

The good fight

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A group of young men at the University of Lethbridge pledged to stop violence against women as the first ever White Ribbon Campaign was launched Monday.

The White Ribbon Campaign is a worldwide initiative by men based on the belief that men can stop violence against women. It began in the U of L atrium with men standing up and vowing to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls.

"We want men to take responsibility for their role in the problem," said Keith McLaughlin, campaign coordinator, following the launch. "Men need to be the ones to stand in front and say 'this is unacceptable' to other men."

Speaker Cole Lehto, vice-president of interal affairs with the U of L Students' Union, said statistics show half of Canadian women aged 16 or older have experienced at least one act of physical or sexual violence.

"The White Ribbon Campaign is about every guy standing up and saying this is not OK," he said.

John Thompson, a counsellor with Lethbridge Family Services, outlined various types of abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, financial and spiritual. He also discussed a project by LFS called Accountability for Change where participants learn to take responsibility for their violent actions. That means not blaming someone else.

"When you feel anger that feeling comes from inside of you," Thompson said. "With ownership comes responsibility."

Sonny Dhoot, a board



Herald photo by David Rossiter

Ian Thomas was the first person to sign a large white ribbon during an end to violence against women rally Monday at the University of Lethbridge.

member of the Lethbridge Amnesty International, said one in three women around the world experiences violence like rape, beating, attack and torture. In Canada, the statistics are one in four.

Campaign organizers also hope to draw attention to the levels of violence against women in Canada. Nearly a third of all female students have been victims of unwanted sexual contact at their school over the past two years and 18 per cent of those have been sexually assaulted. In 1998, the vast majority of victims in cases of sexual assault were women and 98 per cent of the accused were men. In most cases of sexual assault, the victims knew their attacker and more than half were under the age of 18.

And most men, 66 per cent,

believe men aren't doing enough to address the problem of violence against women.

"I've suffered abuse from men myself so I think it's really important to have these kinds of initiatives, especially because it's started by men for men," said Katelynn Bates, a U of L student and member of the campus women's centre collective, following the launch. "It's refreshing to see that kind of motivation in our community."

The day wrapped up with an evening workshop on gender violence and marginalization of women and girls. Men are being encouraged to wear white ribbons during the campaign and they're available at the Students' Union office, the Campus Women's Centre and the Melliorist.