



News Release

Believing survivors of sexual assault sweeping across Alberta

Calgary and Edmonton, Alberta – September 19, 2016 – Boasting support from community, post-secondary, and military leaders, politicians, students, athletes, media partners, and everyday Albertans, an important public awareness campaign called [#IBelieveYou](#) launched today to send a collective shout-out to survivors of sexual assault: I believe you, and together, we believe you! Believing is a powerful defense against sexual assault because survivors who get a compassionate response when they tell are more likely to get help and seek justice. In partnership with the Government of Alberta, and led by the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services (AASAS), the award-winning #IBelieveYou campaign is now in its second year.

“After generations of minimizing or justifying sexual assault, public sentiment is embracing believing as a first step,” says Deb Tomlinson, AASAS CEO. “The #IBelieveYou campaign celebrates an Alberta where survivors can be sure of a positive, compassionate response; where they know it’s not their fault, that help is available, that they can access justice if they chose to, and that they will be believed. Creating an environment in which survivors feel safe to tell is one of the ways we will stop sexual assault and make our communities healthier and safer for everyone.”

Tomlinson added that support for survivors is growing at an astonishing pace—one she has not witnessed before in her twenty-five years in the sector. This change from even a few years ago is widespread, but not everyone realizes it. Province-wide polling by Leger Research indicates the following:

- That a majority of Albertans (83%) would personally start by believing a survivor.
- However, only 60% believe other people in the community would do the same.

This gap suggests average Albertans (and survivors) don’t fully recognize the groundswell of support for survivors happening before our eyes. The campaign goal is to close this gap.

In addition to funding the campaign, The Government of Alberta will support it through the Ministries of Human Services, Justice, Education, Advanced Education, and Health. “Every act of violence is a tragedy, and survivors should not be forced into silence,” says Irfan Sabir, Minister of Human Services. “Believing is one of the most effective ways we can collectively address this needless crime. When more survivors feel they can safely come forward, we can begin to build stronger communities free of violence. Our government is proud to be a partner in this important campaign.”

Post-secondary institutions in Alberta are supporting the campaign with on-campus initiatives, reflecting their collective concern for the issue. “Because both students and administrators are engaged with this campaign, believing as a first step is becoming institutionalized on campuses across Alberta,” says Francesca Ghossein, Vice-President, Student Life, University of Alberta Students’ Union. “That’s an important leap forward in making sure our campuses are safer for everyone.”

Directed to the friends and families of survivors, the #IBelieveYou campaign is celebrating and showcasing the everyday Albertans who are embracing believing as a first step. A highlight will be a digital “tag” campaign in which individuals and groups showcase their support for survivors by recording themselves “making some noise” for survivors, and posting videos of support on social channels. In addition, the public is invited to be part of the filming of an interactive Public Service Announcement (PSA) at Kenilworth Arena in Edmonton on Friday, September 23 from 11:30 to 1.

“Our goal is to overwhelm survivors with love and support,” added Tomlinson. “For the next four weeks, let’s make some noise loud enough for survivors to hear: I believe you, and together, we believe you! These are simple, but powerful words that will help stop sexual assault, and transform our communities.”

Social links—remember to post using #IBelieveYou:

Website: <http://ibelieveyou.info/>
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Association-of-Alberta-Sexual-Assault-Services/385453678169704?ref=tn_tnmn
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/aasasmembership>
Instagram: https://instagram.com/aasas_ab
Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-2kuaPLIFcL9pY1RVqHg3w>
Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/aasas>

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Contact:

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Background

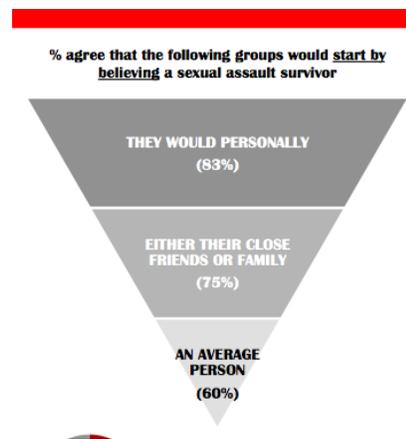
Why “I Believe You”: One of the simplest and most effective ways to encourage survivors to come forward is to educate responders about the power of a compassionate response, and celebrate those who are already supporting survivors. Survivors who get a compassionate response are more likely to get help, seek justice, and help stop the cycle of abuse—making our communities healthier and safer for everyone. Compassionate responses include saying *I’m sorry that happened, it’s not your fault, and I believe you.*

The Campaign: #IBelieveYou is multi-layered public awareness campaign aimed at helping the public understand the growing shift toward believing as a first response. The campaign includes pre-and post-campaign research, media relations, PSA/advertising, digital platforms, on-campus activities across the province, and social & community engagement.

The Research: In June 2016, Leger Marketing polled 1000 Albertans, asking: “How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”

- I personally, would start by believing a survivor of sexual assault (83% agreed)
- Close friends or family members would start by believing a survivor of sexual assault (75% agreed)
- The average person would start by believing a survivor of sexual assault (60% agreed)

Women and Albertans who recall the #IBelieveYou campaign from 2015 were be more likely to agree with all the statements. The overall gap between “me and others” suggests that average Albertans (including survivors) don’t fully recognize the groundswell of support for survivors happening before our eyes. The campaign goal is to close that gap.



Building on last year’s success: In 2015, the campaign dramatically improved the number of Albertans who understood the power of believing as a first step, and won international recognition for superior achievement in community engagement. Support for survivors of sexual assault continues to grow, and the campaign is celebrating and supporting this progressive change in public opinion—leading the country in showcasing the importance of believing on the health and safety of our communities.

What “I Believe You” Is Not: The campaign is not inviting responders to play judge and jury. It fully supports due diligence and due process, recognizing that when we start by believing, due diligence can happen.

Target: The majority of victims are young women in their teens and twenties who are most likely to reach out to a friend or family member (usually a woman). The campaign is skewed toward women, but is inclusive of all genders, sexual orientations, and ages.

Timing: September 19, 2016 through October 17, 2016.

Media Partners: Pattison Outdoor, Bell Media, and Shaw Media/Corus Entertainment will run our content as paid advertising and radio and television PSAs. **Community Partners:** Alberta Ministries of Human Services, Health, Justice, Education, and Advanced Education; Alberta universities and post-secondary institutions; not-for-profit Human Service organizations from across the province; and Conacher Hockey.