

Caledon East walks a path toward supporting need for community mental health services

Written By JAMES MATTHEWS

First responders, their families, and others walked the talk for suicide prevention in Caledon East last Sunday.

It was the third edition of the annual Walk the Talk community event and took place on the walking trail in the area of the Caledon East Community Complex and the Caledon OPP detachment.

Municipal and Region of Peel employees, officers from the Caledon OPP detachment, Peel paramedics, Caledon/Dufferin Victim Services representatives, and many other groups that work toward the community's mental health needs took part.

The family walk is an opportunity for people to come together as a community to recognize the impact of suicide, to educate ourselves on the topic, and to strive to prevent suicide, said Const. Nick Croll, one of the walk's organizers.

According to some of the latest information from Statistics Canada, suicide is the second leading cause of death among people aged 15 to 35.

That information was highlighted just recently in media reports leading up to World Suicide Prevention Day Sept. 10.

In Canada, there are 10 suicide deaths and 250 more suicide attempts every day, and the ripple effect of suicide leads to a huge amount of people impacted by this devastating moment.

"There seemed to be a lack of specific resources for Caledon residents as far as crisis goes," said Const. Croll. "Everything's in Brampton or everything's in Newmarket."

"We just kind of work together to create awareness, pool resources, and create some kind of event like this to raise awareness."

Const. Croll said more and more people have gotten behind the initiative and it's grown noticeably over the last three years.

"The response is always great," he said.

The message of needing to talk about suicide and being open about mental health issues has been resonating with people. First responders often see during their working lives the effects of mental health issues in people. And it's become commonplace to read about the suicides of famous people in pop culture.

"More and more people are seeing there's a need for something," he said. "It seems to be more prominent these days in the media. That's all this is. It's something small. But something small can turn into something bigger in the end."

Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson said the event is a good step toward bringing attention to an important issue.

"Walk the Talk: I think that's what we don't do enough of a lot of the time," the mayor said. "This is a really important issue. All of us at least know two or more people because of suicide that shouldn't have ever happened. The only way we're ever going to be able to get in front of this is to deal with it. And dealing with it is walking the talk."

Sylvia Jones, the MPP for Dufferin-Caledon, said she was part of a committee many years ago that examined mental health issues and means by which they can be addressed.

?We talked a lot about how the community in general can look for the signs and assist when people are needing help, even when they don't understand or appreciate the help they're looking for,? she said.

Heightened awareness of mental health challenges ?is so critical to make sure more of our friends and neighbours are not dealing with issues we could have otherwise assisted them with,? said Jones.