

## 'Speak up': Athlete JR Larose shares anti-violence message

Workshops and presentations aimed at ending violence against women

By John Weidlich, [CBC News](#) Posted: Apr 29, 2016 10:01 PM CT Last Updated: Apr 29, 2016 10:01 PM CT

Drawing on his own experience witnessing violence against his mother, retired football star JR Larose is in Saskatchewan to help launch a new program for the province called Be More Than a Bystander.

Larose, who played for the B.C. Lions, has been a keen advocate of the program for five years. It was launched, in B.C., by the Ending Violence Association in conjunction with his CFL team in 2011.

'We all know right from wrong.' - *JR Larose*

"It was something I needed to be a part of," Larose said Friday. "To raise awareness of an important issue."

It's being brought to this province through the efforts of Saskatchewan Sexual Assault Services and Football Saskatchewan.

Larose, and other high profile people from the world of sport, gathered in Saskatoon to raise awareness about the program's message.

## Mother thrown down stairs

"It was something that hit home for me," Larose said. "I witnessed my mom being abused."

He said he recalls an incident when a man, at a house party, threw his mother down a flight of stairs.

"I found myself in a position of not really knowing what to do," he said. "I was scared and I wanted to call the police. But I thought if I were to call the police, maybe my mom would be the person that ended up going to jail."

He said the experience of being a bystander, and feeling conflicted, helped him understand the message behind the program.

Be More Than a Bystander involves discussions about what people who witness violence against women can do, including reporting what they see to authorities.

They also talk about how to respond when they hear comments, perhaps among their own circle of friends, that are aggressive to women.

"Basically, all we're doing is providing them with options," Larose said. "Things that they can do to be leaders within their own community."

He said he hopes people learn how to speak up.

"We all know right from wrong," Larose said. "But, by doing nothing you're basically saying it's OK for that violence to continue to go on. So I just encourage people to speak up. Stand up."

# Junior athletes involved

In Saskatchewan, Larose will be involved in sharing the program with leading athletes from university football. They, in turn, will bring awareness of the message in presentations and workshops throughout the province.


Dianna Graves, from Saskatchewan Sexual Assault Services, praised the junior athletes for tackling such an important issue.

"We have to do something about it," Graves said, noting the province's high rate of violence against women. "When people and communities understand the problem, they become engaged in the solution."

Funding for the initiative is coming from the Heather Ryan and David Dube Foundation.

*With files from CBC Radio's The Afternoon Edition*

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