

Inaugural Gender Equality Week coming up

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Communities across Canada, including Antigonish, from Sept. 23 to 29, will mark the first Gender Equality Week.

"It is going to be busy," Annie Chau, Antigonish Women's Resource Centre (AWRC) advancing women's equality co-ordinator, said.

Chau and her organization, amongst others, have been planning activities for the inaugural celebration, as part of tremendous community collaboration.

"It has been a lot of work," Breanna O'Handley, St. F.X.'s gender and sexual diversity student advisor, said of the effort.

In June, the federal government adopted the Gender Equality Week Act - Bill C-309 - which designated the fourth week of September as Gender Equality Week.

"Our government continues to make this a key priority because gender equality helps to grow the economy for everyone," Maryam Monsef, federal minister for the Status of Women, said earlier this year regarding the adoption of the legislation.

"This week will provide all Canadians with an opportunity to celebrate the legacy of our progress while reflecting on the necessary work that remains to ensure that all Canadians can reach their full potential, regardless of gender."

Chau, as part of her work related to gender-based sexual violence, is also a member of the Gender Equity Network Canada, an initiative launched in 2017 focussed on advancing gender equality, which is tackling issues, such as violence, poverty, child-care and governance roles.

She spoke to the Senate's human rights subcommittee in May regarding the then proposed federal legislation.

"In a lot of ways, it is easier, but it is also more challenging," Chau said of dealing with issues in a rural setting.

She added there are similar concerns across the country, but there are also differences related to rural context.

The myriad of focuses for the 150-member national organization also includes advancing women's equality, while partnering to end sexual violence.



Annie Chau (left), Emma Kuzmyk, Breanna O'Handley and Margaret Elliott are amongst the group busily planning for the first Gender Equality Week, which will take place from Sept. 23 to 29. The annual Take Back the Night gathering in Antigonish is part of the inaugural week, which will be marked in communities across Canada.

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"Our work here feeds that," Chau said of the focus on creating a National Gender Equity Plan, which was one of the key recommendations made by the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) after its review of Canada's compliance with the UN treaty on women's rights.

She noted the group is halfway through its three-year process.

'Benefits everyone'

The theme for the aforementioned Gender Equality Week is 'gender equality benefits everyone.'

The Antigonish-based celebration will include events on gender-based violence.

"Creating consent culture," O'Handley said, when asked about some of the key messages organizers would like to deliver.

She noted it is about bringing people together and having conversations.

"It is going to be exciting," St. F.X. student Margaret Elliott said.

She and fellow Xavierian Emma Kuzmyk are organizers of Visible X Week, which has come

under the Gender Equality Week umbrella.

"It has been a great collaboration," Chau said of the effort to launch the inaugural celebration.

The widely-supported annual community event - Take Back the Night - will be one of the highlights of the week.

The rally and march will take place outside the Angus L. Macdonald Library on the St. F.X. campus, beginning at 7 p.m.

"I thought it could be a way to help people find and speak their truth," Kuzmyk said of writing sessions she will host in the lead-up to Take Back the Night.

there will be an open mic, where participants in the workshops will deliver their writings.

What's happening?

Along with Take Back the Night, the action-packed Gender Equality Week will be launched Saturday, Sept. 22, with Waves of Change Workshops at St. F.X.

The remainder of the week includes:

Mon., Sept. 24: poster campaign at St. F.X. campus, Visible @ X posters and infographics from the St. F.X. Sexual Violence Climate Survey Report;

Tues., Sept. 25: Visible @ X booth in the SUB lobby, advertising Visible @ X office and Waves of Change program;

Wed., Sept. 26: Creating Consent Culture booth in the SUB lobby, discussing with the Anti-

gonish Women's Resource Centre how to create consent culture at St. F.X.;

Screening of Slut or Nut: Diaries of a Rape Trial, followed by discussion with Mandi Gray, 7 p.m., at St. F.X. (location TBD);

Thurs., Sept. 27: Creating Consent Culture booth in the SUB Lobby;

Mandi Gray lecture, 2:15 p.m., at St. F.X. (location TBD);

Spill the Tea: Sexual Violence in the Queer Community, 5:30 p.m., in the X Pride Space

Poster making for Take Back the Night, 6 p.m. in MacKay Lounge (third floor SUB);

Fri., Sept. 28: Creating Consent Culture booth in the SUB lobby;

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lming of What is Consent? led by Visible @ X, SUB lobby.

Work to do

"I think it is the peak of awareness," O'Handley said, when asked if there has been progress - both on the St. F.X. and broader Antigonish community - regarding these issues.

Elliott added, since last fall, people have become "more open and more interested in getting involved."

Kuzmyk noted the We Stand Together initiative that has spread through the athletic department and campus, while there was

"huge interest" from students during St. F.X. society night in becoming part of a peer support volunteer group.

Nevertheless, the women realized there remains much work to do, with initiatives such as Gender Equality Week, providing an opportunity to facilitate the needed change and advancement.

"The water we are swimming in, in many ways continues to be hostile," Chau said.

For more information about Gender Equality Week activities, visit the Visible @ X and AWRC Facebook pages.