

Women's Centre of York Region celebrated on milestone anniversary



Community members came out in force on last Thursday evening to celebrate the milestone 45th anniversary of the Women's Centre of York Region.

It was an evening to celebrate and reflect on nearly a half-century of providing myriad services to local women experiencing abuse, but also a time to look ahead to the future; and this future includes recognition from both the Federal and Provincial governments.

The Women's Centre of York Region (WCYR) is a Newmarket-based non-profit which provides diverse programs and services for persons identifying as women, including their Managing Changes Life Skills group program that helps women develop basic skills necessary to become clearer and stronger decision-makers, financial empowerment initiatives, and Enterprising Careers, which helps participants become job ready with up-to-date skills and confidence.

The anniversary celebration took place at NewRoads Performing Arts Centre (formally Newmarket Theatre) and included an engaging performance by Canadian musician and York Region resident July Black.

Addressing the audience last week, WCYR Executive Director Liora Sobel underscored the importance of services for persons experiencing gender-based violence.

It is rooted in gender inequality, abuse of power and harmful norms, said Sobel. Gender-based violence is a serious violation of human rights and a life-threatening health and protection issue. It is estimated that one in three women will experience sexual or physical violence in their lifetime. Nearly one in five Canadians between the ages of 15 and 64 experienced emotional or financial abuse by an intimate partner.

While the enforced isolation during the pandemic was intended to keep us safe, it forced many women to be trapped inside their homes with their abusers, resulting in over thirty per cent increase in intimate partner violence and those are only the recorded cases. A hate crime is defined as the intentional killing of women or girls because they are female, [and these] increased over 50 per cent during the pandemic. The statistics are startling and they serve as a call to action for all of us.

The WCYR works with women who have experienced gender-based violence who simply want their lives back, she added, and to be able to live safely in a supportive community.

Often the Women's Centre is the community they begin to rebuild their lives, she continued. We are honoured to be a part of each and every woman's journey. We, as a community, as a whole, need to come together now more than ever to support the women and

girls who are at risk. We need to continue to create collaborative opportunities to address gender-based violence. We need to put an end to it and ensure we have the resources to support all women in their recovery. Today we start this together.?

In addition to inviting the audience to become 'change-makers' by donating monthly to the cause, the WYCR announced at the event they had received a significant boost from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, having been named as a recipient of their Resilient Communities fund to help 'rebuild from the impacts of COVID-19 and effectively meet the changing needs of our community.?

This wasn't the only announcement made during the WYCR's anniversary celebration; Newmarket-Aurora MP Tony Van Bynen announced he was bestowing upon them the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Pin in honour of their service to the community.

'I wish to recognize and award the Queen's Jubilee Pin to the Women's Centre of York Region for their leadership and compassion provided in the Newmarket-Aurora area,' said Van Bynen in a written statement that was shared from the podium. 'The Queen's Jubilee Pin was created by the Government of Canada in honour of Her Majesty's 70 years of service. It is awarded to community members who have shown a commitment to making the lives of their neighbours better, something the women's centre has been doing for 45 years.?

Concluded Sobel: 'We're grateful to be recipients of the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Resilient Communities Fund. The global pandemic was an unexpected challenge we faced. We continue to demonstrate our resiliency throughout. The funding will help us with the implementation of our new strategic plan, Our Way Forward, developed with three strategic priorities: build for our future, invest in our people, and support our sustainability.

'Thank you to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for believing in our work and supporting us to meet the changing needs of our community. I am overjoyed with the news of the award for our leadership and compassion provided in Newmarket-Aurora. In two weeks from now when we're presented with the Queen's Jubilee Pin, it is not only our leadership we will be celebrating; we will be celebrating the thousands of lives that we have helped change through our 45 years of service in this community.?

For more on the Women's Centre of York Region, visit www.wcyr.ca.

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