

Women walk for ?freedom of movement?



More than a dozen women walk to support each other in Bancroft's first Take Back the Night. / SARAH SOBANSKI Staff

Bancroft women have taken to the streets to support women's safety.

Maggie's Resource Centre and Tamarack Women's Resource Centre hosted the town's first Take Back the Night walk the evening of Sept. 26.

Take Back the Night walks started in the mid-to-late 1970s when protestors began taking to the streets to raise awareness about violent crimes against women, said women's support worker with the Tamarack Leslie Jenkins. Like the Bancroft walk, women who have been victims of violence ? domestic or otherwise ? walk with women who support them and women who want to raise their voices against the injustice of a girl being less safe if she is alone or unprotected.

?Women are often told to be extra careful and to take precautions when going out at night,? said Maggie's counsellor Heather Sararas to more than a dozen assembled for the walk. ?In some parts of the world, even today, women are not allowed out at night.? She added, ?When women struggle for freedom we must start at the beginning by fighting for freedom of movement which we have not had or do not now have. We must recognize the freedom of movement as a precondition for anything else. It comes before freedom of speech in importance because without it freedom of speech cannot in fact exist.?

In the past, a large support group has travelled from North Hastings to participate in Belleville's Take Back the Night walk, said Jenkins. This year, the centres decided to host the walk closer to home.

?This year's event we're starting off small,? said Jenkins.

The walk was from Millennium Park to Shoppers Drug Mart. It then led back down North Hastings Street to the park. Jenkins noted similar walks had happened and would happen over the month of September in support of women.

?The goal of the march is to have women feel safe in their communities. If they want to walk at night than they should be able to go for a walk, clear their head without fear that they'll be heckled at, objectified or have to have a man beside them to make them feel safe,? said Jenkins, naming one reason men weren't allowed to participate in the march. ?We want to have our own strength and the ability to walk freely ? we shouldn't have to have someone with us to feel safe and it shouldn't have to be a man.?

Many men want to stand up for women, said Jenkins, but that night was about women standing up for themselves and it being safe for them to do so.

The **Canadian Women's Foundation** states ?half of all women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16? On any given night in Canada, 3,491 women and their 2,724 children sleep in shelters because it isn't safe at home.?

According to the **Take Back the Night Foundation**, ?one in three women worldwide experience some form of sexual violence or intimate partner violence. One in six men experience sexual violence. Less than 50 per cent of victims report these crimes.?