

## **Counsellors and Social Services Workers are Necessary for a Healthy Province**

Whether you know it or not, trauma affects your life.

Odds are, you or someone in your community — someone you know and care about — have experienced gender-based violence or sexual assault. We've all heard the statistics about how one in three women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime, or that half of women will experience physical or sexual violence by age sixteen. But we often forget that behind these numbers are real people, and that they surround us: they are our family, friends, and neighbours.

Violence against women is not a niche issue. It's one that has real effects on families, communities, and even the economy — and as a trauma counsellor, I see those effects every day.

I also see the need to elect a government that will defend and support counsellors and the social care system. I became a trauma counsellor because I have always felt compelled to understand people. As human beings, we all experience suffering. It is what connects us to one another, and this connection allows us to find meaning and strength just as much as experiences of joy or pleasure do. In my work with women who have experienced abuse, I witness the power of trusting relationships, and the ways that counselling helps people re-engage with the larger world. As BC's provincial election approaches, we need to ensure we elect a government that will help make this healing possible.

BC ended 2016 with a budget surplus, yet in spite of this, we continue to underfund social care. Instead of using our wealth to invest in the wellbeing of our citizens, we have focused on narrow job creation and real estate opportunities for the few. This limited focus on "the economy" rather than social support systems isn't just insensitive, it's ironic. Investing in social services makes good economic sense. Having engaged, healthy citizens stimulates the economy. Leaving vulnerable people unsupported costs us all.

And let's talk about the idea that job creation will solve all problems. Job creation is important, but jobs won't end domestic abuse. Jobs won't pull vulnerable people back from the fringes. Jobs won't create the sense of connection and support that is vital to living a meaningful life. Having a healthy economy at the expense of healthy citizens is unsustainable.

Without counsellors and other social support workers, women who are suffering the impact of childhood sexual, physical, and emotional abuse would likely be even more isolated — and isolation is a breeding ground for the critical and destructive voice inside that revels in anger, shame, and doubt. Letting that destructive voice fester can have negative consequences that radiate out into the larger community. Not exactly a recipe for a healthy province.

We want to live in a province that supports people in living happy, productive lives. So this election, ask yourself hard questions about what you want in your life and your children's lives.

Find a nominee that resonates with your values. Consider which candidate is going to support all British Columbians. BC is naturally beautiful and full of resources, but only by investing in our social care system will we ensure that it remains truly livable.