

Government fights trafficking of Women and Girls in York Region



By **Chris McGowan**

Dr. Kellie Leitch, Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, along with Lois Brown, Member of Parliament for Newmarket-Aurora, announced \$200,000 in funding for a 30 month project to address the issues of human trafficking in York Region.

The announcement was made Monday in the riding in a meeting attended by Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, and members of the project team from the Women's Support Network.

This new project is aimed at eliminating human trafficking.

"Ending the violence against women and girls is a priority for our Government," said Ms. Brown.

Funding has been increased to women's programs to its highest level yet to help stop human trafficking in York Region. This project is being managed by the Women's Support Network of York Region, Project Coordinator Loren Delaney, and is specifically focused on the trafficking of girls and women in York Region between the ages of 13 and 19.

This age group is at the greatest risk as they are the biggest users of internet and social Media where luring and sexual exploitation is predominantly taking place.

"Women and girls make up about eighty percent of human trafficking worldwide, and are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation," said Ms. Brown. "\$62 million has been funded to projects to end violence against women and girls, with human trafficking being one of the areas the government is focusing on."

Dr. Leitch was happy to announce this project in hopes that it will ensure the safety and security to women and girls in York Region.

"Canadians think everything is great, and that we do not have these challenges on our soil, but we do," said Leitch. "Our Government is doing their part to ensure Canadians are safe, particularly focusing on the violence against women and girls."

The announcement of this new project was hosted by Samina Esmail, member of the Board of Directors of the Women's Support Network of York Region. The Women's Support Network (WSN) is a rape crisis centre which is mandated to serve all of York Region.

WSN provides free, non-judgemental immediate and confidential services to support women who have experienced sexual violence in the York Region area. Funding is provided to WSN from the Ministry of the Attorney General, and Project Funding is obtained from the Canadian Women's Foundation, and Status of Women of Canada.

WSN specializes in the support of sexual assault, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, incest and commercial sexual exploitation. They are tasked with providing group and individual counselling, as well as providing education to students and the public regarding sexual violence.

?At WSN our goal is to eradicate sexual violence? said Esmail.

Working with WSN on the new project will be the York Regional Police, local women's groups, and social service agencies. The end result will lead to the development of a region-wide plan lead by the Region's Anti Human Trafficking Committee.

?Our organization is committed to eliminating the crime of human trafficking and preventing the exploitation of vulnerable women and girls,? said Kelly Cameron, Human Trafficking Program Developer for the Women's Support Network of York Region. ?A community action plan is needed to prioritize and coordinate our efforts effectively. We are pleased to partner with Status of Women Canada and local agencies on this important project.?

For more information on the project or to learn how to provide volunteer services to the Women's Support Network please visit their website at www.womenssupportnetwork.ca.