

16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence

DAY
#14

CENTERING SURVIVORS

November is Woman Abuse Prevention Month, which includes the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, a global campaign calling for an end to gender-based violence. It begins on November 25th, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, includes The National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women on December 6th, and ends on December 10th: Human Rights Day.

Thunder Bay City Council formally declared GBV and IPV an epidemic on September 25th immediately following our deputation. In addition, City officials have invited us to present to the local social services administration board and the Intergovernmental Affairs committee, and also supply a list of actionable goals for City Council to better support survivors of GBV in our community.

Our 2023 16 Days campaign will focus on these actionable goals - efforts at the municipal and personal levels to address gender-based violence.

Why it matters

- Survivors are the experts on their situation. Listen to survivors, believe them.
- Effective, trauma-informed practices center survivor (and children's) safety.
- Laws and policies that govern the response to GBV have no effect if we do not acknowledge and reinforce that women possess the credibility to report on their own experience of violence.

ACTION

- Remember that survivors of GBV/IPV are not their trauma. And you don't need all the traumatic details of their experiences in order to show compassion and give support.
- CKW Inquest Jury Recommendations:
 - #12: Ensure that survivors and those assisting survivors have direct and timely communication with probation officers to assist in safety planning.
 - #17: Establish clear guidelines regarding the flagging of perpetrators or potential IPV victims in police databases, immediate dispatch and police access to the identities and contact information of potential targets, and how to notify those targets.
 - #43: Ensure that survivor-informed risk assessments are incorporated into the decisions and positions taken by Crowns relating to bail, pleas, sentencing, and eligibility for Early Intervention Programs.
- Review Victim Rights policies; ensure that women are allowed to clearly and completely record their experience in criminal court Victim Impact Statements; ensure these statements are submitted and encourage the submission of community impact statements.
- Change Child Welfare intake policy to avoid stigmatizing protective parents.
- Create an intersectional advisory of survivor-advocates to provide feedback on local services.
- Provide training for social workers, employers and financial institution employees to recognize and report financial abuse.
- Provide violence and trauma-informed training for teachers, coaches, and support staff, so they can provide appropriate support to students who have experienced GBV themselves or who may be struggling with exposure to IPV at home.
- Participate in an upcoming Knowledge Exchange: Survivor-Led in Practice: Supporting Intersectional Expertise and Leadership in the GBV Sector (Virtual Forum, February 2024): <https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/knowledge-exchanges/ke13/index.html>

Resources

- CKW Inquest Jury Recommendations (June 2022): https://lukesplace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CKW-Inquest-Verdict-Recommendations-SIGNED_Redacted.pdf
- Her Toolkit Comprehensive Safety Assessment and Personalized Risk Management Tools for Women Experiencing Violence: <https://www.theredwood.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Her-Toolkit-Table-of-Contents.pdf>
- Barriers to Safety Planning and Best Practices for Supporting Survivors of Domestic Violence in Rural, Remote, and Northern Regions: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=10328&context=etd>
- Intersectionality: https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased_newsletters/issue-15/index.html
- "There's a way out": Insights from Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence: <https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/backgrounders/insightsfromsurvivors/index.html>
- You Are Not Alone: a toolkit for Aboriginal women escaping violence <https://www.nwac.ca/assets-knowledge-centre/NWAC-You-Are-Not-Alone-Handbook-with-weblinks.pdf>
- "Stay with them": Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence Share Insights on How Friends and Family Can Help: <https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/backgrounders/staywiththem/index.html>
- Centering the Needs of Survivors (Part 1): <https://bcw.barnard.edu/videos/centering-the-needs-of-survivors-part-1/>
- Choosing Your Own Path to Survivorship, a zine by young survivors for young survivors: <https://metrac.org/resources/choosing-your-own-path-to-survivorship-zine/>
- What Does Justice Look Like for Survivors?: <https://bcw.barnard.edu/videos/what-does-justice-look-like-for-survivors/>
- Trauma- (and Violence-) Informed Approaches to Supporting Victims of Violence: Policy and Practice Considerations: <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/victim/rd9-rr9/p2.html>
- Children Experience Coercive Control: What You Need To Know: https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased_newsletters/issue-37/index.html
- Preventing Revictimization and Use of Aggression Following Girls' Maltreatment: A life course approach: https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/reports/discussion_paper_18.html
- Trauma- and Violence- Informed Approaches: Supporting Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence: https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased_newsletters/issue-31/
- Understanding Resilience in Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence - What We Know From Current Literature: <https://gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/briefs/brief-38.html>



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HONOURING OUR STORIES

It's hard to tell our stories because they become stuck in your throat.
The words are big and spiky and they are trapped.
Shame, stigma, blame, judgement.
Not being believed,
Feeling untouchable, not wanted.
Violated to the utmost.

By telling our stories we are making the decision to be vulnerable,
To expose ourselves in a way that is terrifying.
It takes strength and courage to let those words flow,
To breathe clean air again.
Sharing is the bridge between isolation and connection.
Many women are coming from the same place,
Beat up emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically.

Without support even the strongest person can buckle.
Sharing is necessary because in the process we realize that we are not alone.
Every time you connect with a group such as this, you heal a little bit more.
It makes you realize how far you've come.

We are continuing to bridge the gaps,
Making connections with the police through creative and vocal expressions.
Shedding the masks and working towards breaking the stigma.
Helping them help us,
Helping us help them.
We are deconstructing our misconceptions of the police and sharing our own experiences,
In order to build trust and reclaim our power.
We are coming together and fostering mutual understanding and compassion.

If we don't honour our stories, others won't honour our stories.
We are reclaiming ourselves.
It is time to make change, re-shape policy and shift the norm.
When we start to share, families begin to heal because trauma is interconnected.
Change needs to start somewhere, why not here?

The community is built like a quilted patch work, all of the pieces fit together nicely,
But if there are holes of secrecy and silence, it does not provide any security and comfort.
Our stories need to be told as they are a valuable piece of herstory,
Which has been invisible far too long.
Honouring our stories means giving a piece of ourselves to the world,
To share the parts of ourselves that we were hiding.
Letting go of years of self-hatred,
Not carrying a heavy load of abuse alone.
We stand together and create a safety net for those who need it.
We are honouring our bodies and our minds as valuable and whole.

--Women Survivors

In 2016, we embarked on a two-year community project to address sexual violence and harassment against women through arts-based activities, including digital storytelling, that would center the dignity and resilience of survivors. Thunder Bay Art Gallery and Thunder Bay Police were community partners. The completed digital stories by participants established the opportunity for dialogue by seeing and hearing each others' experiences and perspectives. Conversations included exploring how trauma affects and connects survivors and participants; recognizing the gaps in the system to holding perpetrators to account; different forms of coping and healing; what responses survivors experienced after disclosure; and associations and public perceptions of survivors and victims.

Funded by the Ontario Arts Council, the project culminated in the spring of 2018 with a formal exhibit of digital stories and artwork by women survivors and police officers at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery, as well as an Artists' Talk. Below is a collective poem created by women survivors who participated in the project.



NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO WOMEN'S CENTRE
EMPOWERING WOMEN BY PROVIDING A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT TO EXPLORE THEIR NEEDS



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