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London Free Press (Ontario)

August 16, 2008 Saturday
FINAL EDITION

Ontario puts up \$1.5M to fight domestic abuse; VIOLENCE: London has been a leader for decades in supporting victims and their rights

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SECTION: CITY & REGION; Pg. A4

LENGTH: 390 words

The Ontario government yesterday announced \$1.5 million in financing to support victims of domestic violence.

The money, announced in London, is to be shared by 42 Domestic Violence Community Co-ordinating Committees across Ontario.

"We are supporting the very good work going on in the province of Ontario, led by the city of London for decades," said Attorney General Chris Bentley, who made the announcement along with MPP Khalil Ramal, and Deb Matthews, minister responsible for women's issues.

"We know the work you have done has saved lives," Matthews said to dozens of victims advocates and support workers in the room at the University of Western Ontario. "We will never know how many, but we know it does. Thanks for the inspiration and hard work."

About \$800,000 of the funding is ongoing, meaning recipients won't have to reapply for it year after year, he said.

The other \$700,000 is one-time funding for special projects such as the Neighbours, Friends and Families public education campaign, which began in London and is being rolled out in about 140 communities across Ontario.

The London Co-ordinating Committee to End Women Abuse will receive nearly \$17,000 in ongoing money. The committee will also receive a one-time injection of about \$15,000 to go toward Neighbours, Friends and Families -- the campaign that aims to inform the public about the importance of helping victims or potential victims of domestic violence.

"It's a start," said Kate Wiggins, who sits on the committee and is executive director of Women's Community House.

"We can hire someone, and put some of the money into communications."

The committee plays a key role in connecting the various organizations and services in the city, said Peter Jaffe, who also sits on the board.

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"At the end of the day, you need people to help co-ordinate the service out there for women, men and the children involved," he said.

London has been a leader in supporting victims of domestic violence for decades and the needs are still great, Wiggins said.

"We still have (busy) shelters, and our crisis lines are ringing, indicating things are working," she said.

Domestic violence workers estimate only 10 per cent of abuse victims seek help.

"So if we can increase the number of people calling, that's a good thing," she said.

The announcement was met with great applause yesterday.

LOAD-DATE: August 16, 2008

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

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