

Family Transition Place raising awareness during Women's Abuse Prevention Month

By Paula Brown, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Family Transition Place (FTP) is recognizing Women's Abuse Prevention Month this November as they look to raise awareness to end gender-based violence.

"The purpose of Women Abuse Prevention Month really is to drive awareness, to increase accountability and to drive action to eliminate violence against women in our communities," said Brennan Solecky, director of development and community engagement at FTP.

One point of awareness Family Transition Place will be highlighting through November is the concerning rise in femicide cases in recent years. Femicide is the act of a man killing a woman because they are female.

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation, 173 women and girls were killed by gender-based violence in 2021, an increase from 160 cases in 2020 and 118 in 2019.

"Femicide rates are on the rise. In 2021, every eight days, in Ontario alone, a woman or child was killed by a man known to them," said Solecky. "It's more important than ever that we're talking about this because it continues to be a real issue."

Speaking with the Free Press, Solecky noted the importance of raising awareness of gender-based violence and recognizing Women's Abuse Prevention Month locally.

"FTP operates an emergency shelter that is almost all of the time full, so we know people are fleeing situations that are unsafe for them," said Solecky.

Family Transition Place has 13 independent units in their emergency shelter and can have upwards of 28 people, both women and children, staying in the shelter at any given time.

Solecky said that FTP provided shelter to around 55 women and 26 children last year.

"That number seems low and it's because there's nowhere for people to go," explained Solecky. "What also contributes to the gender-based violence issue that we have in our community locally is the fact that there's no affordable housing for them to move to."

It's not just the number of individuals accessing the FTP emergency shelter that indicates issues of gender-based violence within the community. Solecky said in the last year FTP has received over 3300 calls to their crisis line, which can be called by anyone in crisis including victims of abuse or those looking for support for an individual fleeing abuse.

As part of Women's Abuse Prevention Month (WAPM), Family Transition Place is participating in the Wrapped in Courage campaign. Organized by the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OIATH), this year marks the 10th anniversary of the awareness campaign.

"It's 10 years of showing solidarity and support for those folks that are affected by gender-based violence and the services that support them. But, it's also a bit of a sombre milestone because it's still required now more than ever, that we're generating awareness and action," said Solecky.

The Wrapped in Courage consists of the sale of purple scarves that act as a symbol of support and solidarity to generate awareness

for gender-based violence.

This year, FTP is selling a brand-new scarf that is fair trade and handcrafted by marginalized artisans.

“For some folks, they wear the scarf because they’re remembering someone who’s lost their life to femicide, and they’re committed to the change that’s required. If nothing else, it’s a symbol of hope and commitment to those that gender-based violence continues to affect in Ontario and in our community,” said Solecky.

When asked about the impact seeing the symbolic scarf worn within the community can have for those facing gender-based violence, Solecky said, “It’s a really poignant visual reminder. It signals to anybody that’s been affected by gender-based violence, that they are believed and valued, and that they’re never alone in their experience of gender-based violence. It also sends a message that this will not be tolerated here.”

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (Nov. 25) will be recognized by Family Transition Place with the raising of the “End Gender-Based Violence” flag at Orangeville Town Hall on Nov. 24 at 3 p.m. and at Shelburne Town Hall on Nov. 25 at 10 a.m.