



PHOTO COURTESY OF JR LAROSE

## PROFILE

# Championing change

JR LaRose counters sexual violence with new campus-based program

BY TALIA WOOLDRIDGE

RETIRED CFL PLAYER, JR LAROSE, stands tall at the front of a Carleton University room in early August. He shares an emotional memory of watching his mother and sister be assaulted while he was growing up.

LaRose is a community leader who has dedicated his life to speaking about the issues that have affected him, especially gender-based and sexual violence. Today he is sharing his experience as part of Champions for Change,

a three-day program he co-created with Bailey Reid, a Carleton alumna and on-campus sexual assault support coordinator. It is already receiving interest from the University of British Columbia and University of Guelph.

In 2016 the provincial government passed Bill 132, which mandated all universities to create sexual violence policies due to ongoing assaults on campuses. Carleton's policy recently came up for renewal, and while working on the new policy at Carleton, the university decided to also develop a campus violence prevention strategy. For Reid, Champions for Change "was a perfect dovetail" with the new strategy: the program's ultimate goal is to prevent sexual assault and violence on campus.

She targeted athletes because they are often highly visible to the student body and "have an incredible amount of power." Given that most sports teams, regardless of gender, traditionally foster an atmosphere of hypermasculinity and use derogatory terms like "bitch" to denote "weakness" or "failure," the locker room seemed like a good place to start.

When she reached out to LaRose in January, he was quick to accept. "There's a lack of knowledge around what athletes can do to counter objectifying behaviour," LaRose explains. "There's a lot of pressure to say or do nothing, even when you know it's wrong, for fear of being judged or being given more bench time."

LaRose applauds Reid for designing an effective, participatory program with Champions for Change. He appreciates the co-ed workshop dynamic because male athletes are able to hear a female perspective on things and vice versa. "It was eye-opening and inspiring because there are people who really want to create change," he says.

Through brainstorming activities and challenging conversations, varsity athletes of all genders discuss personal experiences and design solutions around sexual consent, alcohol and drugs, rape mythology, locker-room talk, masculinity, victim blaming, and the bystander effect (staying silent instead of acting). After students work with

each other, their coaches are included in the workshop.

LaRose emphasizes the importance of including varsity coaches in the program as a means to “change the culture from the top down.” He adds that he’d also like to see a workshop for coaches only, geared towards encouraging better behaviour.

“Talking about [violence] and being vulnerable, like breaking down and crying, are important aspects to masculinity,” LaRose says, sharing that

he does this in front of his two sons. “There’s strength in taking ownership; sure, there’s a fear of being judged. But how do we break that? By modelling it. And by redefining healthy masculinity for our future generations.”

LaRose and Reid want to expand the program campus-wide to include frosh week leaders and to offer another workshop during reading week. Given that the Ontario government reported in March 2019 that 63 percent of university students experienced a form

of sexual assault on campus, the issue is still painfully relevant.

“Having JR there is absolutely critical,” Reid said in an interview with CBC in August 2019. “I can talk about ending sexual violence on campus but none of the information that we share is going to be helpful if the players listen to it and think ‘I could never actually do that.’ Having JR there to say, ‘actually you can and I did and this is how’—the program would not be what it is without that.”

## WHAT'S INSIDE

### Working forward

Is Canada a role model in labour migration policy?

**IN 1971, CANADA HAD ALMOST SEVEN WORKERS FOR** each retiree, federal Immigration Minister Ahmed Hussen recently told a Toronto audience; by 2035, without ambitious immigration targets, it’s estimated the country will have just two workers to each retiree.

That number is “unsustainable,” said Hussen.

Hussen’s comments were delivered at the unveiling of an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report on Canada’s labour migration policy, in which the country is called a “role model” for attracting, integrating, and retaining skilled migrants.

While the OECD report holds Canada’s system up as a “benchmark for other countries,” it also offers recommendations on how Canada can improve its immigration system.

**REVISE ASPECTS OF THE POINTS SYSTEM.** The report recommends Canada improve its systems to recognize workers’ foreign credentials, citing evidence that the majority of labour migrants have difficulty finding work to match their skill level. One solution would be for the government to afford workers full skills-transferability points in provincially regulated professions such as nursing or accounting. The report also encourages the government to consider whether having separate points calculations for migrants with partners might be deterring families from applying, and, if so, to change the system to avoid that.

**ALTER THE LABOUR MARKET ASSESSMENT.** The report recommends abolishing the Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) for permanent migrants. An LMIA requires employers to prove there’s no qualified Canadian to fill the role for which a migrant worker is being hired, and can be quite arduous. The report suggests a “trusted employer” system to make the process easier and quicker for both applicants and employers, and integrity checks to ensure fair working conditions. This scheme, similar to those used in the U.K. and Australia for instance,

would allow employers in good standing to bypass some of the procedural red tape.

**SIMPLIFY THE PERMANENT LABOUR MIGRATION PROCESS.** While the report has some glowing things to say about Canada’s Express Entry system, it recommends merging the Federal Skilled Workers and Canadian Experience Class streams, and abolishing the Federal Skilled Trades program. Some streams have not attracted enough workers, the report notes, and because they each have different entry standards (language level, for instance), some applicants are put at a disadvantage when ranked next to those in other streams. Effectively, this means that entry criteria could be at odds with admission criteria.

**CREATE MORE TRANSPARENCY IN MINISTERIAL DISCRETION WHEN RANKING APPLICANTS.** The report calls Canada’s Express Entry system for permanent labour migration “the most elaborate selection system in the OECD.” In a two-step process, applicants are awarded points based on uniform criteria such as education and language skills, and then ranked compared to one another. That said, the system allows for ministerial discretion, for instance when allocating bonus points for politically desirable assets (such as French language skills). The report urges this discretionary power be “evidence-based” and used judiciously.

**HONOUR THE INCREASINGLY REGIONAL NATURE OF MIGRATION.** While immigration is a shared responsibility between federal and provincial/territorial (PT) governments, the report emphasizes that migration is increasingly driven by regional decisions. Recommendations include creating pilots to better target regional shortages in specific labour areas, and ensuring PT nominations come primarily through Express Entry so federal skills needs are better reflected in provincial selection.

— BRIANNA SHARPE