

UNBC forum to focus on gender violence

Stuart Neatby / Prince George Citizen

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A forum addressing the many facets of gender-based violence in B.C.'s north has almost completely sold out.

The forum is organized by the Northern Feminist Institute for Research and Evaluation - or Northern FIRE - and will draw together researchers, activists and community leaders throughout the north who are focused on the subject of violence against women.

The full-day event will take place starting on Friday morning starting at 9 a.m. at The Gathering Place at UNBC.

The symposium will also include an evening keynote by Tracy Porteous of the Ending Violence Association of BC, starting at 4:30 p.m. at the Prince George Native Friendship Centre. Porteous' presentation is entitled Opening Doors: How Men Have a Crucial Role to Play in Ending Violence against Women.

Although both events are free, organizers say registration for the symposium was completely full as of Monday night.

The evening keynote is also free, and the registration page can be accessed online.

The symposium will include presentations on a range of subjects, including the experiences of domestic abuse survivors in the legal system, the prevalence of sexual violence amongst hitchhikers in B.C.'s north and the role of men in violence prevention. It is the first such gathering hosted by Northern FIRE.

"We've been focused for a long time in our work really tightly on healthcare and on wellness issues - which of course violence is part of that as well. But we wanted to really develop some breadth to the work that we're doing. This was one of the things that was very foremost in our minds and of course on everyone's minds, these days," said Dawn Hemingway, a member of Northern FIRE's leadership team.

Jacqueline Holler, who is on the leadership council of Northern FIRE, will be speak about her research into the vulnerability of hitchhikers in the north. Her study was the first of its kind in Canada.

"What we started out to do was assess the experience of hitchhiking in the north and how it's different from hitchhiking elsewhere. And in the process of our research, we made some really interesting findings that have to do with sexual violence," Holler said.

Some presenters will also highlight the challenges faced by women who pursue legal action against abusive or violent partners. Cindy West of the group Violence Against Women in Relationships will speak about her research focused on these experiences.

"While all participants spoke of system strengths through their positive interactions with the RCMP, the majority of women felt their interactions with the criminal justice system were negative," reads a description of West's presentation.

Organizers hope the event will lead to closer collaboration amongst feminists and advocates in B.C.'s north.

"We want to engage in a conversation and get it out there about these issues and to have people able not only to talk about it, but to connect with each other," Hemingway said.

"We're looking at something that will plant some seeds, let's hope, for policy development in the future," Holler said.

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