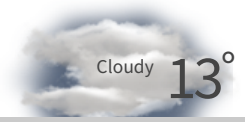




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Melinda Mack recipient of "Be More Than A Bystander" Award

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by Caitlin Thompson - Coast Mountain News
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Melinda Mack at the 2016 Dancing in the Light conference. From L to R: Comedian Ryan McMahon, Tracey Porteous of EVA, MLA Jennifer Rice, Susan Aglukark, Mike James, Will Loftus, JR LaRose and Theo Fleury — Image Credit: Archives

Melinda Mack's contributions to her community have not gone unnoticed, both locally and now from afar.

Last Friday, November 25, Mack was honoured in Vancouver by the Ending Violence Association of BC, who presented her with the 2016 "Be More Than A Bystander" Award.

Be More Than a Bystander is a groundbreaking partnership between the BC Lions and EVA BC that sees sports icons from the BC Lions using their status and public profile to create awareness and urge everyone to "Break the Silence on Violence Against Women."

Founding partners of the Be More Than a Bystander initiative are Status of Women Canada, the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development and Encana Corporation.

Community members will certainly remember Mack's powerhouse fundraising efforts. She has worked tirelessly to manage bingos, auctions, and more to deliver on her goals of bringing in relevant speakers and celebrity guests.

When asked what motivates her to do this work in the community, Mack said she is continuously motivated by her personal experiences and the reward of moving forward.

"Through personal experience I have come to a place where I wanted to see change and get the message out there. We are moving forward baby steps at a time," she explained. "I feel we need to do more education in our schools, talk about it more, we need to get to the core and start with our men, our men need to feel valued, need to feel they belong, the justice system is not the answer, we need to find a solution that works for all.

"We need to all work together to make a difference, and we need to keep sending the message."

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Mack has volunteered dozens of hours locally to raise awareness about violence against women, sexual abuse, and domestic and family abuse. She has partnered with the association directly and has branched out on her own.

She has organized several conferences and special events, most notably "Dancing in the Light," which brought in well-known speakers such as Susan Aglukark and Theo Fleury to speak about their experiences with sexual abuse.

She said her most memorable moment was her success in bringing Aglukark to Bella Coola, which was a challenge that she overcame.

"The most memorable event was in 2009 when Susan Algukark joined us for the first Dancing in the Light," she recalled. "I was doubted that I could get her to Bella Coola. The topic alone left me so afraid that no one would attend; this was a start.

"Abuse affects all walks of life not just aboriginal, and sexual abuse is a big issue. Victims are reluctant to go forward, and we need to find a different solution that works better for the victim and offender. It is yet a cycle to be broken."

She has worked closely with several BC Lions such as JR LaRose, Rolly Lumbala, and Will Loftus as well as performers such as Inez Jasper and Shane Yellowbird in an effort to reach the youth of the community with important messages about stopping violence against women and youth empowerment.

LaRose, who has now become a friend, was on hand to help present her award last week.

"Don't let her size fool you," LaRose told the crowd as Mack made her way to the podium. "She may be small but she is fierce."

Since its inception, the Be More Than A Bystander program has continuously gained momentum and broadened its audience. Now in its fifth year, the publicity reach of this program is conservatively estimated to be in excess of 357 million impressions.

It has won several awards, been highlighted in a global session at the United Nations in New York, and been directly responsible for a number of spin-off campaigns across Canada that include the Winnipeg

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