

Cases of domestic violence rise during holiday season: Yellow Brick House



The holiday season is a joyous season for many, but for women experiencing domestic violence the season can see an escalation in an existing problem.

This sad reality of the holiday season was underscored on Tuesday, December 6, when National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women was marked at Town Hall.

Mayor and members of Council were joined by Lorris Herenda, Executive Director of Yellow Brick House, to raise a flag to commemorate the day, which was first observed following the Ecole Polytechnique Massacre on December 6, 1989.

“We commemorate the [massacre] and also use the day to raise awareness about the continuation of gender-based violence, the continuous growth of femicides across Ontario and Canada, and we raise purple Wrapped in Courage flags across eight municipalities in York Region,” Herenda told *The Auran* ahead of the ceremony. “It’s really raising awareness that the issue of gender-based violence has not been solved. We need to collectively, as a society, be a part of the movement where we’re raising awareness, breaking the silence, and giving a voice to those who are no longer with us because of the fact they lost their lives due to their gender.”

During the pandemic, Yellow Brick House saw a significant rise in domestic violence, which can be attributed to the fact women who experienced violence were under stay-at-home orders and thus stuck at home with their abusers.

“Even pre-pandemic, we saw about a 30 per cent increase in crisis calls during the month of December just before the holidays and an influx of women leaving their abusive homes right after the holidays. That has been a traditional trend for us and already we’re experiencing that increase. Even though we’re in the early days of December we’re anticipating between a 30 to 45 per cent increase in our crisis calls until the end of this month.”

“Traditionally, a lot of factors are used as stress indicators that may escalate violence. It is important for us not to say that violence escalates because the holidays are around the corner or there are financial pressures. That could be part of the equation, but violence that happens in this home is pre-existing and a lot of perhaps outside stressors such as poor economy or inflation or the need to spend money on gifts for family members are used as an excuse for the reason and escalation in violence. It’s important to understand that violence was pre-existing and a lot of these external pressures that happen to all of us is used as excuses to escalate that violence against the women and children in the home.”

Ms. Herenda encourages women who are living in violent situations not to wait until the holidays are over to escape because their lives might be in danger.

Yellow Brick House and like organizations make a concerted effort, with the help of the community, to make shelters feel like homes. There might be some stigma associated with coming to a shelter, Ms. Herenda added, but it's fear of the unknown, not knowing what a shelter looks like.

A shelter is a home, it's a safe home where women and children can relax, they can actually get a good night sleep without having to worry about being beaten or violated, and we give it our 100 per cent shot to make sure they do have a celebration of the holidays in our community and York Region has been great to ensure the women and children have gifts for the holiday season and special meals prepared.

I encourage women, if they fear for their lives, and they want to get help, to please reach out to the crisis line and we can certainly make sure their time with us is safe and very much a safe and secure family setting.

If you are in crisis, Yellow Brick House's 24-hour crisis line can be reached toll free by either text or phone at 1-800-263-3247.

For further information on Yellow Brick House, visit yellowbrickhouse.org.

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