

Tree of Life, walk about empowering women

October 8, 2010

Lifestyles

By HEATHER CROFT

They say that the No. 1 factor that makes a difference as to whether a woman stays, or leaves, an abusive relationship is the level of community support.

The Women and Children's Shelter of Barrie, for more than 29 years, has been providing a safe and secure refuge for abused women and their children in Simcoe County.

Our objective is to create a non-judgmental environment of support that recognizes and respects the strengths of each woman. Our goal is to enable women to gain perspectives on their situation, explore alternatives and options, and make decisions for themselves.

A substantial amount of our funding comes from the community, from those who believe in the value of each life, and empowerment through respect.

We would love to have the community involved in working together to end violence against women. We cannot do this alone; together as a community, we must empower women and children.

Gender violence does not just affect women. It affects the men who care about them, their families, friends, co-workers, and their communities. Someone you know, someone you care about, has, or will, become the victim of gendered violence. It may be your mother, sister, friend, girlfriend, wife, co-worker, or daughter. No one is unaffected.

We would like to thank Shoppers Drug Mart for recognizing the importance of women's health as their focus in their Tree of Life campaign in 2010. This is the ninth year of the campaign, and this year, according to Lisa Gibbs, Shoppers' manager of community investment, will see 100% of proceeds donated to women's health organizations, ensuring women have even greater access to the information and resources they need to stay healthy in mind, body and spirit. This year's campaign will introduce new icons for the 'Tree of Life', which customers have the opportunity to purchase and personalize, including a "leaf" for a loonie, a "butterfly" for \$5, or a "cardinal" for \$50. These new icons will be prominently displayed on the Tree of Life in all Barrie stores.

To support this year's campaign, visit one of the seven Barrie Shoppers Drug Mart locations from now until Oct. 15. The enthusiasm of Shoppers' employees is outstanding, their interest in our organization has been truly invested, and the creativity and hours that each store's employees have put into this campaign has been inspiring.

The shelter is also hosting 'Walk a Mile in Her Shoes' on Sunday, Oct. 17 at Centennial Park in Barrie. 'Walk a Mile' is exactly how it sounds. We are asking men to literally walk a mile in women's shoes. We are well on our way in the process of collecting wild and crazy large-sized shoes for men to walk in.

We would be thrilled to have our community partners participate in this fun, dynamic event.

We encourage businesses and organizations participating as a team to dress as a team and/or bring a banner to carry throughout the walk.

Last year, more than 300 such walks were held across the country and tens of thousands of men (women and children, too) put on high-heeled shoes as a symbolic gesture to walk in solidarity with women.

Please join us at 11 a.m. on Oct. 17 at Centennial Park Lion's Pavilion to register and at noon to Walk the Mile.

Pledge sheets are available at [http://barrieshelter.com/events- 2/walk_a_mile](http://barrieshelter.com/events-2/walk_a_mile).

Heather Croft is the community development coordinator with the Women and Children's Shelter in Barrie.