

EDITORIAL

Who is protecting who?

by Allan Carter

Violence against women' is a phrase which most of us hear practically every day. In the past few years, universities have begun to take a look at the abuse and harassment which women are forced to endure in everyday living. A recent case of an alleged sexual assault at Centennial College in Ontario has left many people questioning whether or not programs and safeguards which are being implemented in an attempt to stop violence against women are actually working.

Like most universities, including UNB, Centennial College offers a "Walksafe" program for its students. Such a service purports to offer female students a safe walk home during evenings and early mornings. One complaint of safe-walk programs is that many women who use the service do not feel safe having a male stranger who has not been "screened" for the job escort them to their destination. Centennial College decided to address this problem by having a two-person escort team which would consist of one female patroller and one male. An individual may quickly conclude that such a technique is a logical solution. However, at Centennial College a female patroller alleges that she was sexually assaulted by her male co-patroller. In response, the Ontario college is now considering a three person escort team, comprised of two females and one male. Yet, is this really a solution?

Certainly, any woman would be forced to question how safe the program actually is if a three person team is nec-

essary to escort one woman to her destination. In such a situation, who is protecting who? Suddenly, the safe walk program has become a farce, and not a comical one.

At UNB, in conjunction with UNB security, Neill House offers a safe walk program for students. The program has been successful thus far and quite a number of people use the service. According to Craig MacInroy, a proctor at Neill, the service receives an average of 12-14 calls per week. The service is operated through the UNB security office. Anyone who wishes to have an escort can phone security, who in turn phones the House. A patroller is picked and Security is given his name and then his name is passed on to the caller.

Presently, Neill House has no formal screening procedure when choosing potential patrollers. Yet MacInroy believes that the fact that patrollers are aware that UNB Security possesses the patroller's name should prevent any negative incidents from occurring. Certainly, security's involvement in the Neill House safe-walk program provides a safeguard. But I am sure that the creators of the Centennial College "Walksafe" program in Ontario also assumed that having a two person escort team would prevent any negative incidents from occurring. Apparently, however, that is not the case.

The Neill House Escort Service is obviously necessary and there is no doubt that students, particularly female, appreciate the service and use it regularly. Further, Neill proctors make an honest effort to pick a suitable escort for each caller. Presently, there have

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been no complaints with the existing safe-walk program, nor have any confrontations been reported. Nevertheless, the alleged sexual assault at Centennial College reminds us that every safeguard must be implemented when such a service is offered. A screening process may not guarantee complete safety, but it certainly would make many women who use the service more comfortable with their patroller. Such a safeguard may help us to avoid asking the question "who is protecting who" at UNB.

As we continue to explore the reasons for and the issues surrounding violence against women it is slowly becoming evident that final solutions will never be discovered in trying to protect women. As Valerie Kilfoil, a member of the UNB Wimmin's Collective, states in a news story this week, attitudes which men hold regarding violence against women must change so that the need for protection can be eliminated.

Thus, society has a responsibility to ensure that the services and programs which are in place to protect women also help in making those attitude changes possible and that safe-walk programs do not become a "pick your attacker" service. UNB is not excluded in this responsibility.



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