

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this brief.

I have watched several of the presenters with growing heartbreak and concern. There are so many suffering and losing hope.

As a survivor myself, I feel for each person, regardless of gender, that answered the call to serve their country, only to find the biggest threat from those wearing the same uniform around them. I am currently awaiting my release date, because I am not capable, due to panic attacks, of doing the annual fitness test. I am not physically unfit, but due to sexual assaults linked to PT and being harassed while at the gym, it is too mentally taxing.

This is a problem in the Canadian Armed Forces, but it is not a military problem.

If anything, #MeToo demonstrated how widespread this toxic behaviour can reach - including into the halls of our own government. This is not a military problem, so we cannot use military training to address it. But since we, the CAF, have an ability to hold our members to a higher standard, we are uniquely capable of leading this charge. I believe, if done appropriately, the CAF can emerge as a leader in addressing this issue.

This could be our finest hour.

But we have failed so far.

Sadly, part of that failure has been the very environment that nurtured this toxicity. As a survivor, I have fought for years to get this training program heard, only to be told "We (the organization) have this managed."

Clearly, they did not.

It has been a uniquely painful experience to watch it fail.

It failed because of a chain of command that was unwilling to consider that military-style training would not be enough, that we do not all come from the same background, and that we need to educate and evolve the people IN the uniform.

The program I created is a one day workshop, which forces a dialogue and pushes people to rethink how they see the world and their place in it. I was trained in the importance of initial victim support - many do not know that the single biggest way to prevent long term PTSD from sexual trauma is that initial support. It is vital and can be taught to everyone in DND easily. I received this training from the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services - they have a two day First Responder program, that I was certified to teach in 2016. The entire morning is reinforcing how to support those victimized.

The second half of the training is Leading Change, a gender violence intervention and prevention program created by Dr Jackson Katz, which I was also certified as a master trainer in 2016.

I took the best practices and most current methods and put them in a military context. Using real-life stories, offered by survivors, I have taught this program to over 300 members in uniform, all of which reviewed it as astounding, revolutionary, and calls for it to be mandatory.

With the recent high-profile scandals plaguing Operation HONOUR, I was able to push this training forward, and am finalizing the piloting of this workshop within the CAF. We do have some excellent leaders and they are invested in tackling this problem. I am very hopeful that this will be a powerful tool to support survivors and finally achieve a tipping point to a stronger and more inclusive CAF. This is a completely survivor-borne effort, and I believe it could be a beacon of hope to those still suffering out there. I am happy to speak (if time allows), send a PDF of the manual, or invite members to see some of the course in an informal sneak-peek.

Thank you for the opportunity to send this in,

Major Donna Riguidel