

Due to a technical error, the template containing pages 2, 5, 8 and 11 of yesterday's Record was swapped with a Brome County News template. In an effort to correct this unfortunate mishap, we are running additional pages today to include the content our print subscribers missed.

We regret this error and any confusion it may have caused.

#NEWSMATTERS: THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY REPORT

Quebec women have borne the brunt of pandemic's consequences

By Raquel Fletcher

Two years ago this month, Premier François Legault declared a public health emergency, leading the province to close schools and non-essential businesses, ban visits to hospitals and long-term care homes and tell people to stay at home. It was the first of multiple circuit breaker shutdowns, which took an emotional toll on almost everyone, especially on women.

As March 8 is International Women's Day, this week's column is dedicated to bringing attention to how Quebec women, especially mothers, have borne the brunt of the consequences of both a global health crisis and public health measures put in place to curb contagion.

Women were twice as likely as men to lose their jobs as they tend to work in the tourism, food and culture sectors that were much more affected by health measures. They were also more likely to reduce their hours or quit work altogether to ensure childcare for kids learning from home or because of shortages of daycare spaces.

"For the past two years, we've seen a

lot of fear," said Johanne Pelletier, who works at the Centre des femmes de la Basse-Ville, a women's centre in Quebec City. Since the start of the first wave, she has been accompanying women she describes as being "in distress." Women forced to balance working from home with children also at home doing online learning, women thrown into poverty no longer able to make ends meet with the rising cost of food and women cut off from their social networks have all come to the centre for help.

"These women, when they come here, they cry a lot. They feel alone. The stress is sometimes so great they have the impression things will never get better," Pelletier explained, adding many of her clients show signs of serious depression, anxiety and other mental health issues.

Conjugal violence on the rise

And then there are women for whom stay-at-home orders and curfews have meant months of isolation with a controlling or abusive partner. Conjugal violence and other forms of violence against women is on the rise. Last year Quebec recorded the highest number of murders in a decade: 26 women were

killed, most of them by current or former partners.

Calls have escalated for the government to do something to thwart this frightening trend. Last month, Public Security Minister Geneviève Guilbault announced Quebec would become the first jurisdiction in Canada to implement electronic monitoring bracelets for past offenders. Using geolocation technology, police officers are alerted if an offender comes within the bounds of an established perimeter of his victim.

Rare moment of collaboration from MNAs

The initiative is just one put forward by a transpartisan committee, which, thanks to the combined efforts of female MNAs from all four parties, made 190 recommendations to combat violence against women. Last November, the National Assembly also adopted Bill 92 to create specialized courts for victims of sexual assault.

In today's political climate, elected officials seem to spend most of their time criticizing their rivals. However, in this case, they've collaborated on the report and on implementing

its recommendations. It marks one of the rare moments Quebecers have seen MNAs from all the parties seated side by side at press conferences.

Maintaining this common front is also one motivation for the province's committing more dollars to the cause. Last year the CAQ government was taken to task for setting aside a measly \$22.5 million over five years to fight domestic violence. Women's shelters made it loud and clear that the sum was simply not enough. Weeks later, Guilbault announced the government would increase its investment ten-fold, by \$223 million.

Community groups say more is needed in this year's budget, which will be tabled on March 22.

"If we had one more social worker, if we had more financial resources, we could do more," Pelletier said. "We always try to respond to all the needs, but sometimes we just burn out."

The aftereffects of the pandemic are still being felt. Women are asking for more support - to take care of themselves and to continue taking care of others.

Raquel Fletcher is QCNA's News Matters columnist on provincial affairs

Potton Celebrates International Women's Day



THE SCOOP

MABLE HASTINGS

March 8 is International Women's Day. This global day recognizes and celebrates women's and girls' achievements socially, economically, culturally and politically. This special day recognizing women can be traced back to the early twentieth century with the first International Women's Day taking place on March 19, 1911 in Austria, German, Switzerland and Denmark. In 1975, the United Nations recognized March 8 as the official International Women's Day and it is now celebrated in many countries worldwide.

The Municipality of Potton has opted this year to shine a light on the efforts of the women who serve as members of the Mansonville Firefighters and First Responders serving Potton and surrounding areas in keeping the community safe.

"This is the perfect opportunity to

highlight the wonderful contribution made by these women," said Potton Mayor, Bruno Cote. "We salute all of the dynamic women in our township this International Women's Day and while we cannot showcase everyone, we are proud to share some information about this vital and implicated group."

Women inspiring women in unity and support to assure the safety and well-being of the population is the aim of the women who have chosen to become Firefighters and First Responders in Potton.

"My husband had been a firefighter and first responder since 2010 and kept asking me to become one as well," shared Ève Milanovic. "Scared of being overcome with emotion at the end of an intervention, I kept backing away from the idea however, in 2016, the chief at that time communicated with me, explaining there was an urgent need for first responders in Potton. I thought: this must be a sign," she said.

She went ahead and got her certification and over the first six months faced some of the most tragic situations with her first call being an attempted suicide and the second a heart attack victim who died unexpectedly. The difficult cases just kept piling on.

"To my great surprise, I was able to deal with the situations emotionally speaking. Moreover, the simple fact of helping someone in need was immensely rewarding," said Milanovic. "People gave me hugs, thanked me gratefully, and some of the patients would even get in



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the ambulance with a smile on their faces. That's when I knew I had done everything I could to help them physically and emotionally. I will continue to be a first responder for as long as I can. It has been six years so far. I look forward to many more," she concluded.

Alexandra Ducharme chose to be a firefighter and first responder because she wanted to contribute to her community and experience extraordinary things.

"The situations I am exposed to allow me to exceed my limits, to quench my need for adrenaline and to learn new things during the training sessions," said Ducharme. "I am motivated in the knowledge that I feel I am making a difference for the people who are going through a difficult time," she said.

Another member of the team, Carine Daoust joined the force because she loves helping people.

"It felt like this was the best path for me to pursue in order to ensure that I do my part as part of the community in some meaningful way," she shared.

For Fire Chief, James Bouthillier, the women like the men who make up the Firefighters and First Responders for the Municipality of Potton are vital and necessary.

"It takes a team to serve the population and Potton has a team it can be proud of," said Bouthillier. "On the occasion of the International Women's Day we raise our hats in salute of the contribution and effort these women make to the community."