

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Human trafficking, Day of Mourning and more?

By Chris Ballard, MPP

Newmarket-Aurora

We generally lead safe lives here in Aurora and feel insulated from harsh crime that too often occurs elsewhere. We are correct ? Aurora is a safe place in which to live and raise a family.

And yet, there is one crime throughout York Region ? and that includes Aurora ? that we need to confront: human trafficking for prostitution.

Human trafficking and violence against women in York Region is a reality. All too often we believe things like this can't possibly happen in our own backyard ? but it does.

York Regional Police report human trafficking is on the rise and local York Region social service organizations report that: 63 per cent of victims trafficked in Ontario are Canadian citizens; 90 per cent are female; 63 per cent are between the ages of 15 and 24; 34 per cent entered exploitative trafficking through boyfriends acting as pimps; and 96 per cent of victims experienced multiple forms of violence.

While I'm told exact numbers of women in York Region who are being trafficked is difficult to pin down, police and social service agencies concur the number of women they help, almost on a daily basis, continues to grow.

Social agencies in Toronto have told me no longer is human trafficking about bringing women from overseas ? it's about women from our own communities being bought and sold. Increasingly, it's also about young boys being lured into this modern form of slavery.

That's why last Friday I was delighted to attend a ceremony in Newmarket to award the Women's Support Network of York Region a grant of \$612,000 to help women who are trafficked and want to escape the dangerous world of prostitution.

The grant was made by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, an agency of the government. The Network works closely with York Regional Police and York Region Victim Services to help women safely escape and rebuild their lives.

The Women's Support Network also provides free confidential services for women who have experienced sexual violence ? including a counselling and crisis line, support groups, outreach and public education and community based training.

Day of Mourning

I was honoured to be asked to speak at the recent National Day of Mourning at CUPE 905 headquarters on Pony Drive in Newmarket. CUPE 905 has created a beautiful memorial rock garden with cascading water. It is such a moving location that members of the community stop by to add small stones to the rock garden with the names of their loved ones who have died in workplace accidents, written on them.

The National Day of Mourning is not only a day to remember and honour those lives lost or workers injured due to a workplace tragedy, but also a day to renew the commitment to improve health and safety in the workplace and prevent further injuries, illnesses and deaths. Growing up I recall hearing stories told by my father and uncles about workplace accidents that killed and injured their colleagues. It made a lasting impression.

We have come a long way and we are continuing to make positive changes in workplace safety. Since 2003, our province's annual rate of workplace injuries has dropped by more than 40 per cent, making Ontario's workplaces among the safest in the world.

Small Claims Court more accessible

Ontario is making it faster and easier to file all types of small claims by expanding online services for small claims court. The online service allows individuals and businesses across Ontario to prepare and submit forms online, pay court fees securely using debit or credit cards, and receive court-issued documents by email without having to go to a courthouse.

Small claims court e-filing has been available since August 2014 for a specific list of cases. Now, all small claims up to \$25,000 can be filed online through a convenient, around-the-clock service, including claims for amounts that are not definite or exact, such as an award for property damage or personal injury.

There are two convenient ways to file online. One is for those who are representing themselves and who are unfamiliar with the small claims court process. The other is for legal professionals and regular users of small claims court. You can find more at the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General's website.

Around town

You know its spring by the number of walkathons and marathons filling our streets and parks. I joined with thousands recently to raise almost \$120,000 for Southlake. Congratulations! Later I joined the dedicated souls who braved rain and cold to walk for Doane House Hospice.

Because it receives just a small amount of government funding, this award winning organization depends on volunteers and community support. Doane House Hospice is dedicated to enhancing quality of life through the provision of non-medical support for those affected by, or caring for, an individual with a life-threatening illness, as well as bereavement support. Learn more on the group's website.

I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.