

ENDING VIOLENCE

Association of BC

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SEVEN YEARS AFTER OAK BAY: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STILL TAKES ITS TOLL IN BC

Victoria – It has been seven years since Sunny Park, her six-year-old son Christian Lee and her parents, Kum Lea Chun and Moon Kyu Park were murdered by Sunny’s husband, Peter Lee in Oak Bay, B.C. Central to that tragedy was that Sunny Park was not connected to any community-based victim service in the four-year span leading to her murder. Instead, she was left to cope with complex, disconnected systems involving police, marriage counsellors and child protection workers while the violence and threats by her husband escalated - threats that would later be identified by experts as clear risk factors for extreme violence or potential lethality.

So far this year, B.C. has stood witness to a brutal outbreak of domestic violence-related murders, attempted murders and suicides that have left 18 people dead. Among the deceased are 12 women, 5 men (4 of these were offenders who committed suicide) and 1 child. There were another 11 people injured. 12 men have been charged with murder or attempted murder of their female partners and 1 man charged with the murder of his ex-partner’s current boyfriend.

In light of what we know will save lives, and to honour Sunny and her family, and all those who have lost their lives to domestic violence, today we plead with the Province of B.C. to make the investments that have been called for over many years:

- 1) Increase spending for existing community-based victim services and fund new programs to make them available to every B.C. community and fund specialized Aboriginal programs for each Reserve and through every Friendship Centre;
- 2) Provide early intervention counselling and management for abusive men, when risk-related behaviours first appear, rather than waiting for post-conviction court mandated services;
- 3) Invest in coordination efforts to increase the number of Interagency Case Assessment Teams (ICATs) throughout the province (teams that consist of cross-sector responders who work together on a case-by-case basis to develop and implement strategies to keep high-risk women and their children safe).

EVA BC has been tracking domestic violence-related deaths in B.C. for over 15 years and, like many coroner inquest and inquiry recommendations, we have concluded that having access to community-based victim support is key to women surviving high risk domestic violence. In a province with 889 communities there are only 69 community-based victim service programs, most with just one worker, while numerous reports and recommendations have identified that this kind of support is critical to ensuring victims do not fall through the cracks.

Effective and accessible services for offenders are also essential to increasing women’s safety and to ending intimate partner violence. Programs for offenders need to be included in a coordinated system of services for victims and children. Early interventions, when risk-related behaviours first appear, could stop an abuser from progressing on a path of escalating violence ending in murder and suicide.

A number of inquests and inquiries, including the *Domestic Violence Death Review Panel Report* to the Chief Coroner of B.C. in 2010, have stressed that safety for women and children can be improved by collaborative interagency responses. An incredibly effective response framework that has emerged in B.C. is community and police lead high-risk Interagency Case Assessment Teams. Funding must be provided to increase the number of these teams.

A recent report from the RCMP concluded that Canada's total number of murdered and missing Aboriginal women far exceeds previous public estimates and that Aboriginal women are over-represented among Canada's murdered and missing women, with victimization rates close to three times higher than that of non-Aboriginal women.

It has to be said that some progress has been made at the policy level in B.C., but it is slow and funding for front-line supports has been basically unchanged for more than 20 years while spending for police, health and education in B.C. has steadily increased. We ask the province of B.C. to accept our plea and make the necessary investments. The problem is only getting worse. Clearly, this situation cannot continue.

Quotes

Tracy Porteous, Executive Director, Ending Violence Association of BC -

"It's hard to measure how many lives have been saved thanks to the efforts of community-based victim supports, but in all of our research into domestic violence deaths in B.C. we have not been able to find one woman who was receiving community-based victim services who has died as a result of domestic violence."

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, Representative for Children and Youth -

"Today, seven years after the death of Christian Lee, a collaborative, systemic approach to domestic violence across the child-serving, mental health, and criminal and civil justice systems still does not exist. I am confident we can get to a stronger system if we truly dedicated the effort and resources to supporting vulnerable women and children and remove the barriers they now face to safety."

Robin Russell, Victimized by Domestic Violence –

"I was dealing with some pretty horrific violence over many years and I am not sure I would be here today if it wasn't for the support I got from my community based worker and the police. I am making the step forward today because I feel strongly that all women dealing with what I have been through need and deserve support."

Haminder Gakhal, Cousin of Rajwar Gakhal – "It has been 17 years since tragedy struck my family in '96; and it is disheartening for us to see how little ground we have covered when it comes to effectively combating domestic violence. Domestic violence is everyone's responsibility, and in order to be successful, all levels of government must work together to bridge gaps in the services and we just are not seeing that."

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