



Annual walk brings in \$7,500 to fight violence against women

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Thompson RCMP Sgt. Joe Frizzley, left, and Staff Sgt. Kevin Lewis, right, step gingerly down Thompson Drive Sept. 20 as participants in the Walk a Mile in Her Shoes fundraiser put on by the Thompson YWCA every year to raise money and combat the problem of violence against women and girls. Photograph By Ian Graham

It looked like it might be a dangerous affair when the clouds opened up in the morning, but the weather improved enough that slippery conditions didn't add to the hazards experienced by participants in the Thompson YWCA's Walk a Mile in Her Shoes fundraiser on Sept. 20.

Fifty-four men took part in the event, which aims to raise awareness about and money to prevent violence against women and girls, and involves men donning high heels for a stroll around the block, in recognition of the obstacles and dangers that women face every day.

"This event is important because men and boys, particularly men who are role models in our community, make a public declaration which sends a powerful message that men can change their violent behaviours towards women and girls," said Thompson YWCA board member and now board president Angel Anderson prior to the

promenade. "It's great to see men and their families showing their support for ending violence against women and girls."

The men who participated raised \$7,523 for the YWCA's women's centre, which opened last December, and the top fundraiser was Dr. Hussam Azzam, who raised \$1,601 followed by Rick Leger, who raised \$500 and Darryl Sheppard, who raised \$495. The total was not as high as last year, when participants raised \$11,673 in pledges, but two of the top three fundraisers donated their prizes – a six-burner barbecue and a bar fridge, back to the YWCA, while Leger took home a sound system to present to the real keys to his fundraising drive.

"When you say that I raised the money, I didn't," said Leger. "It was the women at the Paint Lake Resort that did all the canvassing. They did an awesome job for us."

Coun. Charlene Lafreniere spoke on behalf of the city at the event.

"Laughter is a really important part of healing, especially in the aboriginal community," she said. "It's one of the seven sacred teachings so you have to laugh and you have to bring humour to some of the things that are darker in life. But we also have to talk about those really serious things, those issues that we all face and deal with daily or annually or however it's a part of our life. Talk to your parents, talk to your kids, talk to each other about violence against women and violence against girls. Women are at most risk in their home, less so on the street, but in their home. Children see that and sometimes they're also victims of that violence. I think being here and starting those conversations is an awesome thing."

Though the local statistics about violence against women can be staggering – the Thompson YWCA noted that a 2011 survey of R.D. Parker Collegiate students indicated that 21 per cent had been victims of some kind of sexual assault and that there are probably 1,800 domestic violence incidents per year in the city, most of which are never reported to the police – Anderson said there are signs of progress.

"This attention to the issue of violence against women and girls is helping," Anderson said. "Conversations are taking place. Men are starting to learn that if a woman is unable to give consent that is rape. People are beginning to understand the importance of stopping victim-blaming. It doesn't matter if a woman was drunk, or if she was dressed like a slut. It doesn't matter. Men are responsible for rape, not women. Just recently there was a young man in California who killed six people and wounded eight others just to get back at the women who rejected him. The blame is being put on those women, not on the man who killed all these individuals. So what can we do in our community? We can continue these discussions. We can stand up against jokes and language that perpetrates violence, racism and sexism. Don't attack the victim. Janay Rice, [suspended NFL player] Ray Rice's wife, she's been criticized so much in the media for staying with her abuser but we can't judge her or any woman for the choices that they make when we don't know what options they had to choose from."

Firsts for this year's Walk a Mile in Her Shoes includes a one-year-old participant – the youngest walker ever – and a challenge between Thompson RCMP detachment members and Thompson emergency medical services (EMS) workers, to see who could raise the most money, which was won by the EMS workers.

A few days prior to the walk, Charlene Dysart Fitness hosted a fitness fundraiser that brought in \$510 and Vale's Manitoba Operations also presented a donation to the Thompson YWCA at Saturday's event.

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