

Report

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members of the larger community who reflect social values and attitudes that contribute either to the problem of sexual violence or its resolution."

Referring to the local community, the report specifies, "In Antigonish, we do not have a comprehensive system of services in place for meeting the needs of survivors of sexual violence nor have we yet developed a collaborative approach to education about and prevention of sexual violence. Many of the individual therapists/counsellors and agencies that are trying to provide services to survivors are overwhelmed by the magnitude of the need for service. Some service providers face frustration when trying to provide a more client-directed type of service and the mandate of their service does not meet the needs of survivors. Others need specific training for working with survivors and are working in agencies which do not make training opportunities available. Yet, many service providers continue to be committed personally to providing a better service to survivors and are looking for the means of incorporating better service into their workplaces."

Speaking on behalf of the project, researcher Lucille Harper says, "Disclosing sexual abuse or sexual assault is an act of bravery for survivors. It takes tremendous courage to overcome the cultural prohibitions against talking about sexual abuse and the fear of reprisal, judgment and disbelief which further silence survivors. The response of the first person told (about the victimization) influences how survivors feel about themselves, the incident(s) and seeking help."

She explains, "The problem of sexual violence is complex and involves many agencies and organizations in addressing it and in providing intervention. The project asked survivors of sexual violence as well as individuals working directly with survivors in the criminal justice system, medical services, educational institutions, community organizations, through religious institutions and as therapists and counsellors to inform the project about their experience with services and as service providers. Approximately 100 individuals were interviewed personally and asked to describe the strengths and shortcomings of services, to identify gaps in services, and to offer directions and suggestions for changes to services. The responses of these key informants, honest, insightful, and creative, has given the community a solid base of information from which to work to improve services."

Harper notes, "The Sexual Assault Project was designed to provide a forum for service providers and consumers to work together to develop a community model of service that would better meet the needs of survivors. The report will be used to develop a model of service appropriate to a rural community wanting to address sexual violence from a cooperative and collaborative perspective."

She adds, "Both the survivors and service providers interviewed agree that there needs to be a more combined, connected approach among agencies working with survivors of sexual violence. They noted that with coordination, services could be more consistent and provide a progression of service that would support survivors



AMONG THOSE INVOLVED in producing the "Beginning with Us: A Community Response to Sexual Assault and Sexual Abuse in Antigonish County" report were RCMP Const. Don Peters (left), of the Antigonish detachment, Nelda Armour of Drug Awareness, Jennifer Bezanson of St. F.X. Sexual Assault Educators, researcher Lucille Harper, Susan Jewkes of Adolescent Health project, and project consultant Doris Gillis.

throughout their healing journeys."

Harper reports, "When survivors were asked what they would like to tell service providers to help them in their

work with survivors, many stressed the importance of believing survivors 'both in words and in body language.' As one woman said, 'Go beyond that last

mile to reach someone and don't give up because I can say there's a part that is terrified of talking for fear of being laughed at, judged, blamed; and another part saying, 'Help me out of this pit.'"

Report on Sexual Abuse Survivors Published

by Dawn Currie

"Beginning With Us: A Community Response to Sexual Assault and Sexual Abuse in Antigonish County" has recently been published by the Sexual Assault Project. The 88-page report documents the service needs of survivors of sexual violence and looks at ways in which services currently available to survivors in Antigonish are meeting their needs.

The authors explain the initiative for the project, saying, "The Sexual Assault Project has undertaken this needs' assessment as a first step in working together as a community to develop an efficient, effective, collaborative system of services for survivors and their families. It is the hope of the Sexual Assault Project that the voices of the survivors and the service providers who contributed to the needs' assessment will be heard and that their concerns will be welcomed and addressed through positive changes in the service delivery system."

The project is sponsored by the Antigonish Women's Association, with researchers Lucille Harper and Ellen King. It was funded by the Nova Scotia Department of Justice; Victims Services Division.

The project development committee consisted of St. F.X. University dean of students Rick Benson; Betty-Anne Fraser of the provincial Department of Health and Fitness; Dorothy Gilson of

the Naomi Society for victims of family violence; Susan Jewkes of the Adolescent Health Project; Cynthia MacDonald; Rev. Shelagh McCulloch-Taylor; Jim McMullin of the St. F.X. health and counselling center; local educator Sylvia Parris; and local RCMP Const. Don Peters.

Members of the community advisory committee in addition to the above were: Nelda Armour of Drug Dependency; Jennifer Bezanson of St. F.X. Sexual Assault Educators; therapist Shirley Burkett; St. F.X. sociology professor Ann Louise Brooks; St. Martha's Regional Hospital psychologist Jean Collins; Naomi Society's Annette Goring-Gingras; and local therapist Chris Tragakis.

The introduction to the report points out, "Sexual violence is a pervasive social problem which affects many people as individuals and our community as a whole. Understanding sexual violence and developing an effective response to it is a complex and challenging task requiring the people who are affected by the problem to become involved in creating a response to it. This includes the survivors and their families, those most profoundly and negatively affected by the experience, the members of the criminal justice, social service and mental health systems who become involved through intervention and healing, as well as the

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