

## **New committee aims to educate about domestic abuse**

By Mary Riley

It's about all of us as a community getting involved, to protect these women and children. A new program aimed at helping the public recognize domestic abuse can be described in simple terms: If you aren't part of the solution, you're part of the problem.

The Kawartha Lakes & Haliburton domestic violence co-ordinating committee is introducing two new initiatives to help abused women and children.

The committee is made up of agencies from the justice, health and social service sectors that work with victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and elder abuse.

With Community Care as its lead agency, (the committee is not in itself a non-profit agency), the committee received a grant from the Ministry of the Attorney General's Ontario victims services secretariat to implement the two new programs.

The first, Neighbours, Friends and Families, is a public education campaign to encourage the community to get involved when aware of an abusive situation.

The second initiative is to support a Rural Victims Transportation Unit.

Neighbours, Friends and Families was introduced to City of Kawartha Lakes professionals on Tuesday.

Facilitator Tim Kelly (chair of the Province's expert review panel) told an audience of politicians, health-care professionals, police and members of several service agencies that the public must take a more active role in eliminating domestic abuse.

"The Coroner's death review committee has studied cases where women and children have been murdered since 2003," he said. "They found that in each case, there were people who knew the abuse was going on. These murders could have been prevented." People who had that knowledge were struggling with what to do with it, he added.

Lisa Cameron, a Crown prosecutor working in Lindsay and chair of the Committee, said that while the laws against domestic abuse have been in place for many years, the justice system can only do so much without the public's help.

She noted those in the criminal justice system must often do what they can for victims based on limited information.

"Police officers, judges - they are real people who apply the law from their perspective," she said. "This program encourages the community to get involved in helping when they know someone in an abusive situation."

"To the public, it's the agencies and the victim sorting through the problem. People don't understand if (abuse) has never been part of their lives."

The program focuses not only on the involvement of families, friends and neighbours of victims, but also health care, education and other service professionals.

Mr. Kelly noted one of the main objectives of the program is to teach people how to recognize the danger signs of suspected abuse.

What came out of the Coroner's review of the murders of the women and children, he said, was that people close to each of the situations knew there was trouble."

"But, they saw an isolated incident instead of an escalating pattern."

Liza Hancock, City of Kawartha Lakes & Haliburton domestic violence responsiveness initiative co-ordinator, said many people who are aware of someone in an abusive situation are reluctant to intervene, because of fear or a belief the situation is "none of their business."

"Our fears and frustrations are real," she said. "It's understandable to be trying to help someone and they don't seem to want your help. Family and friends get frustrated and angry; we don't know what to do."

"This program teaches how to help abuse victims, how to talk to abusive men and how to identify women at risk. It's about all of us as a community getting involved, to protect these women and children."

The program includes detailed and informative literature; 'Safety Planning for Women who are Abused.' 'How You can Identify and Help Women at Risk of Abuse' and 'How to talk to Men who are Abusive.'

For copies or more information, call Community Care at 324-7323.