


Workplaces get new tools to identify abuse

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By Heather Travis

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An initiative started at The University of Western Ontario promoting each person's role in preventing women abuse was given \$622,000 from the province to increase resources and training for the workplace.

Deb Matthews, MPP for London North Centre and Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, announced Monday at the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children (CREVAWC) the Ontario government would provide additional funds over two years to the Neighbours, Friends and Families public education campaign to focus on a workplace strategy.



London North Centre MPP Deb Matthews announced the provincial government will invest \$622,000 for a workplace domestic violence prevention program.

Neighbours, Friends and Families is implemented in more than 170 Ontario communities.

"We have learned through tragedies, Lori Dupont, Theresa Vince ... that if the right people knew the right response, we know we could have averted tragedy," says Matthews. "This investment will make a profound difference in the lives of women, children and men of our society."

The support will allow employers and employees to access information and tools to help recognize the signs of abuse and to implement the appropriate policies and protocols.

The workplace strategy dovetails with a proposed legislative amendment to the Occupational Health and Safety Act suggesting employees have a responsibility for preventing domestic violence in the workplace and requiring employers to do training.

"We are going to be working with employers across the province to help them understand that it matters; that their productivity is actually affected by workplace violence and to train the employers and employees about what to do and what signs to look for," says Matthews.

Statistics show 70 per cent of individuals suffering from domestic violence are victimized at work and the economic impact of such violence results in billions of dollars spent on health care, social services and criminal justice.

"When somebody is at risk and somebody is at danger, not just themselves personally but all of their co-workers as well, you can't turn your head the other way," says Barb MacQuarrie, Community Director for CREVAWC.

Although it may be difficult to approach a co-worker about a suspected domestic violence issue, MacQuarrie says it's vital to get over the stigma of abuse being a private issue. "We have to think differently about privacy and what we have let happen in the name of privacy," she says.

The Neighbours, Friends and Families campaign is based on the belief that everyone has a role to play in preventing abuse in our communities. What started in 2005 has expanded well beyond the walls of the centre, says MacQuarrie.

"It is a cultural shift. I am starting to see people believe women abuse isn't a problem that experts deal with. It is a problem we all care about," she says.

The campaign will also develop a strategy in consultation with disability communities on how to involve people with disabilities, as women with disabilities are 40 per cent more likely to be a victim of abuse, says Matthews.

The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants will also be supported by the campaign to connect with recent immigrants.

"The warning signs are often seen in the workplace," says Peter Jaffe, academic director of the centre, adding the program will also include violence against men.

Some signs a person is being abused are: uncharacteristic behaviour, such as sudden tardiness, poor concentration; missed work days; harassing phone calls; or unexpected visits from a spouse demanding to know his or her partner's whereabouts; and depression.

"We want employers to be caring and asking questions. Not to be prying into an individual's personal life, but to be able to reach out and be part of a safety plan," adds Jaffe.

For more information visit the website at <http://neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca/>.