

Tri County Women's Health Coalition (TCWHC) – Presentation to the Municipality of Yarmouth

On behalf of the Tri County Women's Health Coalition we would like to thank the Council for this opportunity to discuss our work and the letter we sent the Council last May during Sexual Violence Awareness Month.

The purpose of the Coalition is to promote health and reduce health issues related to women, their families and communities through a coalition of community groups, agencies and citizens.

We have four specific goals:

1. Promote a best practices approach to improve women's positive health outcomes.
2. Advocate for policies that promote the health of women.
3. Advocate for accessible programs and resources that promote the health of women.
4. Provide feedback on policies, programs and issues that affect women's health.

As you are aware May is Sexual Violence Awareness Month in Nova Scotia. Last May the Coalition:

- ∇ Provided information to the community on four topics 1) What is Sexualized Violence/ Sexual Assault, 2) What is Consent? 3) Men's Responsibility for Preventing and Stopping Sexual Violence, and 4) Community's Role in Preventing and Stopping Sexual Violence.
- ∇ Sent a letter to all Town & Municipal Councils asking them to recognize/ proclaim Sexual Violence Awareness Month as a gesture toward recognizing the importance of stopping sexualized violence.
- ∇ Hosted a public vigil at Frost Park (Warden Murray Goodwin attended)

In response to the Rehtaeh Parsons tragedy, the provincial government formed an **"Action Team on Sexualized Violence & Bullying"** to look at the implementation of recommendations and actions to address prevention and intervention of sexualized violence and bullying. The government has asked all relevant departments, as well as the Child & Youth Strategy, to make sexualized violence and bullying a priority over the next two years.

As part of that process community and government stakeholders across the tri counties have started to come together to strengthen our collaboration on Sexual Violence Prevention & Intervention. All our Coalition Members are very involved in this community-based collaborative approach.

There are a few facts about sexualized violence that we would like to bring to Council's attention. The correlation between sexual assault and alcohol is significant. Research has shown that 50% to 75% of sexual assaults involve alcohol consumption. We want to be clear that alcohol use does not cause sexual violence; rather alcohol enables the perpetrators to reduce their inhibitions and avoid responsibility for their actions, making it more likely they will choose to sexually assault another person.

Alcohol not only lowers the inhibitions of the perpetrators, surveys with female university students say that living in today's culture of hypersexualization and sexual expectations, many

women use alcohol as a means of numbing their experience because they do not feel they have a right to say no, the alcohol consumption allows the sexual culture and harms to continue.

Adding to this is alcohol marketing that contributes to earlier alcohol consumption among non-drinkers and increased consumption among current drinkers. It heavily influences children and youth and contributes to the patterns of child and youth drinking in NS.

In recent years, women and girls have been explicitly targeted by the alcohol industry as a means of increasing sales. Furthermore alcohol marketing depicts females in a hypersexualized manner and contributes to problematic assumptions about sexual availability and consent. The targeting of girls and women by the alcohol industry, including NSLC, can be viewed by those concerned about sexual violence as “getting her drunk” or as enabling alcohol facilitated sexual assault.

Access and availability of alcohol is determined by the density of alcohol outlets and the hours and days it is sold. Research has demonstrated that as outlets increase, so too do alcohol related harms including violence. Extended hours of access, availability and convenience correlate with increased consumption of alcohol and increased alcohol related harms.

To balance community safety and concerns, we know that the implementation and enforcement of Alcohol Policies contribute to a safe culture of alcohol consumption and reduction in harms including sexual violence. As well, Municipal Alcohol (MAP) Projects are happening throughout the province to reduce alcohol harms.

For us the availability and promotion of alcohol, over which Council has some control, is a public safety issue as it pertains to sexual assault.

As councilors you may ask: **What can we do to be part of this local and provincial effort to prevent sexual violence and improve our intervention services?**

The Tri County Women’s Health Coalition would like to suggest some actions and welcomes the opportunity to work with the Council to implement them.

- **Controlling the availability of alcohol:** As indicated, it is our understanding the Council has some control over access and availability of alcohol. We are advocating for limited/less agency stores and reduced hours of sales in licensed establishment.
- **Controlling the promotion of alcohol:** Again, it is our understanding that Council has some control over this for sporting, festival, and special events. We encourage the banning of alcohol marketing at these events. If it can’t be completely controlled, ensure that gender specific advertising is not allowed. Some alcohol products will have scantily dressed models posing at events, whereby increasing the link between hypersexualization and alcohol consumption. For both the availability and promotion of alcohol, we would ask that you put a gender and child safety lens to your decisions so the safety of women and children is considered
- **Printing & Distribution of Contact Sheet of Support Services:** We want to develop a list of services in a compact format, something that will fit in a wallet, so people who are

coping with recent or historic sexual assault know about the support services available to them. When the resource list is ready for printing and distribution, can the council assist with printing? As well, with distribution such as putting it in the tax bill envelope?

- **Signage:** Some communities across our country, Owen Sound, Ontario for one, have large “billboard” signs that state a positive message about important social issues like stopping violence against women. Would the Council consider working with the Coalition to put up appropriate signage about stopping sexualized violence?
- **Recognize/ Proclaim Sexual Violence Awareness Month:** Can the Council recognize Sexual Violence Awareness Month through your own formal proceedings as well as publically? As part of this action, the Coalition would like to host a yearly event in that month and encourage the Council to be active participants.
- **Web site:** Can the Council have a link on your website to information about sexualized violence and bullying and the tri county *Collaborative Model of Practice* being worked on and supported by our Coalition? As part of that effort, we would appreciate website links to our local services and relevant government websites like the one on Bullying.
- **Youth:** Our success as adults on any social issue will not be evident if we do not involve young people, in all their diversities. Service providers, who are members of the Coalition, work with youth on developing their leadership and critical analysis on a number of social issues including sexualized violence. We would welcome the opportunity to bring that youth engagement to the Council Chambers so we are working together to ensure everyone’s safety & security.

We want to be clear that we are not talking about the revival of the temperance movement or prohibition, or an individual’s drinking habits, but the importance of putting limits on alcohol and moving towards a culture of moderation.

On behalf of the Tri County Women’s Health Coalition, we look forward to meeting you and discussing our letter further on Wednesday, Nov. 13th in your Chambers.

Sincerely:

Bernadette MacDonald

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Tri County Women's Health Coalition Members:

Name	Agency/ Association
Anne Robbins & Lisa Newell	Juniper House
Bernadette MacDonald	Tri County Women's Centre
Polly Ring	Healthy Beginnings – SWNDHA
Raymond Gaudet	Public Health – SWNDHA
Connie Geddes	NSCC – Burrige Campus
Megan LeBlanc	Nurse Practitioner – Women's Wellness Clinic - SWNDHA
Debbie Cooke	Tri County Pregnancy Centre
Cynthia Duncan	Community Member
Michele Archibald-Hattie	Yarmouth Centre for Sexual Health
Norma Jean Profitt	Mental Health & Addictions Services - SWNDHA
Joan Tufts	Tobacco Specialist – SWNDHA
Nathalie Ellis	Parent's Place
Jocelyn Comeau	Clare Community Health Board