

# IWD

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Do you know what the letters 'IWD' stand for? In an absolutely perfect world (and goodness knows we are far from that) every single person would know that IWD is the acronym for International Women's Day. Better yet, every single person would also understand the significance of both the date and of recognizing the HUMAN rights of essentially 50% of the planet. Yet here we are. It is decidedly not a perfect world and so we will continue to write about, and call attention to, International Women's Day every year, with the hopes that at some point in history, it may no longer be necessary. 'Per chance to dream,' as Shakespeare once wrote.

International Women's Day is on March 8, although you may see events happening throughout the week leading up to it. Locally, Family Transition Place hosts an annual fundraising event celebrating the day, this year taking place today (if in fact you're reading this paper on publication day) at the Hockley Valley Resort. So too is the Town of Caledon's Economic Development Department hosting a special event recognizing Women in Business, with keynote speaker Kiran Mann, the CEO of Brar's. Such events are an important opportunity to recognize the vital role that women and girls play in the socio-economic, political, cultural, and environmental fabric of the world.

This year's theme is #givetogain, emphasizing the power of reciprocity and support. It's the simple idea that when we all support one another, when people and organizations and communities come together in giving, 'opportunities and support for women increase.' Further, it supports the idea that 'when women thrive, we all rise.' Excuse the sarcasm, but what a novel concept! Imagine a world where men recognise the importance of women's contributions to the world around us. We're getting there, sure, but there's still a long way to go.

To be clear, I'm using the language of 'women and girls' on this day, and very specifically, for the purposes of highlighting the unequal balance of power between men and women, and one of the most often-cited results of that imbalance, gender-based violence. Of course, if we had more time and space, any discussion of gender politics would take a far more inclusive and intersectional approach and would also include conversations about how these issues impact not just gender, but also race, sexuality, human rights and workplace inequities.

I say this because while I strive to be clear AND inclusive at the same time, I'm not sure it's possible. I'm certainly not a leading expert in gender politics, nor gender studies. Instead, I'm a woman; a mom, a former volunteer board member at Family Transition Place and on this day, (IWD) and with this column, I seek only to magnify some of the ongoing issues impacting women and girls. These include human trafficking which is at an all-time high here in Peel Region. These include gender-based violence, as evidenced by the many programs and services offered by FTP and others like them, which are always at maximum capacity. These also include other issues like the continuing gap, at all levels of government, between the number of women vs. the number of men holding public office.

Some of the statistics are overwhelming. In terms of human trafficking, Ontario accounts for more than half of all human trafficking cases in Canada, and the GTA and its proximity to all major highways and the airport, make it a 'sex trafficking hotspot' allowing for the 'easy movement of victims across Ontario and Canada.' In Peel Region alone, human trafficking rates increased by 60% in just one year! The average age of a victim is between just 12 years old and 24 years.

The statistics around intimate partner violence are no less startling with, on average, one woman in Canada killed every six days by an intimate partner. That's 60 women (and sometimes children) dead as a direct result of intimate partner violence every year. Has progress been made? Sure. Is it enough? Not even close. Politically, where perhaps the equitable distribution of voices at decision-making tables might have the most impact, the organization known as Equal Voice 'is working to improve gender representation through training and advocacy to 30% by 2030.' I'm not even sure how to feel about that statistic. Encouraged? Shouldn't we already be there? Shouldn't we already be at 50%?

Clearly, we have work to do here at home and yet for so many more women and girls around the world, it is almost unfathomable how much worse it can be. That's why we have to have an International Women's Day. It's why we have to continue the clarion call for action against gender-based violence and continually act as a voice for the voiceless. It's why we should take up the theme of this year's IWD celebrations, #givetogain and support, where we can, the organizations who provide support, services and yes, even hope, to women and girls because ?when women thrive, we all rise.?