N.S. funds fight against sexual violence

Six First Nations groups to split $150,000, Red Cross to work with communities

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Community Services Minister Joanne Bernard announced on Monday more than $150,000 in funding for six organizations committed to preventing sexual violence in First Nation communities.

The Sexual Violence Strategy grants aim to support sexual violence prevention programming for all genders, sexual orientations and identifiable communities in Nova Scotia.

"The sad truth is that aboriginal women and girls are about three times more vulnerable to sexual victimization than non-aboriginal women," Bernard said in a release from a Mi'kmaq community engagement conference in Truro.

The two-day gathering seeks to establish collaboration among service providers and community leaders from First Nations communities across the province.

It provides a forum for them to share knowledge and identify ways native communities can both prevent sexualized violence and provide a compassionate, cultural response for its victims.

These strategies need to address the impact of colonization, racism, historical trauma and residential schools have had on First Nations communities, said Juliana Julian, health director with the Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaw Nation in Antigonish County.

"Asking how these areas impact sexual violence is a loaded question unless you understand how these have had a long-lasting effect on our communities and affect us as a nation," she said in a phone interview.

"These are all deep and grounded within our culture and it makes sexual violence so difficult to talk about," she said.

Julian said the $46,000 grant the Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaw Nation is receiving will fund outreach to male youth based on the Inspire program that the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre has successfully delivered in other communities for more than 20 years.

The program aims to work with boys in Grades 7 and 8 in Paq'tnkek to explore healthy sexuality and relationships, consent and self-esteem.

More than $36,000 will be provided to the N.S. Native Women's Association so they can deliver culturally-relevant programming to aboriginal women and girls in the Sydney area.

"The project provides our women who have been affected by sexual violence with a connection to their culture," said association spokeswoman Audrey Marshall in a news release.

"That gives them a sense of pride and, more importantly, hope."

The Canadian Red Cross is receiving $30,000 to work with First Nations communities in the delivery of culturally sensitive, peer-education sessions on healthy relationships and dating violence to high school-age students.

The program trains youth facilitators to speak to other youth on the issues they understand.

"Youth seem to listen a lot more when the information comes from their peers within the communities, it's perceive as more reliable and relatable," said Alison Lynch Richard, an advisor with the Red Cross' Respect Education program.

Lynch Richard said in a news release that they launched the program last fall and recently completed some training with some Eskasoni youth using another funding source.

"It's something we hope to expand and build on, and we're excited about the potential with it," she said.

Waycobah First Nation and the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre will be be hiring a community facilitator to implement a community engagement project on preventing and responding to sexual violence with a $34,000 grant.

Additional investments include $5,000 to the Mawio'miokuom society of Membertou and $5,000 to the Millbrook Native Women's Association.