

Safe Harbour program aims to make Valley more caring place

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A community action program that began in 2004 in Nanaimo is making a splash in the Comox Valley.

Safe Harbour is a program that equips storefront businesses and agencies with the tools to be a refuge for a nearby community member experiencing harassment or unfair treatment as a result of their age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or any other factor.

The program trains the staff to deal with confrontations or respond to a person who enters the business or agency in need of assistance.

Safe Harbour program coordinator Kathie Landry said that any Comox Valley business or agency willing to participate can register select employees for a free, two hour training session at the Job Shop. After the session, the participants are able to sport the Safe Harbour, multi-coloured decal on their storefront windows.

"The focus is to create awareness about who lives in our community, and different ways that people from particularly marginalized or vulnerable groups might experience living in our community," said Landry.

Also, "We look at some practical skills to respond to discriminatory comments made in the worksite."

So far, 10 businesses in the Comox Valley have signed on. Training sessions started in July and Landry said that there's been over 40 participants from 10 different organizations.

"I found that the Comox Valley has really taken to it quickly," she said. "I've barely advertised because people have heard about it so quickly, our workshops have filled up."

The next training session is Oct. 30, and Landry advises those interested to register quickly. She also offers in-house training for the entire staff, and can be contacted through the Job Shop.

Bruce Currou, owner of Mudsharks Coffee Bar in Courtenay, called the training program informative.

"It's nice to have a little bit more of the educational part of (community assistance)."

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