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Events mark Sexualized Assault Prevention Month

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By **Emily Blake** on **May 8, 2017**

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The Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, LesEssentiElles, and a number of other Yukon organizations are hosting events as part of Sexualized Assault Prevention Month.

The goal is to raise awareness about sexualized assault and offer solutions to eliminate it.

This year's theme, Flip the Script, is aimed at tackling norms and social scripts that perpetuate sexualized violence, and offering tools to build a culture that promotes and respects consent.

"Something that we talk about in this field all the time are the little things that contribute to sexualized violence," said Sarah Murphy, the women's centre's program co-ordinator.

She said this includes everyday conversations and actions that enable sexualized violence, excuse perpetrators, and deny people's consent and ownership of their own bodies.

"I think one of the first steps we can take is changing the way we talk about sexualized violence and consent and the way relationships are generally portrayed in the media," said Elaine Michaud, the executive director of Les EssentiElles.

She highlighted "boys will be boys" as a classic example of a saying that negates educating people about consent and respect.

This month's events will focus on helping bystanders to understand why these scripts are troublesome and how to counter them.

"We will take a look at some of these common things that are said and encourage people to identify them as problematic and maybe respond differently," explained Murphy.

One common misconception about sexualized assault they plan to address, she said, is that someone who is intoxicated can consent to sexual activity.

She noted that even professionals, including some judges, RCMP officers and lawyers, don't fully understand the law around consent and the consumption of alcohol and other substances.

"It really just distracts from the fact that perpetrators use alcohol as a weapon to lower people's inhibitions, make them more vulnerable and easier to attack," she said.

Another issue she highlighted is victim-blaming, or finding ways to make a survivor responsible for what happened to them rather than putting the onus on perpetrators.

“We can’t be putting blame on victims,” she said.

“In 100 per cent of rapes, the rapist is responsible.”

As well, she said, people often think of sexualized violence as a “stranger danger,” whereas in most cases the survivor knows their assailant, and it can even be their intimate partner.

Sexualized Assault Prevention Month will kick off with a barbecue from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. today in LePage Park on Third Avenue.

It will include free food, door prizes, live entertainment and games to learn about consent.

Bringing Youth Towards Equality (BYTE) and the Yukon Consent Crew will be on the scene to provide information.

There will also be drumming from the Women of Wisdom program from the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre and music from members of Ukes of Hazzard.

The second main event is the BYTE ConneX panel from 7 to 9 p.m. May 16 at Baked Café. The panel featuring Yukon youth will focus on media literacy, and examine and discuss portrayals of sexualized violence in TV shows, movies, music, and sports.

“We’re going to be looking at clips from the media that send messages about consent, and we’re going to be asking the panelists to unpack those messages,” explained Shelby Maunder, BYTE’s executive director.

“A lot of our work is about healthy relationships, and consent is kind of at the core of that. It’s just an issue that we think is important.”

The final major event features retired football star J.R LaRose, who played for the B.C. Lions. He will speak May 31 at 5 p.m. at The Old Fire Hall as part of the Be More Than a Bystander initiative with the Ending Violence Association of B.C.

His talk will address how men and bystanders can help eliminate violence against women.

“I think there are three very different events within the theme,” said Murphy.

“I’m really excited about a different approach to talking about it with the B.C. Lions and J.R. LaRose.”

She noted this month is important, as sexual assault is the only major crime in Canada where the rates are not falling.

Statistics suggest that one in four women in Canada will experience sexualized violence in her lifetime.

And sexual assault rates in the Yukon are three to four times higher than the national average.

“It’s a statistic we quote often and it continues to be a problem,” said Murphy.

“Three to four times higher the rate means three to four times the concern.”

Resources in the Yukon for survivors of sexualized violence include the RCMP, territorial Victim’s Services staff, the Yukon Women’s Transition Home, and other health and social services.



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