



Abuse of women discussed

Published Thursday November 17th, 2011

Sessions arranged to raise awareness about domestic violence court system? Synopsis Lede

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Abuse against women is the loss of safety, dignity and control. Women who are abused or threatened with physical, mental, verbal, financial or sexual abuse by their partner, are the victims of crime. November is family violence prevention month and there were two information sessions yesterday at the Peace Centre on Queen Street to encourage dialogue about abuse.



ENLARGE PHOTO

RON WARD/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Judge Anne Dugas-Horsman spoke on Wednesday at the Downtown Peace Centre in Moncton during an information session on domestic violence. The session was organized by the City of Moncton's Public Safety Advisory Committee.

Ginette Petitpas Taylor is the co-ordinator of Codiac RCMP victim services and a member of public safety advisory committee of Moncton. Taylor organized these two sessions to raise awareness about how the domestic violence court system works and what kind of help there is available for people who are suffering from domestic violence.

You don't need to be a social worker to be affected and touched by domestic violence, said Taylor.

"We are all affected by it in one way or another. We all know individuals who are victims, regardless if we know they are victimized or not. They are in our world."

The first information session was a luncheon with judge Anne Dugas-Horsman. Horsman was tasked with creating a specialized court dealing with domestic violence, this court was established in Moncton and was the first one of its kind east of Ontario. Moncton was chosen as a pilot for this project and it's now a permanent fixture.

"It was a result of a government plan what's called a better world for women and that's one of the initiatives," said Horsman.

Moncton was the first domestic violence court established east of Ontario, and now there is a trend moving towards these therapeutic courts, said Horsman.

"Newfoundland is now two years into its model. It's now experimenting with a model in St. Johns and Nova Scotia is in the process of implementing a pilot project."

For the sake of simplicity in her presentation, Horsman referred to victims as females and offenders as males, because although there are female offenders, the vast majority are male.

Domestic violence court takes a curative approach to dealing with offences, said Horsman.

"Because most of the models are therapeutic in approach."

Therapeutic in the sense that when an offender comes to court to answer to a charge, if he wishes to avail himself, he will be expected to enter a guilty plea and from there, sentencing will be deferred until the offender has completed a series of measures and programs, said Horsman.

"He may be ordered to reappear periodically in front of a judge to show his progress or a lack thereof."

In some cases, he would be taken out of domestic violence court and dealt with in regular court, said Horsman.

"If indeed he completes the program that was deemed appropriate in light of the circumstance of the offence committed and he's met all the essential criteria, then the sentence is usually some kind of discharge."

The emphasis and goal of domestic violence court is prevention and a curative approach, but there are challenges with domestic violence, said Horsman.

"In the large majority of cases she does not want (the offender) charged. She wants the behaviour to stop and she wants him to get the help that she feels he needs."

The victim's safety is of the utmost importance, said Horsman.

"This is the only type of criminal offence where sometimes the offender can go home with the victim."

The evening session, also at the Peace Centre, featured Rina Arsenault from the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Foundation. Arsenault discussed all the resources available to victims of abuse.

Twenty years ago, when Taylor began working in the system, domestic violence was not something that was discussed, she said.

"It was something that was dealt with at home. You just didn't go there, it was a home issue."

Arsenault provided a snapshot of what can you do if you're suffering from domestic abuse.

Emergency services

- * If it's an emergency call 911.
- * Codiac RCMP 857-2400
- * Richibucto 523-4611
- * Sackville / Shediac 533-5151
- * All other regions 1-800-665-6663

Transition houses

- * Aboriginal 458-1224 or 1-800-565-6878
- * Moncton 853-0811
- * Kent 743-1530

Helpline

- * Chimo 1-800-667-5005
- * Elsipogtog crisis line 523-8224
- * Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868

All the resources victims and offenders might need can also be found on the first or second page of your phone book.

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The judge's name is Dugas-Horsman NOT just "Horsman".....but who cares if a name is correct, huh?

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