

Take Back the Night coming to Shelburne for the first time

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Shelburne residents will have an opportunity to come together against sexual and gender-based violence next month as Family Transition Place (FTP) hold its annual Take Back the Night event in the community for the first time.

The event will take place Thursday, Sept. 17, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Mel Lloyd Centre. The evening will feature guest speakers, community resource tables, a two-kilometre empowerment walk through Shelburne and a candlelight vigil to honour survivors and remember those whose lives have been lost due to gender-based violence. The event is open to community members of all ages, and no registration is required.

Kelly Lee, manager of fund development and communication at FTP, said that while Take Back the Night has been an international movement for decades, FTP and partner organizers wanted to expand their awareness work into another community within their service area.

"Take Back the Night events have been taking place internationally for years, starting back in the 70s," she said. "So we thought, what a great place to land, and it's an opportunity for us to expand the awareness piece into a different community that we support."

The Shelburne event is being organized by FTP in partnership with Dufferin Child and Family Services (DCAFS) and Headwaters Health Care Centre (HHCC). The three organizations work together to support victims and survivors of sexual violence in Dufferin County, and the event will provide an opportunity for all three partners to connect directly with residents.

This marks the first time FTP has hosted its own Take Back the Night event in Shelburne. The organization has historically partnered with Georgian College on initiatives recognizing the event.

Lee said the Mel Lloyd Centre was selected as the venue because of its central location and the number of community services already operating there.

"We have an office in the Mel Lloyd Centre, and there's other services available through our partnerships in the Mel Lloyd Centre," she said. "Because it's such a central location with other services nearby, it's a good opportunity for us to sort of touch base in that space and in the Shelburne community."

The event is intended to connect residents with organizations and supports they may not otherwise encounter through a single community gathering.

Attendees will have time at the beginning of the evening to visit information tables, meet community partners and ask questions about available services. Representatives from FTP, DCAFS and HHCC will be present, along with other community organizations connected to the work.

The information component is a significant part of the evening. Organizers want residents to leave with a better understanding of where support is available for people who have experienced sexual violence, as well as information that can help people feel more informed about personal and community safety.

The formal portion of the evening is expected to begin shortly before 6 p.m.

Lee said that guest speakers and partner representatives are likely to speak.

‘We’re working on the complement of speakers right now,’ she said. ‘We do know that we’ll have representation from each of the partners to speak, but we are also looking at survivors to speak about their experiences as well. We have a couple of other things that we’re looking at that are a little bit outside the box beyond guest speakers as well.’

The event will then move outside for a two-kilometre empowerment walk.

The planned route will begin at the Mel Lloyd Centre, travel behind the building and continue through Shelburne. Participants will travel along Jelly Street, cross at Main Street and continue onto Victoria Street before returning to the Mel Lloyd Centre.

‘So it works out to be just about two kilometres in a loop,’ Lee said. ‘So we’ll have that opportunity to walk right through the main part of Shelburne, and which brings a little bit of exposure to the event above and beyond just being at Mel Lloyd Centre.’

The walk is rooted in the broader purpose of Take Back the Night, which focuses on challenging concerns about safety in public spaces after dark. While the movement has historically focused heavily on women’s safety, organizers emphasize that safety concerns can affect people across communities.

The evening will conclude with a candlelight vigil, creating space to recognize survivors and remember people who have lost their lives as a result of gender-based violence. The event will also give attendees an opportunity to connect with services and resources available locally.

Organizers are hoping the event will encourage more than awareness for one evening.

‘We’re hoping that people walk away a little bit more confident in their community,’ Lee said. ‘And that people are talking about this issue, with the hopes that we can end the cycle of violence and raise awareness about how people are still feeling unsafe, you know, 30, 40, 50 years later after this event started, and what can we do as a community to talk about what can be done to end this sort of violence.’

The event also aims to encourage broader community conversations about safety and the continued prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence. Organizers acknowledge that the issue has persisted for decades and that communities continue to face the challenge of finding ways to prevent violence and support survivors.

The event could also become an annual fixture in Shelburne.

FTP is committed to continuing Take Back the Night as an annual awareness initiative, with organizers hoping this year’s event can establish a foundation for future gatherings in Shelburne. The success of the venue, route and overall format will help determine how the event develops in future years.

The event is open to everyone, including children, although organizers note that there will not be children’s activities and that the evening will include discussions about sexual violence and safety. Parents and guardians are encouraged to consider the nature of the content when deciding whether to bring younger children.

Take Back the Night will run from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 17, at the Mel Lloyd Centre, 167 Centre St. in Shelburne. No registration is required.

The event is being presented as an opportunity for residents to learn about local support, stand in solidarity with survivors and take part in a visible community effort focused on creating safer spaces in Shelburne and across Dufferin County.

For more information about Take Back the Night and to learn about more community resources, contact Family Transition Place at 519-942-4122 or visit: familytransitionplace.ca