



Victoria Pruden of Bridges for Women (left), hosts Mayor Lisa Helps (right) at the non-profit's annual luncheon for International Women's Day. This year's event takes place March 8 at the Union Club of B.C. Photo courtesy Bridges for Women

International Women's Day luncheon invites men to the table

Aim is to shift dialogue away from labelling gender-based violence a 'women's issue'

[KRISTYN ANTHONY](#) / Mar. 1, 2018 6:00 a.m. / [LOCAL NEWS](#) / [NEWS](#)

Violence against women is unfortunately, nothing new.

But, given the events of the last year, and the increasing number of men who are stepping up to lend their voices to eradicating the culture once and for all, what is new is how the issue is being addressed.

Victoria Pruden, executive director of [Bridges for Women](#) – a non-profit that provides employment training for women working through the challenges of trauma and abuse – is gearing up to host the organization's annual luncheon for International Women's Day, March 8.

“Yes, we want to highlight the achievements of women, but we also want to have frank conversations about how to end violence against them,” Pruden says, and one crucial way of doing that is inviting men to the conversation.

Former BC Lions player J.R. LaRose, spokesperson for Be More Than A Bystander, the campaign tackling toxic masculinity and talking about the role of male allies in ending violence against women, will be one of two guest speakers.

“What I love and admire about J.R. is that he’s not only a former CFL player, he’s also an Indigenous man,” Pruden explains. “He’s really taking the lead to get out there and talk to thousands of boys and youth and really be a male role model who is changing the culture.”

LaRose will join Tracy Porteous, executive director of Ending Violence BC, to help shift the language from a “woman’s issue” to equally a “man’s issue,” since the majority of perpetrators of relationship and sexual violence are male.

“She’s amazing,” Pruden says of Porteous, a native of Victoria and longtime advocate of the women’s movement. “She’s so committed, so dynamic and so passionate about making a real difference.”



Bridges for Women

@Bridges4women



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Holding the luncheon at Victoria's Union Club of B.C. is particularly meaningful because of its long past as a men-only space. Pruden says their support in allowing the event to return each year "really helps to bust their history."

All proceeds from a silent auction and sponsored tickets go directly toward Bridges, on the eve of its 30th anniversary. Often the women who participate in the programs are on limited incomes as they begin the process of healing in order to graduate and re-enter the work force, Pruden says. The proceeds also enable them to attend the event, providing an opportunity to interact with donors and business people in the community.

"[The luncheon] is really honouring of them and the work they've done," she says. "Women can't do it alone."

For tickets to the International Women's Day Luncheon, visit eventbrite.ca.

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