

## **June flooding, anticipated to affect domestic and sexual violence rates in the upcoming months**

Alberta is no stranger to flooding, but few were prepared for the devastation of the flood this past June. This disaster is now part of Calgarians' collective history, a story and an experience to be shared long into the future. Its impact will continue to resonate as our city and our province work towards recovery.

Citizens are currently in the process of rebuilding their homes and/or their businesses. But rebuilding isn't the only concern Calgarians may have to contend with over the next several months.

Many studies have shown that in times of disaster vulnerabilities increase, which can create opportunities for increased deviant behaviours and issues to surface. One common problem that is tied closely to disasters is an increase in the incidences of violence within communities, and more specifically an increase in domestic and/or sexual violence perpetration. Many organizations within the sector note that these issues, though always prevalent, can often become exasperated both during and following a crisis situation and as such feel that Calgary may experience further ramifications from the flood disaster in the up and coming months.

"The full effects of the flood are yet to be known," said Kevin McNichol, executive director of HomeFront. "I think September will be a big trigger for domestic violence, as that is when kids are returning back to school. Families that have been displaced or who may be feeling a financial strain in the aftermath of the flood are going to need to adjust and adapt to the upheaval of being in a different home and having to change past school preparation spending. These are both major risk factors for domestic violence, as a person's life is less stable than what it once was.

"We predict that we will continue to see ongoing domestic violence as winter sets in, indoor living conditions become tighter and finances become more strained with the onset of the colder weather. There will be mounting pressures and these may trigger individuals to initiate acts of domestic violence."

Similarly, there are risk factors that, though always present, may offer more opportunity for offenders to sexually perpetrate in a time of crisis. Some of these can occur during the crisis itself, such as population displacement, the absence of police and the disruption of the normal social networks that are in place to protect individuals from violence. What is important to know is that crisis situations do not create offenders, but rather the beliefs that many offenders hold surrounding inequality or feelings of hostility towards certain groups of individuals (race, gender, socio economic background, culture etc.), ideologies of male sexual entitlement, hostile family environments, family economic stress, weak community sanctions, socialization, etc. can

attribute to an individual sexually offending at any point in time, but that during times of catastrophe give these individuals more opportunity to offend.

HomeFront, CCASA and other organizations within the sector are prepared to address possible increases in any and all forms of violence should they arise from the flood. These organizations will also continue to work collaboratively around educating community members on the issues of domestic and sexual violence through the dissemination of accurate information on these crimes. There are also many programs and services that are currently in existence to help individuals impacted by these crimes.

Calgary is a great city to live in, and during the flood we saw the community band together to help each other out. But we also need to be aware that just because the physical mess has been cleaned up, we may not yet be completely out of the woods.

By breaking the silence and working with our communities to change the attitudes around the tolerance of these crimes, we can create a culture where every individual is safe from domestic and/or sexual violence.

\*Written collaboratively by CCASA and HomeFront