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Lions break the silence about violence against women



B.C. Lions' defensive back, Eric Fraser spoke on Wednesday to students at Fernie Secondary School about the realities of violence against women. — Image Credit: Phil McLachlan

by [Phil McLachlan - The Free Press](#)
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Two members of the BC Lions football team made a stop at Fernie Secondary School on February 1, to introduce students to their Be More Than A Bystander program that aims to break the silence about violence against women.

Be More Than a Bystander was initiated by the BC Lions and the Ending Violence Association of BC (EVA BC) six years ago, aimed at educating the public about the realities of violence against women, as well as shed light on what an individual can do to help eliminate some of the main underlying causes for such violence.

A stat provided by the BC Lions states, "We're very proud of what we've done. We've reached 87,000 people, with over 357 million impressions."

The BC Lions are the longest standing football organization to host these anti-violence conferences, in either the CFL or the NFL.

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Starting in Jaffray, Lions' defensive lineman, Craig Roh and defensive back, Eric Fraser spoke at high schools in Elkford, Sparwood and Fernie.

"Success in life... It takes leadership. And leadership isn't always easy. With this approach we're going to teach you, it's going to take leaders to do it," Roh began.

Statistics show that one in every three women is sexually assaulted.

In B.C., about 85 per cent of domestic violence reported to the police is perpetrated by males. The Lions clarified that it is not the majority of males that perform these acts of violence, but a very small minority that continually carry them out, often unchallenged.

Stats show one in every two women will be sexually assaulted in their life, starting at the age of 16. Fraser went on to say that although the women in attendance may not think domestic violence is an issue that affects them, they are actually at the most vulnerable stage in their lives when they're in high school, college or university.

"A big reason why I got involved in this, why I'm so passionate about the Be More Than a Bystander program, is that my wife, when she was a freshman in high school, was raped," said Roh. "The amount of emotional and physical pain that she got from that was tremendous... I think if there was someone who was acting as more than just a bystander, maybe that could have been prevented. And maybe that hurt and pain would have never had to happen."

83 per cent of women living in Canada with disabilities will be sexually assaulted.

"[This is] a number to me that is absolutely disgusting," said Fraser. "Because they are our most at-risk populations, so we need to take the care and the duties to protect them, by taking these small leadership steps and stopping these jokes, crude comments, these things that normalize this bad behavior at a young age."

Domestic assault takes many forms. The first is sexual, which does not exclude people in relationships. Fraser specified that being in a relationship of any kind does not default an affirmative consent, and that consent is something ongoing and can change at any time.

Nicky Benzie from the Fernie Women's Resource Centre also spoke, outlining the resources available to those who are affected by abuse.

"If you do need some help, you can come to us and we'll point you in the right direction," she said.

The Lions highlighted many ways bystanders can help in an abusive situation.

"It's our responsibility to speak up," said Roh.

Many points were made about what an individual can do if they witness abuse, such as refusing to join in, leaving the group and standing beside the victim.

After the presentation, all but 30 students were dismissed. A small group of students went on to participate in a personal Be More Than a Bystander workshop with the Lions for the remainder of the day.

Fernie Secondary School Vice Principal, Paul Chow, was moved by the presentation, and grateful for having the two Lions speak at the school.

After the presentation, Chow reminded the students of the standards they set at the beginning of the year. Every month the students are led to deliver a message of PRIDE; (Purpose, Respect, Integrity, Dedication, and Empathy) was recited by the students.

"I know there's a lot of guys out here that like to work out, and like to be big and tough, which is awesome. These guys are big and tough," said Chow. "But being a man and being big and tough means that sometimes we need to stand up for something that's not right."

In relation to the topic of discussion, Chow said later in an interview, "I don't think that they're pleasant things to talk about, but that doesn't mean we need to sweep them under the rug and just make quick mention and move on.

"I think that this is something we need to be aware of and something we need to change."

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