

Vancouver Community College gets proactive to stop gendered violence

Campus project aims to foster discussion and take action on issues of violence against women

by STEPHEN HUI on AUG 20, 2014 at 12:00 PM



Sarah Jo (left) and Alana Prochuk of Women Against Violence Against Women Rape Crisis Centre hope to raise awareness at Vancouver Community College's two campuses.

STEPHEN HUI

AS A SUPPORT worker at the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, Vanessa Chong sees on a regular basis how society has failed to stop violence against women.

Chong, who is studying community counselling skills at Vancouver Community College, believes more education is needed at the postsecondary level to counteract widespread ignorance about violence targeted at people on the basis of their gender.

"I actually don't think it should be limited to postsecondary education, because I think it should start really young," the 25-year-old Vancouver resident told the *Georgia Straight* during an interview at VCC's downtown campus. "I think this should be something that is brought up in elementary school, because gendered violence happens at every age. Unfortunately, that is the reality."

Chong is a volunteer with [CARE \(Campus Allied Response Effort\) About Gendered Violence](#), an 18-month project at VCC that wraps up in October. [Women Against Violence Against Women Rape Crisis Centre](#) is leading CARE, which received \$200,000 in federal funding from Status of Women Canada.

Alana Prochuk, WAVAW's coordinator for the project, told the *Straight* the idea was to get the VCC community "thinking, learning, and taking action" on the problem. Seated next to CARE assistant coordinator Sarah Jo at VCC's Broadway campus, Prochuk noted that the project started with the formation of a task force composed of students, staff, and administrators who learned about sexual assault, relationship violence, [transphobia](#), and related issues and helped identify the needs of the college related to these subjects.

WAVAW conducted online surveys, focus groups, and talking circles as part of a college wide consultation process. It held workshops for faculty members and students, addressing the myths and realities of sexual assault and how people can support survivors of gender-based violence.

Prochuk estimates CARE had conversations with 3,000 people at 35 outreach events. On December 6—the National Day of Remembrance

and Action on Violence Against Women—the project invited students to leave their handprints on banners declaring, “These hands don’t create violence.”

“We filled up about seven enormous rolls of white paper,” Prochuk said. “It was quite inspiring to see the level of commitment and engagement around this issue on campus.”

The CARE task force has submitted a three-year action plan to the college. John Woudzia, vice president for education and student services at VCC, told the *Straight* the recommendations will likely result in changes to policies dealing with student conduct and campus safety and security.

Woudzia called CARE a “great success”. On September 15, VCC’s two campuses will host events to celebrate the work of the project.

“I think there will be lasting changes,” Woudzia said by phone from the Broadway campus. “But much of that will depend on how effectively we’re able to take the information from the project and find a way to build upon our existing support systems to effectively get that awareness out.”

According to [Statistics Canada](#), women were 11 times more likely than men to be victims of sexual offences in 2011. Women were also three times as likely to be victims of stalking. Men were responsible for 83 percent of the acts of violence against women reported to police that year.

In 2013, a string of six sexual assaults hit the University of British Columbia’s Point Grey campus. After some UBC commerce students sang a “rape chant” and a “Pocahontas chant” during frosh activities last September, the university formed a task force on gender-based violence and aboriginal stereotypes that released its [draft recommendations](#) in February.

Jo praised VCC for being “proactive instead of reactive”. Prochuk stated she’s proud CARE hasn’t focused on “Band-Aid solutions” such as emergency call boxes, lighting improvements, and rape whistles.

“Whether or not this problem is visible, whether or not it’s in the

news, it's happening every day, on every campus, and in every part of our communities," Prochuk said. "So, absolutely, every campus needs to step up and take some steps to ensure that violence is addressed at a root level and also that supports for survivors are in place."

Like WAVAW, [MOSAIC](#) received funding through Status of Women Canada's Engaging Young People to Prevent Violence Against Women on Post-Secondary Campuses program. The nonprofit, which supports immigrants and refugees, coordinated a two-year project at Langara College.

According to a [June evaluation report](#) by the McCreary Centre Society, the Langara project involved meetings, a safety fair, a skit, and a zine and resulted in the crafting of a campus and community plan. One of the plan's recommendations calls for yearly anti-oppression training for faculty and staff.

"Participants felt that the project met the needs of women at Langara College because it made them more aware of services available on campus and in the community," the report states. "The project also gave women a space to voice their recommendations for addressing gender-based violence on campus, and led to the development of an active group that could adapt and exercise flexibility to meet the needs of women on campus."

At VCC, Chong helped facilitate CARE workshops for faculty and students. She asserted that gendered violence is a form of oppression, but that education can help people "unlearn" oppression.

"Men can be really great allies to women in terms of gendered violence," Chong said, "because they have the ability to stop other men from perpetuating any sort of violence."