

BC Lions tell Oliver students not to be bystanders to sexual harassment and assault

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By **Lyonel Doherty**



BC Lions defensive back Eric Fraser talks to Southern Okanagan Secondary students about not being bystanders to sexual harassment and assault. (Lyonel Doherty photo)

This week two BC Lions football players came to Oliver with an urgent message to students: Break the silence on violence against women.

One girl took the message to heart and thanked fullback Rolly Lumbala and defensive back Eric Fraser for coming to Southern Okanagan Secondary School to talk about the issue.

"I'm glad they're doing this (addressing schools)," she told the *Chronicle* afterward.

"This (problem) is real; it's not just in the movies," she said, expressing deep concern about the sexual harassment that some girls are subjected to.

"The jokes are not okay . . . we have to stand up (to this)."

The BC Lions football team has been spreading the word to high schools across the province, asking students to "be more than a bystander" when sexual harassment and violence raise their ugly heads.

"Being more than a bystander is not easy," said Lumbala as he paced the gymnasium. "Some people don't know how to intervene, but we're not here to fight violence with violence."

Lumbala noted that one in three women experiences sexual assault in their lifetime, adding there are more than 1,000 physical or sexual assaults against women in BC each week.

"Unless we change our ways and change the culture, one in three women are at risk," Lumbala said.

The fullback said women have been leaders on the issue of gender violence for years. But now it's time for men to stand with these women and speak up.

"We have to change how we talk in the locker rooms and stand up for the women in our lives."

Fraser spoke about relationships and dating violence, noting that jealous boyfriends keeping tabs on their girlfriends via texting can lead to physical and sexual violence.

The player also told the students that catcalling is not funny and can be very intimidating to women.

"Sexual assault can be slapping a girl on the butt," Fraser said.

The defensive back stressed that consent for sex has to be clear, coherent, and enthusiastic.

"A girl can remove consent at any time; make sure it's a mutual agreement."

He also reminded the students that alcohol impairment cannot be used as a defence in sexual assault. In addition, if a guy receives a naked photo from a girl under 18 and he posts the photo on social media, he can be charged with distributing child pornography, Fraser pointed out.

Lumbala urged male students to speak up and do something if they see a girl being sexually harassed or taken advantage of.

"That's the most important thing, step up and do something . . . it's not a superhero approach."

Lumbala said it only takes one person to make a difference, and if someone tells the offender that his sexist joke is inappropriate, he'll think twice next time.

Fraser encouraged the males not to laugh at these sexist jokes, advising them to refuse to join in or simply leave the group. He also recommended that someone offer the victim support by standing beside her and asking if she is okay.

Another method Fraser introduced was creating a distraction so the situation doesn't escalate.

Fraser acknowledged that it's hard to speak out against a friend who is the offender, but he advised pulling him aside later and expressing a concern about his behaviour.

"It's on all of us to change the culture," Fraser said.

Sixteen-year-old Rylan Laranjo said a lot of students were caught off guard by the presentation because they didn't know it was about sexual assault.

Although it was a strong message, Laranjo said a lot of guys were offended because they felt they were being targeted.

Laranjo stated that he has seen and heard sexual harassment in bigger cities, but it's not common in Oliver.

"I can't relate to it because I'm not seeing it (here)."

Laranjo said he would not sit idly by while a girl was being catcalled. The youth noted he and a friend noticed a girl being touched and grabbed at a concert in Kelowna. So they told the offender to back off and took the girl to a safe area away from the unpleasant situation.

In a classroom after the presentation, Lumbala told a group of leadership students that if they don't speak up when someone is being sexually harassed, they are essentially condoning the act, which could land them in trouble too.

