Carrefour Des Femmes Du Sud-Ouest De L'Ontario](#), a francophone women's sexual assault support centre in London.

"The fund will help us provide the services because the need is increasing," she says. "The English organizations do a good job, but it is not enough. We have to help the co-ordinating committee reach the French-speaking community."

Barb MacQuarrie, community director for the Centre for Research and Education on Violence against Women and Children said the funding for the Neighbours, Friends and Families campaign provides a research opportunity to measure what kind of impact the program can have.

She also says the government support represents a paradigm shift in how violence against women is addressed.

In the past, MacQuarrie said the focus has been on building a professional group of people who specialize in women's abuse. Now that the professional sector is in place, it is time to look at the community's responsibility, she says.

MacQuarrie says it is most often neighbours, friends and family members who detect the first signs of domestic violence. The campaign will provide them with the tools to act, she says.

"This is a sustained, preventative approach to women abuse and femicide – the killing of women," she says.

As well, MacQuarrie says the women's victim support services must work together and build a program around an individual woman's needs in order to be able to respond effectively, she says. The announcement of the funding distributed through the co-ordinating committees will reinforce these partnerships, she says.

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Westminster College, Suite 360, London, Ontario, Canada, N6A 3K7
Tel: 519-661-2111