

April 26/17  
The Casket



Central Nova MP Sean Fraser made a funding announcement for the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association, in support of their bystander intervention program, during an event April 18 at St. F.X. Pictured are; Lucille Harper (left) - executive director, Annie Chau, community leader and women's rights advocate, Molly Peters, Paqtnkek Mi'kmaq First Nation band councillor and Nancy Forestell, co-ordinator of the St. F.X. women and gender studies department.

Richard MacKenzie

# Bystander intervention program receives support

RICHARD MACKENZIE  
✉ richardmac@thecasket.ca

Central Nova MP Sean Fraser made a funding announcement, April 18 in Antigonish, which will support the bystander intervention program as a way of dealing with sexual violence.

The announcement was made at St. F.X.'s Schwartz School of Business and was followed by a panel discussion. Included among the panelists were; Lucille Harper - executive director Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association, Nancy Forestell - co-ordinator of the St. F.X. women and gender studies department, Molly Peters - Paqtnkek Mi'kmaq First Nation band councillor and Annie Chau - community leader and women's rights advocate, who has

a positive, in of itself. He segued into a reflection of his time at St. F.X. where any talk on the subject of sexual violence against women usually brought out the same, already engaged, folks. He noted that problem being part of the discussion of his Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women participation.

"You need to go to the people who really need to hear this the most," he said. "It's great to preach to the choir and keep the momentum going but we can't become an echo chamber; we have to have our message penetrate into the larger community if we're going to expect social change. So, by funding community-based organizations which know their own communities, how to get these messages out, we can make a serious difference."

He talked more about the

Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association to help fund their bystander intervention project," he said.

"This is an issue when, on the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women, we studied how to end gender based violence, it came up frequently. We heard about the importance of insuring that young men and boys are engaged in the process and that people, of all ages and genders, can spot sexual assault when it's happening and intervene to stop it before it happens."

Harper talked about the work, also with reporters, following the event.

"It's really good to get this funding in place because it's going to enable us to do an important piece of work in Nova Scotia that is timely, because there is an understanding of the need for

"And it will really get underway over the next two years," she added.

"We have until the end of fiscal year, March 31, 2019, to do this work which is great because it will be quite a big process in bringing everyone around the table, reaching some common understanding around the advocacy around bystander intervention programs."

She talked in more detail about a timetable.

"We're in the process of hiring right now, so we're hoping our co-ordinator will start on May 1 and one of their first tasks will be to establish an advisory committee," she said.

"That advisory committee, we're hoping, should be in place by, certainly, the end of June and then actively working on answering some of the key questions

# Bystander intervention program

continued from Page 1

## Importance

Fraser was asked about his work with the committee and how it has further motivated him.

"Of course I was aware of the importance of gender based violence, more generally, before I ever decided to run for office, just being an engaged member of my community, but I've taken a specific interest in it and gained some expertise as a result of my legislative work," he said.

"We've done studies on the need for gender-based analysis in government policy to end gender based violence and, now, promoting equity in the Canadian economy for women."

Fraser was asked how the panel discussion, including powerful remarks from Peters on the continuing concern regarding the high numbers of missing and murdered Aboriginal women - disproportionately higher than any other population in Canada - only strengthened his knowledge that the government investment, he was announcing, was a wise one.

"There is no question for me; funding initiatives which will help reduce gender based violence will result in social and economic returns that are far greater than the cost of the investment," he said. "This is a no-brainer; this organization [AWRC-SASA] is doing great work. To the extent I

can be supportive, or the federal government can be supportive, I know we're doing the right thing."

## Systemic

Among her remarks, Harper talked about sexual violence against women being a systemic problem.

"It deeply wounds the individual and harms our communities," she said.

"It harms our university community, our work place community and our home community, and when we fail to recognize and address the systemic tentacles of sexualized violence we contribute to its normalization and perpetration."

She was asked about the emphasis.

"When we say systemic it means it is within the very fabric of our institutions," she said. "Many of our community ways of working, and being in the world, in that we have huge inequalities that are within our systems."

"Sean talked a lot about gender inequality, that's a real primary one, there is also economic inequality which impacts vulnerability towards sexualized violence and, of course, the various other kinds of systemic oppressions; Indigenous peoples, African Nova Scotians, immigrants, people with disabilities. So there are huge populations which are particularly vulnerable to sexualized violence and many of the vulnerabilities that they experience are also economic vulnerabilities, accessibility issues."