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ROTARY CLUB OF WEST OTTAWA

Marcia Armstrong, President

March 6, 2024 Reporter: Don Butler

This meeting was Zoom only

Program: Women's Initiatives for Safer Environments (WISE)

Meeting video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8QjWPgorX0>

We open:

President Marcia Armstrong welcomed us to the 34th meeting of this 120th Rotary year. As we gather virtually, with most of us doing so on the unceded territory of the Algonquin, Anishinaabe people, let's be always mindful of their experience in the story of Canada. Learn about it, understand it, and act to make change.

Guests:

President Marcia welcomed guest speakers Valerie Collicott and Elsy David of WISE and, as usual, invited guests to consider joining our club.

40 Rotarians and six guests attended on-line. Guests in addition to our speakers were regulars Linda Roehrl and Tony Watkins and, new to us, Murtaza

O Canada video: a five-singer group before a hockey game.

Presentation:

Theresa Jamone told us she had known Women's Initiatives for Safer Environments WISE since about 2016 when she volunteered with them. Elsy David is the program director at WISE She's been working with them for 22 years. Previously, she worked in supportive housing at the Ontario government. Valerie Callicott has been with WISE for over 30 years. She joined the board of directors in 1993, served as co-chair and then stepped down from the board to fill a staff vacancy as policy and administrative coordinator in 1999 which is her role today.

Valerie took the mic and showed us a slide on how the name of the WISE had evolved since its founding in 1990. She said it had two staff, herself, and Elsy David, and currently eight board members although this varies. WISE is also supported by many volunteers and students for its program work. The initiative started in 1990. There had been a number of sexual assaults in the downtown area of the city and a group was formed to look into the issues of violence against women and women's safety in public areas. Since then, the group was formalized and has looked into the safety of different environments, including, including parking lots, underground garage, open spaces and shopping centers. In 1992 they got their charitable status and in 2002 they rebranded to their current name to make clear the focus of their actual activity and that they were not a shelter. WISE aims to give weight to the voice of women who feel unsafe. Valerie showed us a slide illustrating why these feelings of being unsafe are justified. 50% of women experience, at least one instance of physical or sexual violence before the age of 16. It takes seven attempts for a woman to successfully leave an abusive relationship but leaving is the most dangerous time in a relationship. Every six days a woman is murdered by a domestic partner. Those numbers are even worse disabled women and those of first nations .

Elsy now took the mic to tell us about the WISE programs aimed to address some of these issues. The first was the Community Safety Audit. WISE and members of the community would visit a space- park, parking lot, neighbourhood- and note aspects that make people feel unsafe. When an area feels unsafe people avoid it and isolation itself makes people feel insecure. Dim lighting is a common factor promoting disquiet but it can be lack of signage, or no clear way out or other factors. Participants note what could be done to make the space feel more secure. A report is prepared on the audit results and recommendations made on what should be done. This report is shared with the participants in the audit, but also the owners of the space and relevant municipal representatives. WISE will help advocate for the implementation of the audit recommendations.

Another program comprises personal safety workshops for women designed for the different circumstances of different groups of women- e.g. those speaking different languages, newcomers to Canada and so on. Other programs include legal information on dealing with stalking, harassment and tenant rights, basic training in house and household equipment repair, and car and bike servicing. Wise has also consulted on the construction of new spaces so that they don't raise safety

concerns. An example is a pedestrian overpass, whose design was modified so that people on one side could see who is coming on the other side.

This point Valerie took the mic again and discussed funding. WISE gets a core grant from the city of Ottawa under a five5 year agreement by which they account each year on their activities. They also receive individual donations, directly, and through Canada Helps.

Q&A

To **Theresa Jamone**- They know about and exchange info with Shelter Movers (which helps women fleeing domestic violence) but don't work with them directly

To **Ron Doll**-WISE has done safety audits in the Byward market area, but thinks businesses in that area should do more to help make people feel safe.

Alan Bowles told of how his daughter had dealt with an apparent threat using her martial arts training.

Ginette Thomas told us of feeling uneasy while walking around Carlton University and the Arboretum area at certain times. She thought it WISE addressed this perfectly and very much welcomed their efforts. She wondered if perhaps keeping this feeling of uneasiness might be good.

Don Butler wondered if we had anything to learn from Afghanistan where women were required to be escorted by a man when out on the streets. Or India where women victims of violence were blamed for being out on their own. Elsy thought that some people in Canada needed to learn better what is OK behavior between men and women.

Elsy addressed an earlier question about the feeling of unease saying there are many possible strategies, and one was to phone someone on the cell phone. This would reduce the feeling of isolation and suggest to another person that there is a witness for anything that might happen.

Theresa thanked our speakers telling them of the Club's donation to End Polio to mark their contribution. **President Marcia** added her thanks, recalling that she had done a street audit too and even though she is no shrinking violet, she remembers the feeling of unease at certain darkened streets. She thanked the Program

Committee for arranging this presentation and thought it particularly appropriate to International Women's Day, which fell on the following Friday.

Announcements

Hadi Mortada reminded us of the call for nominations for a Paul Harris Fellow Award due by March 31. He reviewed the Award criteria and said forms were available on the website (see <https://rcwo.org/Stories/want-to-nominate-someone-for-an-award>)

Soc and Rec

Ron Doll reminded us of the St Patrick's celebration March 16 at noon at Connor's Irish pub. Wear something green and come ready to do something Irish. He is still looking for a place for an eclipse party April 8. Ideally it would be on the path of totality. Any leads?

Visitor's Day May 28

President Marcia has found little support for a V day breakfast meeting. Lunch at St Elias would cost \$40 and the Club would have to guarantee at least 50 people. Answering **Theresa Jamone** **President Marcia** confirmed that the committees would have tables around the room and set up displays. Visitors would circulate and talk to committee reps. **Larry Chop** added that guidelines would be sent out to committees on setting up exhibits, timing and other details.

Happy Dollars

Hadi Mortada enjoyed meeting Rotarians in Cornwall March 2

Hadi also asked that Murtaza , our guest for several meeting, introduce himself. Murtaza turned presented himself as a Kurdish Turk now in Canada for a year and a half.

Jen Broad answered **Rod Holmes** that she had walked 5km on her treadmill during our meeting

There being no more interventions **President Marcia** told us the speaker name and title of the March 12 meeting presentation and adjourned

Cash Calendar winners

<https://www.ottawarotarycalendar.com/2024-winners.html>

Next Meeting

Zoom only

Tuesday March 12

“Doors open” 12:00. Meeting proper starts @ 12:30

Speaker: Peter J Thomas- The 11th-20th century manuscripts in Timbuktu libraries

Intro & Thanks **Andrew Young**

Spinoff: **Don Butler**

Meeting log-in info: See meeting invitation or ask per rcwo.org

NB Hybrid meetings planned to restart April 2