

Violence against women, children "less visible"

by Corey LeBlanc

The director of the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre (AWRC) is concerned the issue of violence against women and their children is "becoming less visible" and people are contributing to this situation by the way they talk about the issue.

"That's one of the points I tried to make on December 6," Lucille Harper said recently. "When we call it gender violence, we are really making women disappear and people don't understand; it is less easy to understand it is violence against women."

Harper suggested the violence women are particularly vulnerable to is directed at them specifically because they are women.

"It's not happenstance, chance violence; it's directed towards women because they are women," she said, noting it is the case with intimate partners, woman abuse in general and sexual assault.

"One of our concerns is we are not continuing to address these issues in a really concerted way."

On the heels of another December 6 commemoration of the Montreal Massacre and the recognition of violence against women, the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre (AWRC) says much is left to be done in those areas.

"Some of the programs that we have had in place, certainly through the 1990s that have been cut, such as the Family Violence Prevention Initiative and some related programs are a cause for concern for us," Harper said in commenting on the issue of violence against women and children.

Whatever the issue, whether it is poverty, violence or another issue for women, Harper said raising awareness is always a challenge.

"In some ways why Dec. 6 is so important is because it is the one day of the year where we really do try to focus on violence against women and there's some general recognition of that day by many people, by our governments, by community organizations, by the general public that violence against women is an issue," she said.

"It's like Christmas time when people suddenly are more aware of the level of need and the level of poverty and are far more willing to give to food banks and so forth around Christmas time."

The problem with both situations is

the need for awareness is there each and every day. Keeping those issues visible is important, according to Harper.

"In the same way that the general public is aware of the need around Christmas time, it is the same around Dec. 6 when people are aware of the issue of violence against women. So, yes, the challenge is really keeping the issue present 365-days a year and continuing to work on it for 365-days a year."

Harper said it is an ongoing challenge for community based organizations, like the women's centre, along with the struggle to maintain services, adequate staffing and other issues.

"This is particularly important in the era of cuts when women's centres become even more important as they pick up the overflow from other organizations," she said, noting an increase in the number of women using the centre's services.

"At the same time, there is such a level of funding insecurity that it is always our challenge not only to be addressing the issues, but also to be making sure that we remain open as an organization that can address the issues, and that can support individual women that are coming to the centre."

The Antigonish Women's Resource Centre is located on the third floor of Kirk Place on Main Street.

The Casket
Dec. 17/
03