The story of a creative community-wide project fostering COLLECTIVE CARE through collaboration, awareness and engagement
Once upon a time there was an anti-violence worker who, after more than ten years in the sector, began a restorative & creative practice of slow stitching and textiles that became a form of self-care. This enabled her to sustain the challenges that can come with working against systemic & interpersonal violence.
In August 2021, after:

- two years of a global pandemic
- a rise in polarized & conservative views
- increased levels of systemic oppression and
- some general fatigue & disillusionment,

the anti-violence worker decided to share this creative practice with the community, instead of feeling isolated and defeated.

The Community Stitch Project was born.
With a desire to find opportunities to balance the front-line work with community engagement to build awareness & solidarity, the anti-violence worker proposed an idea to use stitching as a way to engage the community in a collaborative community art project during the annual campaign called: 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE and her organization as well as others responded positively.
750 stitch kits were assembled with the skilled support of the local quilting group called the Merville Grannies and others who wanted to contribute by providing tools, space, cutting, ironing, preparing delicious food, sorting, laughter and discussion.
NOVEMBER 25 - DECEMBER 10
16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
community stitch project

Community Partners who collaborated:

- Comox Valley Arts
- Comox Valley Transition Society
- The Spool Sewing Studio
- Vancouver Island Libraries
- School District 71
- Indigenous Women Sharing Society
- MIKI’SIW Metis Association
- Merville Grannies
- Friends & Family
- Co-workers

LEARN MORE:
cvts.ca/16days
comoxvalleyarts.com/16days
The free stitch kits were distributed at library branches, community organizations, local shops & schools.

**Goals of the booklet in the stitch kits:**

- Provide materials
- Inspire creativity
- Support wellness
- Encourage reflection
- Spark discussion
- Raise Awareness
Activity #1: Developing Information to Build Awareness & Engagement

Take a few minutes to:

• review the booklet in the stitch kits on your own
• note what stands out as effective/useful
• note what could be improved/changed
• discuss observations with your table
• share a summary with the larger group
Activity #2: Things to Consider When Holding Events

Brainstorm with folks at your table what factors might be important to consider when planning and hosting an event to raise awareness of gender-based violence.

During the campaign, we held 3 stitch circles, at the library and at The Spool Sewing Studio. Diverse members of the community participated across different ages, genders, skills and histories.
Over 200 squares were submitted!

The next step was to figure out how to engage the community to create finished pieces using the submitted squares – six different women who had stitched a square already and expressed interest in further participation we asked to help and they enthusiastically accepted.
The story continues...

In March 2022, we wrote a funding proposal to hold an exhibit featuring the quilts & submitted it to the federal government who provides funds annually in May during Victims & Survivors of Crime Week... and were successful!

During three cold & VERY windy days in May, we held our outdoor exhibit downtown...
We made a zine for the exhibit which provided:

- educational information about GBV
- community resources
- what community members can do outside of what programs might exist

In other words - **COLLECTIVE CARE!**
Activity #3: The Summit Exhibit

Take a few minutes to review the zine. Walk around and look at the quilts. Read the written reflections of the participants and then take a few minutes to write your own reflections about your experience with these questions in mind:

1. What possible impact(s) are there to seeing the exhibit? For whom?
2. In what ways might seeing the exhibit help raise awareness?
3. How does the zine add to the experience of the exhibit?
4. How can the quilts be used to call groups and individuals to action?
Advocates & front-line workers have identified the following items in their critique of the NAP:

1. Limited national-level actions
2. Framing the suggested actions as optional
3. Key recommendations missing
4. Limited focus on systemic change
5. No mention of meaningful accountability & independent oversight
6. Lack of commitment to sustained & escalating investment

Key Recommendations missing include:

1. Sexual Violence
2. Housing, Income Supports & Privatization
3. Intersectionality
Resources:


Stitching Our Stories: https://norfolkheritagecentre.wordpress.com/stitching-our-stories/