

Men vital to anti-violence awareness, intervention

BY NATASCIA LYPNY, LEADER-POST MARCH 10, 2015



Jamie Taras, director of community relations for the B.C. Lions Football Club, which encourages men to speak out about ending violence against women.

Photograph by: Troy Fleece, Leader-Post, Leader-Post

The Regina Sexual Assault Centre wants to partner with local sports teams to increase awareness about violence against women, and it's hoping the Saskatchewan Roughriders will get on board.

At the centre's 40th anniversary breakfast on Monday, attendees learned about the Be More Than a Bystander campaign. A partnership between Ending Violence Association of B.C. and the B.C. Lions, it has players use their public profile to raise awareness about violence against women and encourage other men to speak out.

"I think it would be absolutely awesome to bring that here," said Debbie House, the sexual assault centre's administrator.

She said the person-power needed to get it up and running, though, would be "challenging" for the organization and, "would be much easier if we had the Riders on board and we hope that that can happen."

The B.C. campaign involves public service announcements featuring Lions players, a provincewide school education program delivered by players, a training program for amateur football coaches, and a film.

"What we're trying to do is make it cool to respect women and girls," said Tracy Porteous, executive director of the Ending Violence Association of B.C. While she said that public awareness of violence against women has increased, "what's been missing until recently is the interventions by men."

Jamie Taras, director of community relations with the Lions, said, "It's tremendous to me how the kids have embraced this topic."

The same thing has happened among the Lions themselves.

"We had change that had to occur in our own lockerroom," he said.

Porteous said "very few corporations have been willing to lend their brand to anti-violence advocates and the work that we're trying to do," but the Lions, by "flipping masculinity on its heels," will hopefully lead to a "groundswell" of involvement across Canada. Sure enough, since the partnership's launch in 2011, the Winnipeg Blue Bombers, Toronto Argonauts, Edmonton Eskimos and Calgary Stampeders have adopted some form of the campaign.

Dan Plaster, manager of community relations with the Roughriders, attended

the breakfast. When asked whether the team will sign on, he pointed to the club's Imagine No Bullying campaign. It has players speak about bullying in schools across the province.

"I think that is the best way we were able to deliver an anti-violence message," Plaster said.

He added that the program has drawn from elements of the Lions' campaign.

"So if you look at them, different titles and maybe a different way of doing things, but they're almost the exact same thing."

Still, Porteous wants to see more.

She said that while it's not her place to second-guess the Roughriders' decision about their involvement in this issue, "I would say that an anti-bullying campaign is an excellent intervention for bullying, but it's not an intervention for sexual assault and domestic violence."

She said that specific conversations about how to discuss and intervene in violence against women is essential.

"The more generic and more general a program is, the less effective it is in dealing with violence against women."

House added how it's pivotal for men to be involved in speaking up about violence against women. "If a woman speaks to a man and says, 'I don't like the way you're treating me,' it's just kind of sloughed off.

If a man speaks to a man and says, 'This is what appropriate behaviour is,' it carries a lot more weight. That's a sad thing to say, but that's the reality of it."

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