

Marching to stop violence

By Sarah Sobanski

Community members will march to raise awareness for violence against women next week.

Tuesday, Dec. 6 will mark the 27th anniversary of the Ecole Polytechnique massacre that saw 14 women murdered in Montreal. Bancroft locals will once again gather at A Place for the Arts and march to the Heart of the Park to remember these women and those lost closer to home. Anastasia Kuzyk, Nathalie Warmerdam and Carol Culleton who were murdered last year in Wilno. I think when it happens so close and it happened in our community also in the early '90s when three women in our community were brutally murdered on New Year's Eve by their son, nephew and spouse. Each year we mention those women and now the women who were killed in the Wilno area as well. It's very close to home here in our community and it's affected so many of us, said women's support worker for Tamarack Women's Resource Centre and Maggie's Resource Centre Leslie Jenkins. It's really important that we raise awareness that women are losing their lives in senseless acts of violence.

That man who killed those women last year, all of that stuff built up inside of him over time. This was not random. It wasn't like how did this happen? You have to understand that that dynamic got built over time. It's sustained and built systemically. The dynamic how women are less, how we're still not honoured or respected, how we're not treated equally, said community member and local artist Jody Raven.

Jenkins and Raven are helping to organize the march. They're welcoming all community members including youth and men to stand with them.

We will be providing the men present at the rally with black armbands. It is a symbol of grief, death and also a protest symbol, said Raven who has been a victim of violent abuse. She noted the march was also for participants' sisters in spirit? the country's thousands of missing and murdered indigenous women.

Jenkins added, We encourage all members of community to come and participate. We're really hoping that we see a strong youth presence this year. We do encourage men to participate.

Jenkins suggested that domestic violence is a problem in Bancroft and surrounding areas. She said Maggie's Resource Centre has five employees that are busy dealing with domestic violence and situations involving violence against women every day.

These cases only reflect the small margin of women who reach out for help. Raven explained many never break what she called the silence code.

We'd be guessing [that's] 10 to 30 per cent of the actual need. We need to understand that 70 to 90 per cent of women do not ever contact anyone. That's the other issue we're always working with. How can we reach the women who don't use our services or don't reach out. Raising awareness increases the percentages of women who seek help, said Raven.

She added, The women who do are actually pariahs and mavericks because they break the silence code. They step out of the dynamics of the patriarchy and they actually say something. As soon as they do it they become different. Women who do that have tons of courage. It's, frankly, openly discouraged.

Isolation is one of the many hurdles for rural women dealing with domestic violence. Jenkins explained in some situations a family only has one car. Without access to transportation, it can be harder for a woman to get help.

Triggers for violence against women can also peak at different times of the year. Moving into the winter, families with seasonal incomes can suddenly be short on cash.

The bills are piling up. Christmas is coming. Oftentimes a lot of that stress is then put on the female to miraculously create something that isn't possible. Then that is taken out on her when she is not able to fulfill that, explained Jenkins. I think the rising costs of living in a rural community as well, in the sense of do I pay my hydro bill [or] do I pay my car payment? those types of things can also be triggers for a lot of abuse because women are just supposed to pull this money out of thin air and when they can't they're victimized.

Raven suggested there were too many factors for violence against women to quantify into statistics. The stats recording abuse only brush the surface of how deep the problem runs.

Women are killed of course, but there's all kinds of things that happen [where] women don't die but their souls are ripped out of their bodies, said Raven. We need to speak about this and talk about all the women who are dying in their relationships and in their homes, through violence, [and] through psychological, emotional, mental, spiritual, sexual, physical, financial [abuse] and they are completely hidden. The course of the abuse we see is usually the worst, it's the indicator. Women are murdered and we know there's a whole bunch of other things happening and it's widespread.

The march will begin at A Place for the Arts at 3 p.m. There will also be a gallery at the annex of A Place for the Arts featuring

artwork from the women of Tamarack, Maggie's and the community. Called the Stronger Women Art Project, the gallery will run from Dec. 6 to Dec. 20.

?Just share, spend time together as a community, acknowledge that this is huge in our community and bring awareness to the fact that this is going on through our back doors. It's going on with our family members,? encouraged Jenkins, noting the march will end with a bonfire and meal for those attending.

?Our mothers and daughters and sisters and nieces are in relationships that are unhealthy and they're afraid to speak to anybody because as women we're always made to feel like we have to fix it. If we can fix it then it will go away. You get to a point where you're not able to fix it anymore because you're so broken as a human. Sometimes all the strength they have is to make a phone call.?