

# ***THE WILLIAMS LAKE TRIBUNE***

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## **Research: Making a Link - HIV and Violence**

By Sage Birchwater

Sheila Dick makes it really easy for others to understand the plight of disadvantaged women.

Standing in the city hall council chambers, alone at the podium, with few people in the gallery, she reads from a prepared script. City councillors and staff and Mayor Rick Gibson sit in silence, listening intently. You could hear a pin drop.

Dick had no tricks up her sleeve, just the raw facts. For the past year, she has been working on a research project making the link between HIV-AIDS and violence against women.

“One of the problems faced by these women is that the man raping her didn’t have the consideration to put on a condom first.”

It’s a vicious circle, she explains, poverty, rape, violence and now HIV-AIDS.

So far Dick has interviewed 30 women. Most are aboriginal, but not all. A few are Caucasian, some are of mixed blood from other nationalities. She told council she wants to use the information gathered by her study to help improve the conditions of women in the Cariboo and help reduce the risk of HIV.

The value of her study, says Dick, is that it is being done locally, but will be used by other communities to help solve problems there. The expertise and certification for the study is being provided by Dr. Colleen Varcoe of the University of Victoria.

“There are many unresolved issues around violence towards women. Our study is attempting to identify some of the things that can be done to make women feel safe.”

Coun. Debbie DeMare was first to break the silence. “When I read Sheila’s report, I just sat there. It was easy for me to put myself in the place of those women. I never realized before the connection between HIV and violence against women.”

Mayor Rick Gibson also spoke soberly. “This is very startling to say the least. And the problem is a lot deeper than people think. My store sits between the main street and an alley, and different people walk down the main street than walk down the alley. But, they all have a story.”

Describing himself as an extremely right wing person, Mayor Gibson said he has compassion. “There are a lot of people in the community who go unnoticed, but we’re nothing as a community if we don’t look after those less fortunate than ourselves.”

Dick invited council members to attend the March 11 “dissemination event” at the Overlander Hotel where information from this first phase of her research study will be made public.

Coun. Surinderpal Rathor encouraged members of council to attend the meeting. “I move we ask the community to support the project and attend the workshop.”

DeMare said it is important to look at what is happening in other countries. “Some turned their backs on the problem but it didn’t go away. Now it has become an exponential problem. I personally care. I just hope our community can listen to these stories and take it on.”

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