

Beyond the Shelter – Issue 3: Healthy Relationships 101

Department: Outreach

When people hear about domestic violence work, they often think about crisis response or shelter services. Outreach looks a little different. My role focuses on prevention, education, and connection — meeting people where they are, often long before a crisis happens.

At the heart of outreach is **Healthy Relationships 101**. This means having real, honest conversations about boundaries, consent, communication, and respect. These are topics many of us were never formally taught, yet they shape every relationship we have — romantic, familial, platonic, and professional.

A big part of my work involves youth prevention. I spend time in schools, youth programs, and community spaces talking with young people about what healthy relationships actually look like. We talk about boundaries — how to set them, how to respect them, and how it's okay if boundaries change over time. We talk about consent as something ongoing and mutual, not a one-time question. We also talk about red flags, power dynamics, and how social media, peer pressure, and cultural messages can blur what healthy behaviour really is.

These conversations are rarely one-sided lectures. Youth are thoughtful, curious, and often relieved to finally have a space where they can ask questions without judgment. Sometimes the most impactful moments come from a simple realization — that healthy relationships should feel safe, supportive, and respectful.

Outreach also means community education. I work with adults, seniors, service providers, and community groups to increase awareness about gender-based violence, healthy relationships, and available supports. Each audience is different, and part of my role is adapting the conversation so it's accessible and relevant.

One of the most important parts of outreach is helping people understand that abuse doesn't always look the way we expect it to. It isn't always physical. It can show up as control, isolation, financial pressure, or emotional manipulation. By naming these behaviours early, we create opportunities for prevention — and for people to seek help sooner.

Outreach is also about building trust. For many people, attending a presentation or having a conversation with an outreach worker may be their first connection to Agape House. They may not be ready to ask for help, but they leave knowing support exists, that they are not alone, and that they deserve healthy, respectful relationships.

Just this past month, I had the opportunity to spend time at École Île-des-Chênes School, talking with students about healthy relationships and conflict resolution. These conversations reinforced why this work matters. As someone who grew up in Steinbach and has a strong passion for justice, being able to return to local schools and have these discussions feels especially meaningful. Teachers shared with me that they wish they had learned these skills when they were younger — a reminder of how impactful early education can be.

Healthy Relationships 101 isn't just for youth or people in crisis — it's for everyone. The goal of outreach is simple but powerful: to plant seeds, challenge harmful norms, and create safer, more informed communities where respect and consent are the standard, not the exception.

If you're a school, community group, workplace, or organization interested in learning more about healthy relationships, boundaries, and consent, we invite you to connect with our outreach team. These conversations have the power to prevent harm, strengthen relationships, and build a community where everyone feels safe, respected, and supported.