

B.C. told to put money where the promises are  
Tragic deaths spur chatter, but anti-violence groups hope for more

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The Daily News

Tuesday, January 26, 2010

While pleased that the issue is finally in the spotlight, groups that deal with domestic violence issues in Nanaimo hope for more after a number of recommendations were made earlier this week to try to tackle the problem.

In the wake of the recently concluded coroner's inquest into the multiple murder-suicide in Oak Bay by Peter Lee in 2007, the provincial government announced a series of efforts Monday to try to reduce domestic violence in B.C.

The inquest made 14 recommendations, including the establishment of a domestic violence homicide panel to look at recent cases to determine what lessons can be learned, a domestic violence police unit in Victoria and the creation of an inter-ministry task force of senior officials to review recommendations from the Lee inquest and to develop a plan of action for the province within 60 days.



CREDIT: Krista Bryce/Daily News  
Magi Cooper and Bob Morrissey have worked together for 15 years as counselors with the Nanaimo Family Life Association. More programs need to be available for men, says Cooper.

With so few resources dedicated to the first round of action by the province (just \$25,000 so far) and a focus mainly on the Victoria area, local groups want more money and resources to be made available for programs and other efforts to deal with domestic violence issues once the task force makes its recommendations.

Many hope for more programs to deal with men's role in domestic violence issues.

But critics are skeptical and claim the government is merely playing "lip service" to a serious issue and will likely be unwilling to devote many resources to deal with it in lean financial times.

"This is a hugely complex issue that needs a diverse, multi-pronged approach in the ongoing efforts to deal with it all across the province," said Anne Spilker, executive director of Nanaimo's Haven House Society, which provides services to women, children, youth and families who have experienced violence.

"I believe it's always good when the issue of domestic violence is looked at and ways are considered to do things better. But the focus so far is in the Victoria area and we wonder about other areas like Nanaimo."

The inquest's recommendations stem from the case in which Lee stabbed to death his six-year-old son Christian, his wife Sunny Park, and her parents Kum Lea Chun and Moon Kyu Park and then himself on Sept. 4, 2007.

Mary Ellen-Turpel Lafond, B.C.'s child and youth representative, conducted her own investigation into the murder-suicide and said Christian's death could have been prevented if B.C. had a better co-ordinated system for dealing with domestic violence.

She has concluded the government changes proposed this week fall short of expectations and "much more" needs to be done to address the "significant gaps in the system" that have been identified in the Lee inquest.

The NDP has been scathing in their assessment of the government's response to the Lee inquiry and challenged the Campbell government to put their money where their mouth is.

Nanaimo MLA Leonard Krog said the initiatives announced this week by Solicitor General Kash Heed are nothing more than a "public relations exercise" and not a "substantive response" to a major problem facing British Columbians.

"The \$25,000 the Liberals have committed to these initiatives so far wouldn't pay for a press conference," Krog said.

Magi Cooper is a Nanaimo therapist who runs a 20-week intensive therapy program, on behalf of the Nanaimo Family Life Association, for men with domestic violent histories called Beyond Blame.

The program aims to address the root causes of violence in families by supporting men to take personal responsibility and end their abusive behaviour.

Like Spilker, Cooper said she appreciates the government is taking steps to better address issues around domestic violence, but claims the missing component in the new initiatives is more attention to men.

It's a concern frequently raised by officials at the financially troubled Nanaimo Men's Centre, the only fully functioning men's centre in the province that offers legal help, anger management and counselling for men facing separation and divorce.

"When a man opens his mouth and says words that are not respectful to his partner, that's the time when it must be acknowledged that he needs help," Cooper said.

"A perfect solution would be to have secure core funding for programs for men to learn concepts to help them be in good, non-violent relationships.

"Programs like that are not supported in a meaningful way and I don't think it should be so much trouble to find sufficient support and funding for programs that benefit the community so much."

Spilker agreed more attention is needed to be focused on men in domestic violence issues.

She said, thanks to a \$25,000 grant from the Canadian Women's Foundation, Haven House has begun a pilot project that trains men in the community to go into local schools and talk to students about domestic violence.

Spilker said because most perpetrators in domestic violence cases tend to be men, having a "positive and safe male role model" speak to students about the issue, particularly students who have witnessed abuse in their own homes, is proving beneficial in the program's first year.

"Haven House has proven effective in many areas that we work in, but we don't have enough funding for preventative programs," she said.

"We hope the government's announcement this week is just a first step."

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#### FAMILY VIOLENCE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

- 10,121 incidents of spousal assault were reported in B.C. in 2000
- 78.2% of the accused were male
- 12.9% of the accused were female
- 8.9% of reports involved both spouses assaulting each other
- Male on female violence accounted for 46.5% of all violent crime in Canada
- 37.8%: Male on male violence
- 8.1%: Female on female violence.
- 7.6%: Female on male violence

Sources: Crime Summary Statistics for B.C.; Canadian Crime Statistics