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Family Transition Place raising awareness
for Sexual Violence Prevention Month]

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Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Family Transition Place (FTP) is working to educate the community on sexual violence as they raise awareness in recognition of Sexual Violence Prevention Month.

?We very much work from the premise that sexual violence is never someone's fault,? said Lynette Pole-Langdon, FTP director of counselling, education and community mental health initiatives. ?We want the community to know that we're here for support, whether someone's been a victim of sexual violence themselves, or they're supporting someone that has been a victim or if they're wanting to learn more about prevention and education that we have the services available.?

During Sexual Violence Prevention Month, various agencies promote awareness and create opportunities for the community to learn about sexual violence to decrease the stigma surrounding it.

Formerly known as Sexual Assault Awareness/Prevention Month, the 30-day awareness initiative was renamed to reflect the shifting use of sexual violence versus sexual assault.

?With sexual assault, there's the image that it's a physical act and that's it. Whereas, sexual violence exists on a continuum and it includes a wide range of behaviours from verbal harassment, online stalking, exploitation and physical sexual assault but it's a much broader term that speaks to the behaviours and experiences people can have,? explained Pole-Langdon.

The support provided by sexual assault centres has become increasingly critical over the years as numbers indicate a notable rise in reported sexual violence incidents.

According to the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC), there has been an 18 percent increase in reported sexual assaults in Ontario every year since 2016. The organization also says that 81 percent of all Ontario sexual assault centres saw an increase in crisis line calls in the last year.

Statistics provided by Family Transition Place show that during the 2021-2022 year, 116 women and 24 men accessed services for sexual violence counselling and received 3,875 calls to their support crisis line. The following year they saw 171 women and 29 men access services for sexual violence counselling and received 4,768 calls to their crisis line.

The organization has seen a 27 percent increase in calls to the crisis line over the last four years.

One factor that has become prevalent in sexual violence incidents is the roleof technology.

?Technology really has increased the vulnerability of people, but especially young people, because we know they spend lots of time online,? said Pole-Langdon. ?We know, technology provides new avenues for people to be harassed, stalked, and exploited ? especially when people are vulnerable.?

In 2022, Family Transition Place launched the Lotus Centre, a program that aims to provide a larger continuum of support for victims and survivors of sexual violence with increased counselling opportunities.

Supports that the Lotus Centre program offers include; 24/7 crisis counselling; sexual violence counselling services; support for partners, family and friends of survivors; therapeutic group counselling; sexual violence peer support groups; and sexual violence education and community engagement.

Throughout the month of May, the local organization will be sharing resources and educational information regarding sexual violence on their social media pages.

The County of Dufferin will be making a proclamation on May 11 in recognition of Sexual Violence Prevention Month, and a flag will be raised at Town Hall in Orangeville on May 15 at 1 p.m.