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Yellow Brick House is looking for a few good men to eliminate violence against women



By Brock Weir

Okay, so more than a few would be great, but spreading the word that violence against women will not be tolerated is a message Yellow Brick House is hoping to get out to the community one brick at a time.

The local women's shelter, which serves women and children from across York Region fleeing abusive homes, has launched its One Brick One Life Campaign. Through the initiative, which runs through July, people are encouraged to turn their houses, offices, and spaces into a safe place, or their own Yellow Brick House.

During the two month campaign, Yellow Brick House representatives will engage the public to raise money and awareness to address the issues surrounding violence against women through the purchase of decal stickers for cars, windows, and office desks bearing the message ?This is a Yellow Brick House? spreading the word that violence against women will not be tolerated.

In order to get this message out, Yellow Brick House is looking for men in the community to help be ambassadors for this way of thinking.

?For many years, we have always focused on women having a voice on the issue of violence against women and children,? says Lorris Herenda, Executive Director of Yellow Brick House. ?Frequently, it was called a women's issue. At Yellow Brick House, we hold the philosophy that this is an issue that affects every child, every woman, and every man in our community. It affects women and children, it is caused by male perpetrators against their partners and children, but this is everybody's issue.

?The issue of domestic violence is not an attractive topic for people to talk about. A lot of people are shocked to hear the prevalence of it. They find it beyond imagination that someone could physically harm their loved ones, their close intimate family members, but it happens. We know one in four Canadian women and children are currently living in violent homes so this is not an issue that happens to a secluded group of people or a particular cultural group. It can happen to anyone and anyone can be exposed to this.?

Women don't make that choice, she says. They enter into relationships with great hopes for the future, a future in which they can build a family together and all too often these dreams can be shattered by perpetrators with very different, violent visions in their

minds. For those people, Ms. Herenda says it is primarily an issue of power and control over another human being, but to open doors to valuable dialogue on the issue it is important to engage the community as a whole, including men.

?Men can be our strongest advocates for the issue of domestic violence,? she says. ?Men who don't perpetrate these crimes, men that believe in family values and respect and love their partners and children could be a tremendously strong voice to get the community to start changing the language of this and start changing the attitude of domestic violence. The more we talk about it, the more we expose it, and the more unacceptable the circumstance becomes.?

She likens it to the efforts of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) which, in its early days advocating against drinking and driving, they faced a world where drinking and driving was, if not a social norm, at least socially acceptable. Now, in no small part to their efforts, it has become almost a taboo through a significant change in social attitudes.

Similarly, Yellow Brick House's One Brick One Life Campaign is starting small. Planned to coincide with Father's Day in June, men ? partners and fathers ? are challenged to contribute both financially through the purchase of the decals to increase their reach to the women and children they serve, but also to step up and foster this awareness. After they purchase the stickers and display them on their desks, their windows, and so forth, they are encouraged to take and share photos of their decals using the hashtag #1Brick1Life.

?This is phase one,? says Ms. Herenda. ?We want this to evolve into something bigger. We want to have men who will, on behalf of Yellow Brick House, and on behalf of all the women and children who have experienced abuse and are experiencing abuse to be our public voices, along with women, to be able to address their friends, their colleagues, their neighbours and talk about this issue to say we will not tolerate this. If we know that somebody is being exposed to violence, we want to intervene. We want to change the social culture about our attitudes towards domestic violence.?