

?Threads of Action? weave together to combat gender-based violence



The cold weather is here and scarves are doing their best to keep us warm ? but, if you happen to spot someone wearing a purple scarf in the community, chances are the simple garment is doing much more than that: it's making a statement against gender-based violence.

November is Woman Abuse Prevention Month in Ontario and this year Yellow Brick House and organizations across the Province are coming together to lead the 10th annual Wrapped In Courage Campaign, the 2025 theme of which is ?Threads of Action to End Gender-Based Violence.?

According to the Aurora-based shelter which serves women and children fleeing domestic violence, the theme ?emphasizes that each individual holds the power to create change, with purple scarves serving as a visible symbol of courage and support for survivors.?

Purple scarves, neckties, ribbons, and so much more were the order of the day earlier this month when Yellow Brick House teamed up with St. Andrew's College and St. Anne's School to host its annual Break the Silence, Step into My Shoes Walk.

While Yellow Brick House Executive Director Lorris Herenda was glad to be able to tell those in attendance that the number of women and children lost to domestic violence in Ontario this year was lower than at the same time in 2024, she told The Auroran this week that there is still much to be done.

?Last year in November I shared that in Ontario we had lost 62 women and children from November 2023 to November 2024, which is an absolutely unacceptable number ? and it's a shocking number, quite frankly, because it's more than one a week,? says Herenda. ?This year, I was grateful that the number had decreased in the last 10 months. We lost 35 women and children, which is a significant decrease.?

While that figure didn't include the months of October and November, Herenda says the number is ?still exceptionally high, but I have to find some hope in believing that by increasing awareness, that we continuously try to do through the year, we are reaching families who are living in these horrid conditions, who are able to reach out for help and escape a potential death sentence.?

The Wrapped In Courage campaign was launched 10 years ago encouraging people to wear purple scarves as a ?symbolic show of support to abused women and children.? It's a movement that has grown well beyond scarves in the ensuing decade ? but the heart of the mission remains the same.

?We've seen tremendous growth across communities in Ontario with individuals, organizations, even corporations really embracing the purple scarf, or the purple garment or ribbon and it's becoming the norm for people that come November 1 they really demonstrate their support to abused women and children,? says Herenda.

She notes she and representatives from violence against women organizations are meeting at Queen's Park this Tuesday, November 25, to meet with legislators, including Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa, who also serves as Ontario's Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, to speak about the necessity of supporting organizations like theirs.

?I think that since the pandemic we've definitely seen a growth in domestic violence, intimate partner violence, yet there hasn't been an equivalent growth in investment in the infrastructure,? says Herenda. ?The Provincial government has been very supportive, especially this year, in providing some funding to Violence Against Women organizations to kind of catch up and support what we already have in place, but we are also seeing a definite increase in the demand for our services, which has resulted in increased wait times for getting counseling support. For example, we used to be from two months to now six months because of the sheer volume of women and children who are reaching out for support.

?Awareness is definitely reaching families that need to hear that we're there for them [but] at the same time, we're not able to grow at the pace that is required to meet their demand. When women and children, for example, call for a shelter bed, we're often full, not just us, across the province, so we definitely have to invest in more shelter beds across Ontario, specifically in York Region. We haven't had a growth in shelter beds in 13 years, yet our population in York Region has doubled, and as the population doubles, so does the need.?

November 25 is the International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women and the first of 16 days of activism that continues through December 10, including the National Day of Remembrance and Action of Violence Against Women on December 6, which honours the memory of 14 women killed in the 1989 Ecole Polytechnique massacre.

Despite their awareness efforts, Herenda says many members of the general population are simply not aware of the number of femicides that take place across Ontario each year, and, when speaking to groups, they're often shocked when she shares the statistics.

?I think that a lot of people think that domestic violence is still a very private issue, and don't understand the severity of it,? she says. ?They may think it's just some sort of a breakdown in a personal relationship, which, of course, it is, but the consequences of that with women and children continuing to live in abusive, violent homes is that their contributions to our community are impacted, their mental health is impacted, their physical health is impacted, and ultimately the danger grows. It may have started with a slap at one point, but down the road it may become a situation where weapons are utilized, and families, not just women and children, but the extended family may be impacted by this as well. It's important to realize that when women are living in these violent homes, and the violence increases, and eventually they lose their lives, the impact it has, not just on that family, but on that woman's colleagues, who may have worked with her and feel horrible that they weren't able to prevent it, or the employer, or the school system. It has a ripple effect on really destroying the cohesiveness of a community.

?People need to understand this is not a private issue. It's an issue that impacts every single one of us. The more we accept that and say, ?no, we don't want that as part of our society,' and we speak up against it, and we engage, and have everybody engage to talk about this issue, not just women, but men as well, to stand up with survivors, to support them, to model respect, to call out abusers and challenge them. That's what we need to do as a society, individually and collectively, in order to change the statistics of intimate partner violence.?

For more information on Yellow Brick House and its services, visit yellowbrickhouse.org. If you're in crisis, call their toll free line at 1-800-263-3247.

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