

DIVERSE VOICES SPEECH – NOVEMBER 4TH

NOVEMBER IS FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION MONTH AND I THINK THIS IS A FITTING TIME TO INTRODUCE TO YOU “THE SILENT WITNESSES”.

ONE DEATH IS TOO MANY; YET BETWEEN 2000 AND 2004, OUR OWN RESEARCH SHOWS THAT THERE HAVE BEEN AT LEAST 31 HOMICIDES ATTRIBUTED TO FAMILY VIOLENCE IN OUR PROVINCE. IT IS THE PAIN OF THESE VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES THAT WE MUST NOT FORGET. THESE VICTIMS THAT YOU SEE REPRESENTED AROUND THIS ROOM, IN THE FORM OF A SILHOUETTE, HAVE PUSHED AGENCIES TO COME TOGETHER AND ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES. IT IS THEIR SILENCE THAT SPEAKS A THOUSAND WORDS.

THE SILENT WITNESS PROJECT BEGAN AS A US NATIONAL INITIATIVE TO HONOUR WOMEN KILLED BY THEIR PARTNERS IN ACTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. IN 1990, A GROUP OF WOMEN ARTISTS AND WRITERS, UPSET ABOUT THE GROWING NUMBER OF WOMEN IN MINNESOTA BEING MURDERED BY THEIR PARTNERS, FORMED THE ARTS ACTION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. THEY FELT AN URGENCY TO DO SOMETHING TO COMMEMORATE AND HONOUR THE LIVES OF 26 WOMEN WHO HAD DIED IN 1990 AS A RESULT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

THEY DECIDED TO CREATE 26 FREE STANDING, LIFE SIZED RED WOODEN FIGURES, EACH ONE BEARING THE NAME OF A WOMAN WHO ONCE LIVED AND WORKED IN THE COMMUNITY AND WHOSE LIFE ENDED VIOLENTLY AT THE HANDS OF HER PARTNER. A 27TH FIGURE WAS ADDED TO REPRESENT WOMEN WHOSE MURDERS WENT UNCOUNTED OR UNSOLVED. THESE WOODEN FIGURES ARE CALLED SILENT WITNESSES.

THE SILENT WITNESS EXHIBIT WAS OFFICIALLY LAUNCHED IN 1991, WHEN MORE THAN 500 WOMEN MARCHED SINGLE FILE, CARRYING THE WITNESSES, FROM A CHURCH, ACROSS THE STREET TO THE MINNESOTA STATE CAPITOL

BUILDING. TO DATE ALL 50 STATES, AND SEVERAL COUNTRIES ARE PARTICIPATING IN THE PROJECT.

IN NOVEMBER 2000, THE WITNESSES WERE BROUGHT TO CHARLOTTE COUNTY FROM PORTLAND, MAINE. THIS DISPLAY WAS SO SUCCESSFUL THAT THE CHARLOTTE COUNTY FAMILY VIOLENCE COMMITTEE DECIDED TO BRING THE SILENT WITNESS INITIATIVE TO NEW BRUNSWICK – THE FIRST IN CANADA.

THE ALBERTA COUNCIL OF WOMEN'S SHELTERS AND PARTNERS ARE FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FRIENDS TO THE EAST AND WILL BE PRESENTING THE FIRST SILENT WITNESS INITIATIVE IN THE WEST DURING THE ALBERTA FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION MONTH CAMPAIGN – THE DIVERSE VOICES CONFERENCE IS THE FIRST TO HOST THE DISPLAY.

THE SILHOUETTES IN THE ALBERTA EXHIBIT REPRESENT WOMEN AND VICTIMS OF TRIANGULATION LIKE A BROTHER, A BOYFRIEND, OR A CHILD, WHO WERE KILLED IN ACTS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE. THE DETERMINATION THAT PARTICULAR HOMICIDES WERE ACTS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE WAS BASED ON RESEARCH IN RELATION TO OUR PROJECT CRITERIA AND OUR DETAILED INFORMATION PACKAGE IS NOW AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC.

ALTHOUGH MOST CASES OF DOMESTIC HOMICIDE ARE PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE, OUR RESEARCH HAS PROVEN TO BE THE MOST DIFFICULT TASK. THERE ARE STILL TODAY, MASSIVE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN POLICE, RCMP, AND PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS WITH REGARD TO THE WAY IN WHICH THEY COLLECT FAMILY VIOLENCE RELATED HOMICIDE DATA . THE PROBLEM APPEARS TO BE THE INCONSISTENT DEFINITION OF WHAT FAMILY VIOLENCE IS AND LACK OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT IN OUR LEGAL SYSTEMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE AS A CRIME. HOWEVER, OUR GOVERNMENT, LEGAL, AND POLICING AGENCIES ARE PULLING TOGETHER AND ARE AWARE OF THE DISCREPANCIES, - WE ARE THANKFUL FOR THE COOPERATION OF OUR SHELTERS, EDMONTON POLICE SERVICES AND CALGARY POLICE SERVICES FOR PROVIDING US WITH THEIR OWN INFORMATION.

EACH SILHOUETTE YOU SEE HERE TODAY THAT HAS BEEN NAMED, HAS BEEN DONE SO WITH PERMISSION OF THE VICTIMS FAMILY. EDMONTON POLICE, VICTIM SERVICES HAVE VOLUNTEERED THEIR TIME TO CONTACT FAMILIES AND INVITE THEM TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS AWARENESS PROJECT. RESPONSE HAS BEEN FAVOURABLE WITH THE VICTIMS FAMILIES. OUR SENSE FROM THEM IS THAT THEIR LOVED ONE IS NOT A LOST STATISTIC, BUT IN THIS DISPLAY IS REPRESENTED AS A HUMAN BEING WHOSE LIFE HAS BEEN CUT SHORT UNNECESSARILY – A PERSON WHO ENJOYED WALKING HER DOG, WHO WORKED AS A NURSE, WHO GAVE TO OTHERS UNCONDITIONALLY, OR LOVED HER CHILDREN VERY MUCH. FAMILY MEMBERS WILL BE INVITED TO A PRIVATE VIEWING OF THE WITNESSES AND PRESENTED WITH A SHAWL FOR COMFORT AT A LATER DATE. THIS PROJECT IS ABOUT HEALING TOGETHER. IT IS ALSO ABOUT PREVENTION – HOPEFULLY THE STORIES AROUND THE ROOM WILL ENCOURAGE SOMEONE ELSE LIVING WITH VIOLENCE IN THEIR HOME TO GET HELP BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.

WE INVITE YOU TO VIEW THE SILENT WITNESSES AND THINK ABOUT EACH VICTIM AND THEIR PERSONAL STORIES OF FAMILY VIOLENCE. WE INVITE YOU TO INCORPORATE EACH SITUATION INTO YOUR LEARNING EXPERIENCE TODAY. YOU WILL SEE - IT'S NOTHING NEW. THE KEY IS PREVENTION, THE KEY IS A COLLABORATIVE, CO-ORDINATED, COMMUNITY RESPONSE – THE KEY IS YOUR PARTICIPATION. AND THIS IS WHY WE STILL GATHER AT CONFERENCES, LIKE DIVERSE VOICES, TO LEARN MORE ABOUT FAMILY VIOLENCE. WE MUST CONTINUE TO WORK HARD TO FIND SOLUTIONS.

ACWS WOULD LIKE TO THANK A FEW PEOPLE FOR THEIR HELP IN GETTING THIS PROJECT STARTED IN ALBERTA:

KIM LAFRENIERE
DETECTIVE, EDMONTON POLICE SERVICES
SPOUSAL VIOLENCE INTERVENTION UNIT

BOB PAGEE
SERGEANT, EDMONTON POLICE SERVICES

VICTIM SERVICES UNIT

MONTY SPARROW
STAFF SERGEANT, CALGARY POLICE SERVICE

DR. LESLIE TUTTY & ASHLEY BARLOW FROM RESOLVE

BRENT CONNELLY, MANAGER OF RONA ON 51 ST.

OUR VOLUNTEERS: ELMER WARWA OF C.K. EQUITIES LTD WHO ENGRAVED THE PLAQUES, SUSAN PATENAUDE FOR WORKING WITH THE VICTIMS FAMILIES, AND THE NORTHGATE LIONS SENIOR CITIZEN ASSOCIATION WHOSE MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION VOLUNTEERED OVER 500 HOURS OF THEIR TIME TO PRODUCE THE SILHOUETTES: RICHARD DALEY, ED FLATHERS, JOHN TUCKER, ED ROBEGE, AL OAKLEY, MIKE PALICHUK, BILL KLUSHIN, SHIRLEY CURLE, DOREEN KRISTENSEN, BILL BARON, CLARY WILLIS, ERCILIA COMARTIN, JAY METHERAL, GLEN TALBOT, JACKIE BLACK, ALBERT REULE, ED SCHAAF, NADIA SCHAAF

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.