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Pageant Contestant More Than a Pretty Face

For Mikayla Korman, competing in the Miss Teen Canada International pageant was for more than simply beauty and grace – for her, it was a declaration of her strength of character.

As a domestic violence survivor, Korman, 18, was looking for a way to make a difference in the lives of others. By drawing on her own personal story of being abused by her father as a child, she began researching opportunities to donate her time to a charitable cause that held significant meaning to her. It was not long that the work HomeFront carries out was the cause Korman was looking for.

By partnering with HomeFront as her charity platform for the annual pageant Korman says domestic abuse is an issue that remains largely anonymous in the public eye due to many people being too afraid or reluctant to leave threatening domestic conflicts.

“What scared me the most was not having anyone to turn to,” she says. “You can’t even imagine the amount of courage I had to have to leave behind six siblings and a mother, to leave behind the only support I had in the world. This was my phobia, but I have gotten over it.”

After years of being home schooled, Korman’s mother enrolled her in a Calgary public high school where she met a person that would change her life. That person’s name is Anna, the school principal. Anna



counselled Korman over a period of four months, providing a safe and unthreatening environment for her. It was during these meetings where Anna suggested a number of organizations that assist people affected by domestic violence, including HomeFront.

At this point in her life,

Korman feels she can offer a great deal back to others affected by domestic violence. Speaking out on the issue in a public forum such as the Miss Teen Canada International pageant is one of the reasons Korman entered the competition. However, her aspirations go beyond the stage.

“I always wished of getting into modeling or singing – that’s every girls dream growing up,” she says. “But you have to have a good plan and not just a dream.”

Although winning the pageant was not to be this year, Korman looks forward to continuing to volunteer her time with HomeFront and to tell her story and encourage others to speak out about domestic violence.

Korman’s future plans include returning to school next year to pursue journalism. Having written songs and poetry as a teenager, she has always enjoyed expressing herself using the written word.

“I love picking up a pencil and writing songs that emit emotion,” she says.

“By writing, you can tell a story that can change someone’s life.” **HF**

2009 HomeFront Selinger Awards Look to Reflect

Reflecting on the commitment and dedication of frontline workers and volunteers who assist those affected by domestic violence is the theme of this year's 2009 HomeFront Selinger Awards.

Now celebrating its ninth year, the 2009 HomeFront Selinger Awards acknowledges those individuals who work with victims of domestic violence and abuse and offer assistance and support to families directly impacted by this crime. Three nominees who have demonstrated outstanding service and excellence to the prevention of domestic violence will be honoured as the recipient of the award in one of three categories – Justice/



Law Enforcement, Community Frontline and Domestic Violence Volunteer.

Chief of Police Rick Hanson, members of the corporate sector and representatives from the community will all be on hand to recognize the exceptional achievements by those nominated.

Named after former Chief Crown Prosecutor Jerry P. Selinger, the awards are a reflection of his work to create a coordinated community and justice program to break the cycle of domestic violence.

The 2009 HomeFront Selinger Awards will take place November 17, 2009 at the Jack Singer Concert Hall Lobby in the EPCOR CENTRE for the Performing Arts. For more information, visit www.homefrontcalgary.com. **HF**

HomeFront Takes Partners to Court

In an effort to promote a greater understanding of the role played by HomeFront in the judicial process, donors and other partners were taken to court.

Mock court, that is.

To get a better idea of the scope and depth of HomeFront as a service provider as well as an independent agency, a mock trial was staged to mimic how a domestic violence case plays out in a courtroom. The actors – consisting of a judge, crown prosecutor, police officer and defence lawyer – played their parts to a crowd of about 50 invited guests. Acting out a scenario taken from an actual case file with the names changed to maintain anonymity, the event succeeded in maintaining a light and fun atmosphere.

Isabel Piggott, fund development manager with HomeFront, says the evening provided a glimpse into the legal process of the domestic violence court, while at the same time, delivered HomeFront's message in an upbeat way.

"This (event) was something we wanted to have happen for a long time," Piggott says. "It was a way to have people understand the work we're doing in an informative and entertaining way."

Held in the former family court in the John J. Bowlen building in downtown Calgary, the mock court event was so successful that plans are in the works for more in the future. As next year marks the 10th anniversary of HomeFront, events similar to this one may be expanded to the public.

A wine and cheese reception wrapped up the evening.

The ability to demonstrate HomeFront's mandate in a new and creative way is something the agency is eager to pursue, Piggott says. And based on the response they have received, it

can only get better.

"To see the event come to fruition is fabulous," she says. **HF**



WHEN MARRIAGE BECOMES ABUSIVE

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Dedication and Commitment Lauded in Hi 5 10/11 Case



Calgary Police Service officers from District 5 responded to a domestic complaint where the ex-boyfriend of a woman had broken into her home, stabbed her and her new boyfriend, sexually assaulted her with a knife and threatened to kill her and her young child.

One of the responding officers volunteered to lead this serious case instead of handing it over to the District General

Investigative Unit. In doing so, the responding officer made a commitment to ensuring the victim would be safe for the duration of the investigation rather than handing it off immediately to another unit.

He coordinated a thorough and effective investigation by expediting treatment for the woman quickly to ensure her safety and that of her child. The officer also secured spots in an emergency women's shelter for the victims and applied for and was granted an Emergency Protection Order.

After taking the victims to the safety of the shelter, the officer thoroughly conducted interviews and acquired detailed witness statements and provided safety planning. He then organized and implemented a plan to capture the offender. Upon capturing the offender, the officer interviewed him and subsequently obtained a confession.

The fairly inexperienced officer demonstrated confidence in his abilities to conduct a thorough and comprehensive investigation. The District 5 officer continues to play an integral role in the case, doing follow-up as it arises and checking on the victim periodically.

The Hi 5 10/11 program is a joint initiative between HomeFront and the Calgary Police Service whereby a "High Five" is given to deserving police officers who assist individuals in domestic violence cases. Names have been omitted to protect the identity of those involved. HF

Working with HomeFront: Treatment Partners Making a Difference

As domestic violence is a complex and multifaceted issue, treatment programs for victims of violence and abuse are as wide-ranging as the individuals affected by this crime.

Christine Berry, director of family violence prevention initiatives at the Calgary Counselling Centre, says there is no standardized approach that can address every case of domestic violence.

"One size does not fit all," she says. "You need to really contextualize what else is going on in each situation."

This is especially true in cases that involve children.

Berry says children are a high motivator when it comes to seeking treatment for domestic violence. In many cases, children who witness violence in the home begin to mimic the actions of one or both of their parents by acting out aggressively at an early age.

"We see three and four-year-olds starting to slap mommy and daddy, and it is usually at this point that attitudes begin to change where the individual or couple starts to seek treatment,"

she says.

In addition to family violence programs for male and female victims and responsible choices for abusive men and women, the Calgary Counselling Centre also offers a program specifically geared to children who have witnessed violence. The program, Responsible Choices for Children and Parents, divides children into groups by age and along with their parents, addresses areas such as anger management, confrontation avoidance and respect for others.

Assisting individuals and families for 16 years in Calgary, the YWCA Sheriff King Home also offers a comprehensive treatment strategy with a multitude of programs and services for those affected by family violence. Paths of Change consists of counselling programs for women and men, children and adolescents as well as parenting and trauma programs. The impact of these initiatives can be seen in the number of individuals that Gary Gibbens has worked with in his 10 years at the centre.

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“We work with men, women, children, families, trauma survivors – there are thousands of stories where people have made positive changes in their life,” says Gibbens, manager of adult clinical services at the YWCA Sheriff King Home.

“We are here to help people understand that using abuse to deal with conflict is illegal and wrong, and to encourage them to think of their own situations and to change their values,” he says.

Gibbens adds new collaborative projects such as the High Risk Management Initiative, or HRMI, is another example of the involvement of many local agencies, including HomeFront, who are working together in an effort to address family violence. Through effective and focused treatment strategies, Gibbens says many individuals are capable of making significant changes in

their lives.

“After treatment, many men say, ‘thank you’ for helping them to deal with their anger in a positive way, while women develop the strength to say ‘no,’” he says.

Christine Berry says the counselling options available to perpetrators of violence and abuse can have a drastic effect on their behaviour upon finishing treatment. This observation is reflected in an evaluation commissioned by HomeFront that found the re-offence (recidivism) rate of offenders dramatically reduced from 12 per cent to six per cent for those individuals who complete treatment.

“Many men in particular want a relationship based on respect. After treatment, they are so different. It’s almost like they have a whole different awareness of who they are,” Berry says. **HF**

Thank you to **Dennis Potharst** for volunteering his time to write the Fall issue of *On the HomeFront*.



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