

Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre offers free self defense classes

The Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre is again offering free self defense classes for women and girls.

"Last year, we were hoping that we would be able to fill the initial three sessions," said Sharon Hunter, Counselling Coordinator at the FGWRC. "At the time, we had no idea how many women would respond." Not only were the three sessions filled, the Centre had to close the waiting list after over 200 women and girls signed up. Since that time, the FGWRC had been actively working on trying to obtain more funding for this program.

With the recent grant from The Winnipeg Foundation, as well as support from the Government of Manitoba, Family Violence Prevention Program and Justice Department, FGWRC will be offering more of its highly successful self defense classes in 2007.

In spring 2006, the Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre was able to offer a pilot project called "Strengthening and Protecting Ourselves". That program, supported by the Family Violence Prevention Program, (Government of Manitoba, Family Services) consisted of free self defense classes for women, each six weeks in length. The community based, crime prevention program aimed to provide women with the skills needed for self protection.

"Participating in a women's self defense class doesn't mean that nothing bad will ever happen to you," says Hunter. "What it does mean, is you will have the tools, knowledge and confidence to protect yourself to the best of your ability. And that's empowering."

Women who attended last year's classes echoed Ms. Hunter's sentiments in their evaluation of the program. They cited increased confidence in their ability to defend themselves against attack, a notable reduction in the fear they felt walking alone at night and a greater sense of strength and empowerment.

Suzanne (not her real name) took the course because she was being stalked by an ex-boyfriend. At the conclusion of the class she said, "This class couldn't have come at a better time. It made me feel much safer as I feel better able to defend myself. Now at least I know some of the basic techniques to get out of a situation that I didn't have a clue about before. I have never felt so strong. I learned to be confident in myself, to realize I am worth protecting and to know no one has a right to violate me, no matter how we are related."

Barbara (not her real name) also participated in the program to help protect herself from being re-victimized. "I learned so much and I am very grateful for the opportunity. I wish I had a chance to learn these things years ago, as a teenager, when I really needed the knowledge to get out of a bad situation I was in," she said.

According to the 2004 General Social Survey, violence against women and girls is a significant problem in Winnipeg and in Canada. The report says more than 1.4 million females 15 years of age and older were stalked in a way that caused them to fear for their life or someone known to them. As a result, 35% of female stalking victims chose not to go out alone. More than 42% of women feel totally unsafe walking in their own neighbourhoods after dark and 37% of women are worried about being in their own homes alone in the evening or night, the survey said.