

Be the Peace project gathers the men

COUNTY — As a man, what would you do to keep your daughter safe? Or your sister or mother or niece? What would you do to ensure they are treated respectfully and don't fall victim to violence in some form?

Domestic or relationship violence in our community hurts everyone, and each of us has a role to play in addressing it. "When it comes to violence against women, there are two sides to the issue — both the women who are hurt, and also the men," says Joe Feeney, mayor of Mahone Bay, who attended an early meeting of partners at Second Story Women's Centre. "Men are a critical part of the equation. The only way we, as a society, as Lunenburg County, can make a difference is through educating the public about the seriousness of the problem, getting the message out, talking about it. And that means men and boys as well. If we are talking about violence against women, well, obviously the problem won't be solved without men being part of the discussion and part of the strategies."

Because men and boys are an essential and valued part of the solution, the Be the Peace project is hosting a Gather the Men lunch on October 28 for any interested males (age 15 and older) in Lunenburg County who care about the safety of the girls and women they love, and want to play a role in creating a more peaceful and secure community for all of us.

Joining us is highly skilled guest facilitator David Hatfield, who specializes in workshops on masculine roles and stereotypes. His program on Mentoring Boys and Male Youth at Tatamagouche Centre runs the week before.

Keith Lanthier of Lunenburg worked for several years with New Start Counselling, a program for men in Halifax. He says, "... domestic violence and abuse takes many forms and has serious consequences, especially for children. Rather than feeling powerless to do anything, what can we do to change this situation for everyone in Lunenburg County?"

Mr. Lanthier appreciates the opportunity to create a safe place for men to talk about what is important to them; in particular, their hopes about having healthy relationships with a partner, their children and other men.

"This is uncharted territory because there are still social messages regarding what men are 'allowed' to talk about." He has worked with men who have also experienced abuse, often as children.

"It is time for men to help break this cycle and in the process, get engaged in talking about what we can do to create healthy relationships and end domestic violence. We can no longer be bystanders because this is also our community."

He says Gather the Men is the logical next step. “Of course most people are against violence, but it’s what we do on a day-to-day basis that demonstrates that.”

The Gather the Men lunch will be held at the Bridgewater Superstore Community Room, October 28, 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. RSVP is essential by October 22. E-mail admin@bethepeace.ca or call 634-8090.

“We, as men, need to know how we can help,” says Mayor Feeney. “So I hope men will consider how important our role is in this issue, and come out to this discussion about how we can contribute to making sure the women in our lives feel safe.”

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