

Women join forces to remember lost babies, grieving families



By **MARK TAYLOR**
For The Daily Gleaner

With flowers and a purpose, several women from across New Brunswick braved rainy weather Saturday to walk through Fredericton in honour of deceased babies and their families.

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER A group of people held a walk and candlelight vigil in downtown Fredericton on Saturday in honour of women who have suffered the loss of an infant. From left are walk participants Anya Duxfield, Karen Flinn, Sabrina Everly and Terra-Lynn Coggan. THE DAILY GLEANER/DAVID SMITH PHOTO

"I saw the ad in the paper and thought I would come out because I had had a miscarriage," said city resident Karen Flinn.

The loss of her baby about four years ago is still fresh in her mind.

"It was not very pleasant," Flinn said.

"I was actually in another city at the time.

"The first day I went back to work, someone else in my office announced that they were pregnant, and I hadn't told anybody yet that I was pregnant. Somebody came up and said 'So, when is it your turn?' And I just broke down and cried."

New Brunswick Health and Wellness Minister Elvy Robichaud declared Oct. 15 Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day.

He called on provincial residents to help promote "support, education and awareness for grieving parents who have lost infants during pregnancy or shortly after birth."

Flinn and the other women held a candlelight vigil at the steps of the New Brunswick legislature.

"It's just a way to recognize that there was another baby that I didn't have," she said.

A group called Bears for Bereaved Mommies helped organize the day's activities.

Founder Terra-Lynn Coggan of Saint John said her group offers support to

families.

"We need sensitive family, friends and caregivers, " she said, adding she would also like to see more programs and services for bereaved families.

According to statistics from the organization, it is estimated that between 25 and 50 per cent of all pregnancies end in miscarriage or loss.

Fetal mortality in Canada fluctuated between 5.4 and 5.9 deaths per 1,000 births between 1991 and 2000.

In 2000, 5.1 infants in 1,000 did not survive the first year of life.

Causes of death range from pregnancy complications to sudden infant death syndrome.

Anya Duxfield of Fredericton said she decided to attend Saturday's walk and vigil because she found little public support when she lost her baby last year.

"I was just so unaware of how often this happens, how real the grief is and how long term the grief is, " Duxfield said.

"And there were no resources. I'm very able to go out now and find something for myself, but there was nothing to find (last year).

"I was just lucky that I was able to get in touch with the social workers at the Chalmers (Regional Hospital). They've got wonderful bereavement counsellors up there and they saved my life."

Duxfield said the community doesn't recognize the reality of the grief. But she said it's important that people understand what has happened.

"It's a grief process like any other, " she said.

But she said the declaration of Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day is the first step in raising awareness about this issue.

"It acknowledges that it (the issue) is real and it acknowledges that it certainly impacts lots and lots of people, " she said.

For more information visit www.bearsforbereavedmommies.org.