

# Province offers support to abuse victims

BY HEATHER TRAVIS

**B**arb MacQuarrie, community director for the Centre for Research and Education on Violence against Women and Children (CRVAWC) at The University of Western Ontario, says provincial funding to support women victims of domestic abuse provides a unique research opportunity.

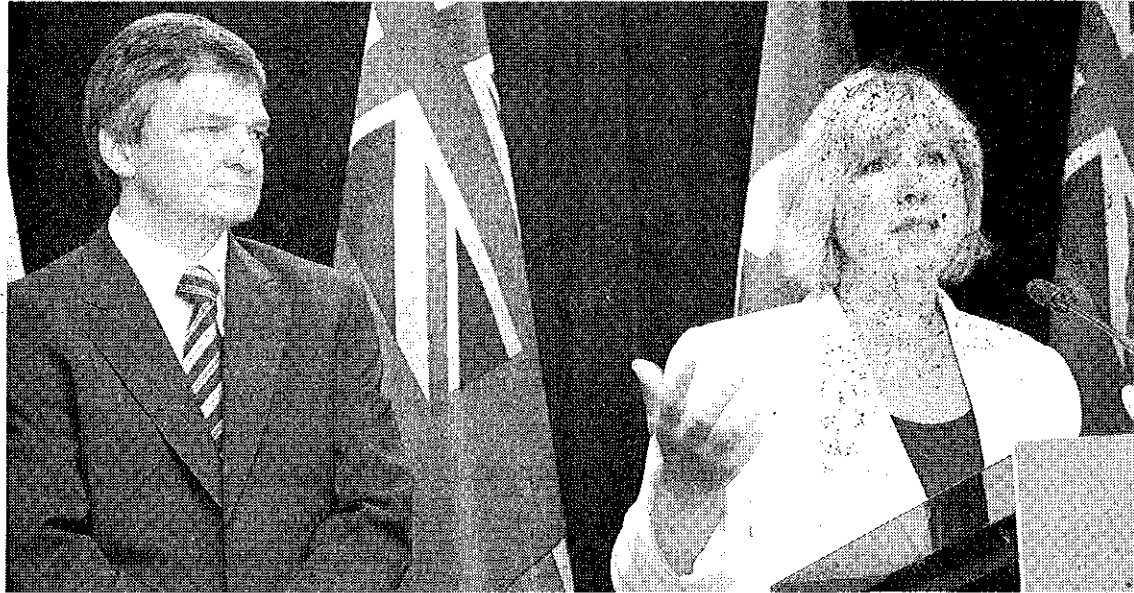
On August 15, Attorney General Chris Bentley announced at CRVAWC that the Ontario government is committing \$1.5 million to support victims of domestic abuse and prevention programs.

The funding will be allocated to 42 domestic violence community co-ordinating committees across Ontario, in the amount of \$800,000 annually. These committees bring together the local partners services for abused women. Members of the committee 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," says Bentley. "We are talking about helping people in desperate situations."

In addition, the committees 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, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues in Ontario. "You have inspired the government to get our act together.



Heather Travis, Western News

Deb Matthews, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues in Ontario, along with Attorney General Chris Bentley, announced \$1.5 million to support abused women and prevention programs on August 15 at The University of Western Ontario.

"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.

"It means many more lives will be saved. If we prevent and respond quickly, what that means is families are healthier," she adds.

MacQuarrie says the gov-

ernment support represents a paradigm shift in how violence against women is addressed and researchers can measure what kind of impact the campaign can have.

In the past, she says 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.

It is most often neighbours, friends and family members who detect the first signs of domestic violence, says MacQuarrie, adding this program provides family and friends with the tools to act.

"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. The announcement of the funding distributed through the co-ordinating committees will reinforce

these partnerships, she says.

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.

"When you work in an organization and you see the person come through the door who has been abused ... you are affected by that person," she says. "You want to make things better."

However, Williams said community support is needed to change the tide of violence against women.

"It's not my job as an agency to stop this, it's the community's responsibility," she says. "The day of minding our own business has past."

Representatives from several local domestic violence support agencies were also present for the announcement.

Among them was Emilie Crankondji, 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."

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