

Remembering the École Polytechnique shooting



By Bill Kilpatrick

December 6 marked the 35 anniversary the École Polytechnique shooting in Montreal. On that day in 1989 a man, armed with guns and knives, walked into the engineering school and murdered 14 women because they happened to be women. Workers and board members of Maggie's Resource Centre of North Hastings and a small group of people gathered at Millennium Park in Bancroft to hold a vigil for the slain women and all others who have been impacted by gender-based violence. Melissa St. Pierre, executive director of Maggie's spoke about our societal duty to ensure that nothing like that ever happens again. She said, "As we reflect on the events of that fateful day, let us not only grieve but also act. This vigil serves as a solemn reminder of the work that still lies ahead. It is a call to all of us to challenge societal norms, advocate for policies that protect women, and educate future generations on the importance of equality and respect. Together, we must create a world where such acts of violence are not merely remembered but rendered impossible. In honour of the 14 women who lost their lives, we must rise as a united community, ensuring that their memory fuels our passion for change, a change that will dismantle the barriers of gender equality and empower future generations of women to pursue their dreams without fear. After her speech the group then laid a white rose on laminated pictures of the slain women and said each woman's name aloud. St. Pierre provided Bancroft This Week with some disturbing statistics pointing out that "Since April 1, 2023, Maggie's Resource Centre in North Hastings has supported 144 women experiencing domestic violence. In Ontario, the year has been marked by a troubling rise in violence against women, with 62 known femicides reported in 2023-2024." This is part of a wider trend towards increased violent behaviour that is taking place across Canada. Statistics Canada reported that from 2018 to 2023, police-reported violent crime increased 20 per cent. During that same period overall rates of family violence increased 17 per cent and intimate partner violence also increased 13 per cent. While gender based and intimate partner violence are complicated issues, St. Pierre wants people to know that Maggie's is here to help. St. Pierre would like to see the government invest in more comprehensive support systems for those at risk given the complex nature of gender based and intimate partner violence. St. Pierre further encourages people to reach out if you or someone you know is experiencing gender based or intimate partner violence adding that, "Our dedicated team of three crisis counselors and two women's support workers are committed to providing compassionate care and resources to empower women in their journey toward safety and healing. Together, we strive to create a safer community for all and raise awareness about the pressing issues surrounding domestic violence." For information regarding domestic or gender-based violence you can fill out their form online at <https://maggiesresource.com/contact-us> or reach Maggie's by phone at 613-332-3010. If you are in an emergency please call 9-11.