

POLICE PRAISE WORK OF SEXUAL ASSAULT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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A special committee created with the help of Halton police is working to make things better for survivors of sexual assault.

The Halton Police Board discussed the Sexual Assault Advisory Committee (SAAC) of Halton during its Thursday, June 30 meeting. The committee was created by Halton police and several external stakeholders following a 2017 resolution by the board to

undertake a review of how sexual assault cases are handled by Halton police.

The resolution also noted the board would work in collaboration with local community and justice partners; to ensure victims of sexual assault are provided a timely and dignified response, the best support possible from the police service, and that the process is comprehensive, fair and respectful.

This work was prompted after questions arose about the number of sexual

assaults Halton police classified as "unfounded" in 2016.

In a report to the board, Halton Police Chief Stephen Tanner noted the SAAC is comprised of members of a number of community agencies that work directly to support survivors of sexual assault, including: Thrive Counseling, Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Services of Halton (SAVIS), Radius Child and Youth Services, Halton Women's Place, Halton Violence Pre-

vention Council, Joseph Brant Hospital — Nina's Place, Ministry of the Attorney General, Halton police — Victim Services Unit, and the Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Toronto.

Tanner noted the committee works as a collective voice to enhance the overall response to incidents of sexual assault to ensure survivors feel empowered, supported and believed.

The report noted the Halton SAAC continues to meet monthly to prioritize collaborative work with Halton police to improve police response to survivors of sexual assault.

In response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee has reprioritized its activities and attention over the past year toward increasing community engagement as well as training/education.

In 2020, police said the

committee received funding from the Halton Region Community Investment Fund to create the "Survivors Voices" website.

The regionwide platform features a sexual assault information guide, which lets survivors know what their options are with respect to reporting, the court process, and the supports available to them.

Tanner noted in the report that the website also features an overview report that captures the work of the Sexual Assault Advisory Committee, including case review recommendations and in-service training for Halton police officers.

The website also features a confidential forum for survivors to provide feedback about their experience.

For more information, visit [https://survivors-](https://survivors-voices.ca)

voices.ca.

The SAAC has also delivered training to all Halton police officers in an effort to increase the level of awareness and understanding among all officers with respect to several key concepts related to sexual assault including the neurobiology of trauma and rape myths.

"The Halton Regional Police Service continues to be grateful for the engagement and commitment of the members of the committee," said Tanner in the report to the board.

"Through professional collaboration as well as the sharing of their own experience and unique perspective, it has allowed the Halton Regional Police Service to greatly enhance the supports for survivors through the utilization of a trauma informed/victim centric response."

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