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Lions tell SDSS students not to be a bystander

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B.C. Lions players Jordan Herdman and Mitchell Barnett presented their Be More Than a Bystander: break the silence on violence against women campaign to more than 600 grade 8/9 students at South Delta Secondary last Friday morning.
Photograph By IAN JACQUES

The B.C. Lions want everyone to break the silence on violence against women.

Lions' players Mitchell Barnett and Jordan Herdman teamed up with DOVE (Delta Opposes Violence Everywhere) to present their Be More Than a Bystander campaign to more than 600 Grade 8/9 students at South Delta Secondary last Friday morning.

Be More Than a Bystander is an initiative between EVA BC (Eliminate Violence Association) and the Lions aimed at increasing understanding of the impact of men's violence against women. The program helps break the silence surrounding violence against women and girls by providing tools, language and practical ideas about how to be more than a bystander, how to speak up and how to communicate that violence and abuse is not acceptable.

The five-year initiative, guided by an advisory group of women who are experts in the area of violence against women, sees the Lions use their status and public profile to educate people on the issue.

Last week's presentation was an interactive workshop about gender-based violence. The players promoted the importance of respectful relationships and what boys can do to help.

"Success in life as well as football is determined by teamwork and leadership," said Herdman. "It's not always easy to be a leader, but it can take that one courageous person to stand up and break the silence and we can all be leaders in this room. Leaders are people that stand up for what they believe in."

The overall initiative also includes training presented to amateur football coaches to help them talk to kids about violence against women and respectful relationships, a series of in-season football public service announcements and a series of films directed at youth with positive messaging that it is "cool" to respect women.

"Now that I have been in this program I can see the importance of standing up and speaking up," added Barnett.

DOVE coordinator Jill Colley said public awareness and education are big parts of the committee's mandate.

"This program focuses on the importance of healthy relationships and the need to prevent, assist and help gender-based violence situations," said Colley. "It's the message really that is so important and it gives students assistance and to have a voice. The earlier we can get this message across, the better."