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Dufferin County Cultural Resource Circle holds event for MMIWG2S

Written By **Sam Odrowski**

Dufferin residents recently gathered to show their support and raise awareness around the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S).

The National Day of Awareness for MMIWG2S, also known as Red Dress Day, was marked locally on May 5 with a walk and smudging ceremony at the Mino Kamik Medicine Wheel Garden in Bravery Park.

The event was held by the Dufferin County Cultural Resource Circle (DCCRC), and attended by local politicians, municipal representatives, heads of organizations, and community members.

DCCRC chair, Debbie Egerton, who founded the organization in 2014, said more needs to be done on the issue of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people going missing or being murdered at disproportionate rates compared to non-indigenous people. The homicide rate for Indigenous women in Canada was almost six times higher than non-Indigenous women from 2001 to 2015.

?I've been doing this for eight years and I can't tell you how many people have gone missing in that time and each time it breaks my heart to see what doesn't get done,? she remarked. ?We need to make that happen. We can do it in our community ? we start here.?

An Orangeville resident and Indigenous woman who attended the local walk and ceremony, Kristi Bhogal, has been doing a vow of silence every May 5 since 2003, the year her cousin went missing. She has vowed to this each year until her cousin is found.

Prior to the walk for the MMIWG2S event, Egerton told attendees, ?I hope that as we make this walk together, we keep in mind these people that are missing and have been murdered.?

She added, ?Whomever you choose to pray to or acknowledge, please send a prayer through your own being and let's all try and bring forward some of the solutions, so that we can get these people back.?

For the MMIWG2S event, attendees were given tobacco to hold while thinking about the important women in their lives and what MMIWG2S means to them.

Afterwards the tobacco was buried in the Medicine Wheel Garden.

?By putting that prayer back to the earth, what you're doing is you're asking all of creation to help because it's only when all of creation gets together that we will be able to fix what we've broken,? Egerton explained.

During the MMIWG2S event, people also tied red ribbons to trees, as a way of showing their support for Red Dress Day.

DCCRC member who is Métis-Cree and Two-Spirit, Tiffany Smith said she was thrilled with how the event turned out.

?One thing that I always am amazed at is the community support,? she said.

Smith opened up about her experience as a Two-Spirit person during the MMIWG2S event and shared how they and Indigenous women are targeted.

?When you're talking about places like where I'm from ? the reserves in Manitoba. They're very protected on the reserve. That's the way it's set up. But it's when they go off reserve, it's like you and I walking down the street with a crosshair on our back ? you're targeted,? Smith told the Citizen.

She also noted that the rates of suicide among Two-Spirit people are very high compared to non-Indigenous people.

As well, back when Canada was being colonized, Smith said Two-Spirit people were singled out and killed in front of their communities by European settlers, simply because they were Two-Spirit.

Through speaking about her own experience and being an advocate for Two Spirit people, Smith said she hopes she can bring further understanding to the local community.

?What I hope for and pray for out of events like this is, first of all, it's creating awareness. It's getting the conversation started,? she noted. ?It's like the old saying of planting a seed. We plant a seed in hope and wait for it to grow.?

Going forward, Egerton said she hopes more men will become involved in the issue of MMIWG2S and speak out more about it so there's a unified front within society.

Joining the Moosehide Campaign is one way that men can get more involved, she noted.

The campaign is a grassroots movement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and boys who are against violence towards women and children. Those who join the movement make a pledge and are given a pin with a moose hide that signifies their commitment to honour, respect, and protect the women and children. It also symbolizes their pledge to work together with other men and boys to end violence against women and children.

To order pins, sign the pledge, and learn more about the campaign, visit: moosehidecampaign.ca