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Community-driven video sheds light on domestic and sexual violence in Dufferin-Caledon

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A new community-driven awareness video is putting a spotlight on gender-based violence in Dufferin County and Caledon, using familiar settings and lived experiences to challenge long-held assumptions about safety in rural communities.

The video, part of the ?It Happens Here? campaign, was developed as an accessible educational tool designed to reach viewers where they are, both physically and emotionally. The project was conceived as something that could be shared widely online and revisited over time. The project aims to create a lasting impact rather than a one-time message.

Barbara Mason is the sexual violence community engagement facilitator with Family Transition Place and a member of Dufferin-Caledon Domestic Assault Review Team (DART). She said that by presenting real stories in recognizable local spaces, the video underscores a central idea: violence is not confined to distant places ? it exists within the community itself.

?We want people to understand that this isn't something that happens somewhere else; it does happen here,? Mason said. ?When people watch it, you can tell that it's Orangeville? These are landmarks in our community. This is a close-to-home story. The video shares the reality of gender-based violence throughout our community through survivor voices and through their lived experience.?

The video features multiple survivors sharing their personal stories of experiencing violence and how it affected them.

The project emerged through the work of the Dufferin-Caledon DART team, which meets with and consults with a survivor engagement group known as ?Voices of Courage.? Formed in 2010, the group includes individuals with lived experience who actively contribute to education and outreach efforts.

Members played a key role in shaping the video, offering insight, feedback and direction throughout the process. The result is a collaborative effort that reflects both professional expertise and personal experience.

?Survivors involved in this group contributed their experiences, their feedback and their insights, which helped shape the video and its message,? Mason said. ?They were incredibly brave to share their stories on camera, and they have done a remarkable job to help make DART and our partners more approachable and accessible for survivors.?

At its core, the video is meant to resonate on multiple levels.

For viewers, it delivers a clear message that support exists and that those experiencing violence are not alone. For survivors, it offers a sense of recognition and possibility, showing that others have navigated similar experiences and found a path forward. The storytelling approach ? grounded in real voices rather than statistics ? aims to create a deeper emotional connection and encourage reflection.

The campaign also highlights the unique challenges of addressing domestic and sexual violence in rural communities.

Limited anonymity, transportation barriers, and close social networks can make it more difficult for individuals to seek help.

?For example, you go to the hospital because something's happened and you need support, but you know the nurse who's working at triage,? Mason said. ?Or you know the officer who might get dispatched to your house might be friends with the perpetrator? There are some significant barriers around confidentiality? If you're in Toronto, you can drive a couple blocks away, and nobody has a clue

who you are.?

?There's the other issues of transportation. How do folks who live in rural communities access support if they don't have access to a vehicle or they don't have money for gas? If there is an emergency and it's a violent situation, how long is it going to take for someone to get there to help you??

Concerns about confidentiality and the visibility of accessing services can discourage reporting, while geographic distance can delay access to support. These factors contribute to underreporting and complicate efforts to fully understand the scope of the issue.

Compounding these challenges are persistent misconceptions about small-town safety. The campaign directly confronts the belief that violence does not occur in close-knit or seemingly secure communities.

By placing survivor stories against a backdrop of recognizable local landmarks, the video emphasizes that appearances can be misleading and that harm often occurs behind closed doors.

It's those stories of survival that give this campaign its strength, Mason says.

?As much as ?It Happens Here' is the title, it happens everywhere,? she said. ?That's what gives this campaign strength. It's universal, and it's the women who chose to speak when staying silent would have been much easier for them, and their willingness to share their lived experience so openly, that's what gives this message the weight. That kind of courage doesn't just inform a campaign, it anchors it in reality, and it gives others permission to recognize their stories and feel less alone than sharing them.?

Ultimately, organizers see the video as a starting point. By raising awareness and encouraging conversations, the campaign is intended to break cycles of silence and foster a more informed and responsive community.

Through shared understanding and dialogue, it aims to lay the groundwork for continued education, support, and meaningful change.

To view the video, go to: www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5_fSOv4_Rw&t=2s