

YWCA Banff launches the Harmony Project

A collaborative community response to sexualized assault in the Bow Valley

August 18th, 2016 – Banff, AB – The Harmony Project is a new community initiative addressing sexualized assault and harassment in the Bow Valley. The Project name emphasizes the importance of collaboration and ultimately speaks to the vision of the project - a community free from all forms of sexualized assault.

The goals of the project are to streamline the provision of services for victims who come forward as well as the 90% of victims who are suffering in silence to expedite the healing journey; to take a proactive approach to changing social norms to prevent sexualized assault and to develop a coordinated community response across the spectrum of intervention: prevention, crisis, short-term and long-term intervention to ensure the most significant impact possible

The project committee includes Banff and Canmore RCMP, Bow Valley Victims Services, Banff Mineral Springs Hospital, Alberta Health Services-Addictions and Mental Health, BanffLIFE, Settlement Services, Canmore FCSS, Calgary Sexual Assault Response Team and YWCA Banff. The Project Manager is Reave MacLeod from YWCA Banff.

“We all have a role to play in responding to this issue, it’s encouraging to see stakeholders working together to better support victims and raise awareness in our community,” said committee member and acting Staff Sergeant with Banff RCMP, Stan Andronyk.

Initial funding for the project was received through the Family and Community Safety branch of the Alberta Government.

Engaging the community has been the primary focus of the project as well as setting priorities across the spectrum of intervention: prevention, crisis, short-term and long-term intervention to ensure maximum impact.

Research indicates that females under the age of 24 represent 66% of all victims of sexual assault (<http://canadianwomen.org/facts-about-violence>). This fact is especially relevant to the Harmony Project given the unique demographic in the Bow Valley which has a large population of young adults between the ages of 18-30 years. Training and education will help to ensure key front line workers are equipped with the skills and information needed to support employees, co-workers or friends as part of the outreach strategy.

While a longer term prevention strategy and a community working guide are in progress, the Harmony Project has also started addressing the issue of consent at local events over the summer and offering a variety of training opportunities targeting specific community groups including Human Resource professionals, community volunteers, emergency response workers and representatives from Human Services agencies.

“There is an on-going need for prevention in the Bow Valley to change social norms that will create a culture of consent -- ultimately reducing sexualized assault and harassment in our community,” said MacLeod. According to a 2015 survey commissioned by the Canadian Women’s Foundation, only 1 in 3 Canadians know what sexual consent means (<http://canadianwomen.org/facts-about-violence>).

“Being a part of the Harmony Project is a great fit for BanffLIFE, our volunteers have been eager to receive training they want to know what services are available and how they can support an acquaintance, a friend or a co-worker. We also have an opportunity to infuse our local events with information and positive messaging - I’m already noticing topics like consent coming up in everyday conversation which is a promising trend,” said BanffLIFE Coordinator Michelle Backhouse.

Look for Harmony Project members and supporters wearing ‘Got Consent?’ t-shirts around town and at the YWCA Banff’s upcoming Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event on Sept. 16.

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