

BULLETIN

Providing security in traumatic times

December 1, 2008

The Report: December 2008 vol.29 num.5

by YUKIE KURAHASHI



hen the phone rings in the night, it might be the police. Or a social worker. Or the hospital where an abused woman has been admitted for treatment.

-And a lot of times the women call themselves ... often just to talk," says Julie McKee, a night-time counsellor at Victoria Womens Transition House.

McKee has been up all night. In addition, this chilly morning in the drizzle, she has just participated in the BC Breast Cancer Foundations Run for the Cure in Victoria.

But her eyes are bright as she continues to describe her work.

-So, if anybody other than the woman calls on her behalf we might get some basic information, but generally we ask to speak with the woman," she says. -Once weve spoken with the woman and are clear that she meets our mandate, and that we have space, we arrange for a time for her to come to the shelter. -And then she comes. And where it goes from there depends on where shes at."

Describing the specifics of her work is a delicate business. As she answers questions about her workplace, McKee carefully weighs her words, protecting the safety of her clients and colleagues as well as the overall goals of the transition house itself. She is careful and kind ... but underneath lies an ardent strength.

-The first thing to know about working in a transition house is there is no typical day," she says. -Different women bring different energy to the house. Sometimes our crisis line can be quiet, and other times very busy at night.

-My role as I see it at night is to give the women and children a sense of safety. Nighttime can bring anxiety to women who have experienced trauma, and it is important to have a calm, safe environment.

-Often if a woman is having trouble sleeping, it can help to debrief what is on her mind or to work on relaxation or grounding strategies," she says.

-I believe my work is about new beginnings," McKee says.

-I get to watch people bring new beginnings into their lives. Each womans vision of their personal change will be different. Whether an individual woman chooses to live independently or return to her partner, she has created a new beginning for her life," she says.

Julie McKee
Women's counsellor
Victoria Women's Transition House

-If she returns, she hopefully knows that she has a supportive place to return to if she chooses to leave again, and that the women who work at the transition house will not judge her decision to return to her partner. -It is about empowering women who have had their power stripped away to regain control of their lives. That is very powerful."

While she was at the University of Victoria working on her Bachelor of Social Work degree, McKee was already taking an interest in working to prevent violence against women.

-While I was in university I started to take a close look at society and community with a gender focus, and it became clear to me I wanted to be part of work that focused on issues of violence against women and poverty," she says. -I started volunteering on the crisis line at the Womens Sexual Assault Centre and later volunteered for the Sexual Assault Response Team."

McKee began working with Victoria Womens Transition House after doing a practicum for the Family Violence Project, which is a counselling program for men who are abusive to their partners. -I interviewed and offered support to the women who had partners in the program," she says.

McKee also works part-time at Margaret Laurence House, a second stage housing resource for women with children who have left abusive partners. -Women can stay there for a longer timeframe so I am more involved in their family lives for a longer period of time," she says. -The women are out of the initial crisis and often really ready to consider what they want for themselves and their children. It is a great job."

McKee acknowledges that despite her expertise and years of experience, her job can sometimes be difficult ... both professionally and emotionally. -For example, many people ask me why so many women stay in abusive relationships. This is an important and complex issue," she says, explaining that a full exploration would fill a library.

She emphasizes that its important not to judge. -Likely all of us at sometime have known women in our lives who are being abused by their partners. One of the important things you can do as a support person is to educate yourself around this question. When you have understanding of this question, you will have a better understanding of the woman you are trying to support."

McKee offers help to people who want to help. -Through the crisis line, I am always happy to speak with people who are supporting abused women ... as long as were not busy with the women themselves," she adds. - If you need concrete information and support, Im here. It is very emotional to know that someone you care about is being hurt."

Victoria Womens Transition Society is an acknowledged leader among transition houses, with a reputation as a well-resourced shelter attracting highly-experienced, well-educated, passionate staff.

-I think that women who come and work at transition houses are not there for any other reason than they really care about women who have experience abuse, whether physical, emotional, or psychological. And I think that that is the number one reason that people come work here," McKee says.

-They want to be part of this movement; they want to be working on violence against women. And the shelter is such a first stop place for women who are leaving an abusive situation.

-To be there in that crisis moment is a profound and privileged place to be. I think that more than anything else, women come to this work because they really feel passionate about the issue.

-I love my job because my coworkers are insightful, creative and knowledgeable women. The support I receive from both the womens counselling staff and the childrens team is tremendous." she says.

-The women who come to the shelter inspire me regularly with their strength, wisdom and resourcefulness. I learn from them as much if not more as I am sure they learn from me." 

Type:

[The Report](#)

- [Print](#)
- [PDF](#)

180 East Columbia
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website
www.hsabc.org

Telephone 604-517-0994
1-800-663-2017