

Ending violence against women everyone's responsibility

Working towards a mindset that is different from the one people may have as a result of a specific upbringing that perceives abuse as a common action, is the key to minimizing instances of intimate partner violence.

“Thinking is a behaviour,” said Christa Daku, Envision's executive director. “We learn these types of things from our upbringing, from society, from friends, but we can learn something different regardless of what we've already learned.”

Envision Counselling and Support Centre in Estevan continues to remain up to the challenge when it comes to educating people, and as *End Violence Against Women and Children Memorial Vigil* draws closer, which will take place on Dec. 5 at the Southeast Regional College, they're reminding people that anyone can visit them to obtain assistance and knowledge.

They also often relay the message that no one is judged when they walk through their doors. Whether it's a victim, or someone who has the aforementioned mindset but wants to change their ways, all are welcome and encouraged to come forward.

“To put that fear aside and just seek some support before it escalates into something that can't be undone is so important and we definitely want to be there to support individuals who want to be proactive in their life,” Daku said.

DeeDee Chomyk, owner of Baba's Bistro and author of the book *Unpunished*, knows very well how scenarios involving intimate partner violence can escalate and where it can lead to. Her book, which is based on a woman's past experiences with intimate partner violence, outlines instances of abuse she endured and a subsequent escape from a dangerous situation that involved her partner at the time, a man named Merv, who lived on the Cayman Islands.

“Personally for me, there were things throughout childhood that I never considered abuse because I thought it was normal,” she said. “As I got older and got involved with other friends and families I discovered that it was the farthest thing from normal.”

Merv, who the woman in Chomyk's book named Donna, encountered in her adult life, is described as a handsome young man raised in a Catholic family. He quickly became someone Donna cared for. It became apparent to Donna, however, that Merv was battling serious demons, as he often disappeared for days and looked overwhelmingly haggard and frightened upon return.

Instances of sexual abuse became more frequent as their relationship continued, so she decided to take control and with the help of her friend from Canada, a plan was formulated to get Donna out. Merv controlled her computer and cell phone so as a result, so she had to resort to a landline phone to call for help. A complex, three-day plan was created to sneak her out. She managed to finally escape with her friend.

“There was one road in and no way out,” Chomyk said. “It was either the road or the ocean, because there's lava rock and burning trees surrounded the island.”

Following Donna's escape, Merv was murdered. Chomyk said it was obvious he was targeted. The investigation is still unsolved.

"Things can get so out of hand," she said. "Something was wrong with (Merv) and it was clear he was battling some serious demons. (Donna) tried to help him, but she never figured out what the problem was."

Daku said there are indicators that can hint at a person's capability to harm his or her partner in a relationship. Chomyk and Daku noted that perpetrators can be a man or woman.

"The bottom line is that perpetrators need help, too," Chomyk said.

On the heels of a recent sexual assault case in Weyburn, where a woman was attacked at night after she finished work, Daku said education and support for victims is essential. She also noted that support for potential perpetrators is important as well, because it can ultimately prevent a case, like the one in Weyburn, from happening.

"We all definitely have a responsibility to keep ourselves safe, because ultimately we'll never be able to control anyone but ourselves. That being said more education is needed in the community that informs people how men can be supportive to men who may have the potential to do something like that," she said.

For Donna, Merv wasn't the only man in her life that caused her harm. Before the shocking events on the Cayman Islands, she lived in the country with a man who she described as "extremely controlling," and refused her to have male friends.

Chomyk said Donna's parents largely dismissed her accusations against both men. She described those moments, as "devastating," and said all victims in these situations require support from those closest to them, and a plan.

"Rehabilitation for some men in these situations is difficult," she said. "For a victim, it's easy to do nothing, but it's not easy to get out. But you need to tell someone and you need to have plan to get out of the situation you're in."

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