

# Alaska Highway News

## Retired CFL player aims to end violence against women

[Aleisha Hendry](#) / Alaska Highway News

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Retired BC Lions defenseman JR LaRose gave a presentation of the Lions' Be More Than A Bystander program, aimed at ending the silence on violence against women, at Northern Lights College on March 30. - Aleisha Hendry Photo

Violence against women isn't just a women's issue—it's also a men's issue, according to retired BC Lions defenseman JR LaRose.

LaRose was at Northern Lights College on March 30 to give a presentation of the Lions' Be More Than A Bystander program, which urges everyone to break the silence on violence against women.

"There needs to be more men. At the end of the day we see when we're talking about violence against women being seen as a women's issue, but at the end of the day it's men that are committing these crimes," said LaRose after the presentation. "I'm not bashing men by any means, it's a small percentage of men that commit these crimes, but more men need to stand with women, not against them. The only way we're going to create change is have men speak up about these issues."

LaRose spoke to a group of about 40 people, mostly men, about his time in the CFL, injuries he sustained (breaking the same leg twice, a broken forearm and four concussions to name a few), and also of his own childhood.

About 40 people took in JR LaRose's presentation at Northern Lights College on March 30. - Aleisha Hendry Photo

LaRose is of Cree and Nigerian descent and was raised by his mother as a member of the One Arrow First Nation in Saskatchewan. His mother was a residential school survivor and suffered from drug addiction. He never knew his father, as he was deported before LaRose was born.

He was open about the abuse his mother suffered, as well as the sexual abuse he suffered at the hands of a man he thought he could trust.

He had a lot of anger as a youth because of this, and it wasn't until a principal told him he needed an outlet for that anger that he decided to try playing football.



At the age of 21, he was drafted to the Edmonton Eskimos, which is where he broke his leg the first time. He was sidelined for the 2009 season, and once he was healed, the Eskimos let him go as we was too high a risk for reinjury.

Fortunately for LaRose, the BC Lions decided they wanted him and after playing with them for a season, breaking the same leg again, he finally achieved his dream of hoisting the Grey Cup over his head in front of a stadium in 2011.

When the BC Lions launched the Be More Than A Bystander program as a

partnership with the Ending Violence Association of BC, LaRose jumped at the chance to get involved, and continued to do so even after he retired from playing professional football.

“For me, yes, I am retired, but it’s something that hit home,” he said. “I’ve seen it first hand as someone who was abused as a child, I’ve seen my mother abused, I’ve seen my sister being abused, so the message needs to be spread, the message needs to be spread—the more we talk about it, the more we can be part of the solution.”

The program gives scenarios and suggests how men can step up and help women, by providing distractions or by outright telling the potential abuser to stop, and how to be a leader by setting a good example for others.

LaRose noted that since the program began, the amount to degrading locker room talk he’s witnessed amongst professional athletes has dropped drastically.

He says he hopes that those who took in the presentation at NLC will take what they’ve learned and apply it in real life.

“My hope is when they’re in that situation where they see something happening that they’re able to speak up about it,” he said. “It’s not a superhero approach, it’s just saying something when you see something happening.”

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