

Violence prevention program celebrates workplaces

By Communications Staff
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A domestic violence prevention and public education initiative started at The University of Western Ontario is gaining traction across the province.



Barb MacQuarrie, Community Director of Western's Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children, is helping Ontario communities raise awareness about domestic violence and woman abuse.

The heart of the Neighbours, Friends and Families (NFF) program is everyone has a role in ending domestic violence and woman abuse. The initiative was led by the Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children (CREVAWC) at Western to help people recognize the signs of abuse, so they can help an at-risk woman or abusive man get help.

"We created some tools that can be easily adapted for a lot of different settings – workplaces and communities – that people could use in a way that made sense in their own context. And we've been available for support if they need it," says Barb MacQuarrie, the Community Director of CREVAWC.

Close to 200 workplaces have come on board to introduce the NFF program into their workplace. A ceremony was held at Western Feb. 12 to celebrate the participation of 40 local businesses and organizations. Similar Workplace Champions ceremonies were held in Strathroy, Stratford, Owen Sound and Windsor.

"I see it as an honouring of the connections we've made," says MacQuarrie, noting representatives from Voisin-es, ami-es et familles, the francophone version, and Kanawayhitowin, a campaign to address abuse in Aboriginal communities in Ontario, were present at the London ceremony.

Laurel Broten, Ontario Minister of Children and Youth Services and Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, addressed the London ceremony via a video feed.

"Domestic violence is not a private matter. We all have a role to play in preventing domestic violence," she says, noting the importance of communicating this message in workplaces.

Although development of the program has been met with challenges, MacQuarrie says the ceremony demonstrates its success.

“As a university we should be really proud of being able to develop a public education campaign that was based in research. It’s really a wonderful example of knowledge transfer.”

The NFF program is in 162 communities across Ontario in addition to businesses and other organizations. It is on track to reach more than 10,000 Ontario public servants across 21 government ministries by the end of this year.

With the passing of Bill 168 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act in December 2009, employers face new responsibilities to take every reasonable precaution to protect workers from workplace domestic violence.

The passing of Bill 168 follows from the death of Lori Dupont, a Windsor nurse who was killed at her workplace in 2005 by her ex-boyfriend who was a doctor in the same hospital.

The NFF program can be delivered in the workplace in stages.

The first level of training involves simply e-mailing all employees with information about the program. The second level increases understanding of woman abuse through presentations, and the third level trains trainers to ensure on-going education in the organization.

“The NFF is a natural response to those legislative requirements. How are we going to prevent that harm? Well, first you have to recognize the warning signs before something happens ... and you have to know how to respond appropriately, how to talk to somebody who might be at risk or someone who is abusive. Then, you have to know how to connect people to supportive services,” say MacQuarrie..