

Take Back the Night participants urged to become social advocates

Melanie Cummings, Special to the Beaver
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Oakville MPP Kevin Flynn likely got a call from Dr. Pamela Appelt Friday morning.

She wants to take him up on a promise he made at Thursday night's Take Back the Night March to find provincial funding for women's advocacy groups such as the Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Service (SAVIS).

The retired citizenship court judge, MPP, Mayor Anne Mulvale, poet Denise Anderson and musicians spoke out against violence during the 16th annual rally and march held at Coronation Park.

During a recent visit to the Hopedale Mall office where SAVIS operates, Appelt admitted she was "surprised" to see how much the group could do with so little money and space.

She urged the 50 people who participated in the march to visit the SAVIS office and then advocate for more funding and support from politicians and social organizations.

Appelt also wants those who couldn't make it out to the event to do the same.

Appelt has a long history of advocacy. She was a delegate to the 1985 United Nations Conference in Nairobi on women's issues and is a patron of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development

"Tonight we are giving love to the sisters of abuse and we demand women and children have the right to be free of violence in life," said Appelt.

The march is replicated around the world and has been done since 1976, when women attending the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women in Belgium walked together holding candles to protest the ways in which violence permeated the lives of women worldwide.

Mulvale gave praise to the people who marched along Lakeshore Road afterwards, describing them as the "precious ones" whose very presence sends

a message that they will advocate and stand with those people who believe they're unworthy of a violence-free life.

"You walk in bold defiance together, against those who choose to make the streets unsafe."

At 14, Mulvale said she was dragged into an alley but thankfully escaped further harm when she punched the perpetrator so hard that her hand hurt for days.

"What gave that man the impression that he could do that to me," asked Mulvale.

"I want a world, province and town that no one has to have that experience," she said.

And that begins with awareness that violence exists everywhere, even in Oakville.

There's a myth, she added, that because this town is among the wealthiest communities per capita that somehow it means it is also a violence-free community.

In fact, sexual and domestic abuse in Halton has increased by 1.2 per cent, according to the latest statistics.

There were 175 reported cases of violence in the region in 2005, which is an increase from the previous year's statistic of 168.

Nationally, women aged 25 to 34 have the highest rate of spousal abuse reported to police.

"We must keep advocating until there is no reason to take back the night," said Mulvale.

Denise Anderson, a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, found a way to channel her experiences into poetry. She shared her 30-year journey of hurt to healing, by reading a few of her powerful poems with the marchers.

Flynn also spoke from personal experience, about his brother who told him quite casually, that he'd been mugged twice in his neighbourhood.

"As he told me this, it sounded like there was a level of violence which he was willing to accept," said Flynn.

"By this march we are saying that there is no level here in Oakville that we are willing to accept," he added.