

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

Background on Speakers

Tracy Porteous **Executive Director** **Ending Violence Association of BC**

Tracy Porteous is a Registered Clinical Counsellor in BC and has been involved in the anti-violence field for 31 years. Tracy is the Executive Director of the Ending Violence Association of BC, a Provincial umbrella Association that supports 240 anti-violence programs across the province who specialize in responding to sexual and domestic violence, child abuse and criminal harassment. Tracy develops resources and programs, develops and delivers training and works collaboratively with various public authorities, including government, to create and coordinate public policy and practice to enhance safety for those who are vulnerable to violence and abuse.

Tracy was a member of BC's first Domestic Violence Death Review Panel, and currently sits as an advisor to the National Victim Policy Centre through the Federal Department of Justice. In 2011 Tracy was honoured with a "Lifetime Achievement Award" by BC's Child and Youth Representative. In 2012 she was presented with a "Game Changer Award" by the Scotia Bank and accepted the Humanitarian Award from the BC Association of Broadcasters for conceiving and launching the wildly successful province-wide violence against women prevention program called "Be More Than A Bystander; Break The Silence on Violence Against Women". In 2013 Tracy was honoured with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal for her dedication to service for over 30 years. In 2012 Tracy was invited to speak at the United Nations' 57th Commission on the Status of Women in New York as an official delegate from Canada about the importance of engaging men and boys in the prevention of violence against women.

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond **BC Representative for Children and Youth**

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond is BC's first Representative for Children and Youth. She was appointed in 2006 and was re-appointed for a second five-year term in 2011. The Representative is an independent Officer of the Legislature who supports children, youth and families who need help in dealing with the child welfare system. She also provides oversight to the Ministry of Children and Family Development and advocates for improvements to the child welfare system.

Ms. Turpel-Lafond is a judge on leave from the Saskatchewan Provincial Court. She worked as a criminal law judge in youth and adult courts, with an emphasis on developing partnerships to better serve the needs of young people in the justice system, particularly sexually exploited children and youth, as well as children and youth with disabilities, such as those who suffer from fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

She holds a doctorate of law from Harvard Law School and a master's degree in international law from Cambridge University. In 2007, the Indigenous Bar Association awarded her the distinction of 'Indigenous Peoples Counsel'. As well, Time Magazine has twice bestowed honours upon Ms. Turpel-Lafond, naming her one of the '100 Global Leaders of Tomorrow' in 1994, and one of the 'Top 20 Canadian Leaders for the 21st Century' in 1999.

Harminder Gakhal

Gakhal Family Relative

Cousin of Rajwar Gakhal who was murdered in Vernon in 1996, Harminder is one of the surviving relatives of the Gakhal family, victims in what was Canada's largest domestic violence related mass murder.

Details of the Gakhal Massacre; Vernon, British Columbia; April 6, 1996

Victims:

Karnail Singh Gakhal (50 yrs)

Darshan Kaur Gakhal (45 yrs)

Jaspal Singh Gakhal (14 yrs)

Khalvinder Kaur Gakhal (21 yrs)

Jasbir Kaur Saran (30 yrs)

Baljit Singh Saran (33 yrs)

Harvinder Kaur Gakhal (17)

Rajwar Kaur Chahal (26 yrs ex spouse of Mark Chahal)

Balvinder Kaur Gakhal (24 yrs bride to be)

Offender:

Mark Chahal (30 yrs gunman/suicide)

Summary:

On April 5, 1996, Mark Chahal systematically murdered his ex wife, Rajwar and 8 of her relatives as they prepared for Balvinder's wedding that day. Witnesses described how Chahal opened fire with a .40-calibre semi-automatic handgun and a .30-calibre revolver "one in each hand, just like the old western-style shooters, blasting away". In less than 5 minutes, 9 members of the Gakhal/Saran family were dead. He then returned to his hotel room and killed himself. At the end of this horrible day, 10 people were dead (including the shooter), 2 injured and 2 child witnesses to this act. To this day, the Gakhal massacre is Canada's second worst mass murder, only behind the 14 women killed by Marc Lepine at Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique on December 6, 1989.

Although Chahal had no criminal record, wife Rajwar had complained about his violent behavior to police at their home in the Vancouver area, and then to police in Vernon when she returned to her family after separating from Chahal in January 1995. Rajwar was a modern, professional woman with a loving, extended family who supported and encouraged her decision to leave the abuse and to take criminal action against Chahal for her protection.

Robin Russell

Domestic Violence Survivor

Robin Russell met her abuser when she was 19 years old. She suffered physical and mental abuse at his hands for nearly 15 years. Despite the isolation and fear she was experiencing, she tried numerous times to leave him. As the leader of a gang he was able to use his connections to track her and prevent any escape. It was only once she decided she would rather be dead than with him that she was finally able to escape.

During a trip, her abuser abandoned her in a foreign city while he headed back to BC to empty her home and take her children. Police helped Robin return to BC and placed her in protective custody. She then worked from the confines of a safe house to engage the judicial system to get her children back.

Despite repeated harassment, violence and overwhelming odds, Robin has forged a new life for herself and her children. She credits the support of community based victim services, along with the efforts of police and a tenacious lawyer, for playing significant roles in what she has accomplished. To this day, she continues to struggle with ongoing harassment from her abuser.

Capital Region Domestic Violence Unit

Sgt. Jon Semkiw, Saanich Police Department

A 14 year member currently assigned to the Regional Domestic Violence Unit as the NCO. The Regional Domestic Violence Unit works with the 7 police agencies in the Greater Victoria area, and takes on the 'Highest Risk' Domestic Violence Cases in the Region. The Unit provides investigational assistance as well as Victim support and Offender management. The RDVU team is made up of MCFD, Community Based Victim Services, Police and Probation. The unit is in its 4th year and is proving to be an effective model.

Shabna Ali

Executive Director

BC Society of Transition Houses

Shabna Ali is the Executive Director of BC Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH). BCSTH is an umbrella organization providing training, support and practice development to over 200 transition houses, second stage, safe homes, children who witness abuse and violence is preventable prevention programs across BC. Our members provide front line services to women, youth and children exposed to violence.