

Family Transition Place holds Vigil honouring victims of École Polytechnique Massacre]

By Paula Brown

Family Transition Place (FTP) paid tribute to the 14 victims of the École Polytechnique Massacre on the 33rd anniversary of the shooting with a vigil calling for action against gender-based violence.

Staff, community leaders and residents gathered at the Family Transition Place building in Orangeville, located at 20 Bredin Parkway, on the afternoon of Tuesday, December 6, for the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

“Some may wonder why we still acknowledge this day 33 years later, why don't we get over it and move on,” said Lyn Allen, Director of Transitional Programs and Housing Initiatives at FTP. “But we can't because every day we see images and headlines. We hear sexist jokes and lyrics; we see celebrities and sports figures acting in a way that perpetuates the idea that women are lesser than. We hear women being asked what they were wearing when they were sexually assaulted. We hear how radio hosts and famous film producers abused women while holding positions of power? we know about things closer to home and in our homes, which continue to put women at risk.”

The École Polytechnique, also known as the Montreal Massacre, took place on December 6, 1989 when a lone gunman separated the men from the women students inside the engineering school before opening fire; killing 14 women and injuring others.

The 14 women killed in the gender-based attack were Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michele Richard, Annie St-Arneault and Annie Turcotte.

During the memorial ceremony, FTP staff held signs with each of the 14 victims' names and read them aloud. Attendees were also given the time to speak about individual actions to combat gender-based violence.

“As we stand here today, we must reflect on the reality that 33 years later, gender-based violence is still a threat to women, to girls and to gender diverse people in Orangeville, Dufferin County, across the country, and around the world,” said Orangeville Mayor Lisa Post. “We all need to come together to work because gender-based violence has no place in our community.”

While the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women honours the École Polytechnique victims, it is also a day of action against gender-based violence; recognizing the women who have been killed through femicide.

Femicide is a term used to describe the action of a man murdering a woman because they're a woman, and who is often intimately known to them.

According to the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH), thus far in 2022 there have been 52 women and girls who have lost their lives to femicide.

One of the victims was 65-year-old Shelburne resident Debra Neale, who was murdered on January 8 of this year.

“It does both literally and figuratively hit closer to home. It reminds us that it's not out there and that it's not other people, it's people in our own community that we may have seen out in the community,” said Allen. “It makes it all that much more critical that we don't separate and think of them as others, but that we recognize that they're in our community, and they need us. We need to keep doing everything we can to make sure that they're safe as they possibly can be.”

A 44-year-old Orangeville man, wanted in connection to Debra Neale's murder, was later found dead in an abandoned vehicle in a secluded area near Hearst, ON.

?Debra has been described as a devoted mother and grandmother, who would accept anyone as her own. Debra had a deep love for animals and music,? reads the description on the OAITH femicide list.

The conclude the commemorative ceremony, attendees tied white ribbons to a tree outside of the FTP building as a commitment to end violence against women.