

# Stamps trio takes fight against domestic abuse to local schools

Advisory: Please note the attached video features some strong language

BY VAL FORTNEY, CALGARY HERALD    SEPTEMBER 16, 2014

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STORY

PHOTOS ( 5 )

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Leading Change: The Alberta CFL Project, presented by CFL players, will tour Albertan highschools, empowering youth males with gender-based violence awareness knowledge and skills.

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It's the video seen around the world, an endless replay of a burly professional football player dropping a small woman with a brutal left hook, then dragging her unconscious out of an elevator.

When he signed on to help spread the word about domestic violence and its effects on society, Randy Chevrier didn't think he'd had such a high profile example on hand right out of the starting gate. "It could be seen as unfortunate timing," says the long snapper with the Calgary Stampeders football club of the now-famous clip of NFL star Ray Rice abusing his girlfriend. "But I think it's good that we're here, to cast a light. This has been in the shadows for far too long."

On Monday afternoon, Chevrier is joined by two of his teammates — Anthony Parker and Keon Raymond — for a visit to St. Mary’s High School. This isn’t your usual meet-the-players stop, though. The three are participants in Leading Change: The Alberta CFL Project, a program aimed at providing leadership to young people when it comes to combatting violence and abuse against women.

While the men take the time to shake hands with some of their star-struck fans, the bulk of their visit is taken up with engaging a room full of young football players in some rather unorthodox discussion. Using a flip chart to write down suggestions, they ask the boys what they do to protect themselves each day from violence and abuse. “Nothing?” asks Parker. “Let’s ask some women.”

A survey of the adult women sitting in on the presentation quickly fills up the white page: lock your doors, check your back seat, park in a highly visible spot and don’t walk alone after dark. “You ever worry someone might slip a date rape drug in your drink?” asks Chevrier, prompting awkward laughter in the crowd of boys wearing Stamps jerseys and T-shirts with logos of other pro football teams.

The next exercise, To Be A Man, has the kids shouting out words that they use to identify as manly qualities: tough, courageous, hard working, along with some silly suggestions like bacon and football. The Stamps players encourage them to shout out the unmanly words as well, no matter how crass — pointing out how just about every one of them refers to the feminine.

When I ask Chevrier why he and his teammates chose to partner with the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters on the Leading Change program, he says they took inspiration from their roles off the playing field. “We’re all husbands and fathers,” he explains. “When we took our intensive training for this in the spring, it was a life changing experience. Now we’re even more passionate about being leaders in the fight against domestic abuse.”

Their participation, says Chevrier, is one he hopes helps to demonstrate that “you can’t paint all of us with the same brush.”

After the boys get a small taste of the program that will come to their school and 50 others around the province in the coming year, they filter out and head to the locker to suit up for practice. That’s a pity, because they miss out on Keon Raymond’s short address to those remaining.

“I was eight years old and told my mama I’d be the man, I’d take care of

her,” says the Stamps’ defensive back of his eight-year-old self back in St. Louis, Missouri. He witnessed the bruises his mother had after fights with his dad; as he praises his mother for finally getting the courage to pick up and drive her kids halfway across the country to safety, his voice cracks.

“She’s my rock, I’m so proud of her ... that’s why this is so deep to me.”

Over the coming year, the three Stamps players, along with four players from the Edmonton Eskimos, will take their message to boys age 11 to 15, using their fame and stature to promote respectful relationships as well as recognizing what isn’t respectful.

It’s a job very different from their rough and tumble roles on the gridiron, but it’s one that Chevrier says reflects what they’re all about.

“We have a big heart for this community,” says the father of three boys.

“Calgary police receive almost 16,000 domestic related calls a year. We want to start the conversation, be leaders in ending violence and abuse against women.”

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