

Yellowknifers protest Ghomeshi acquittal

30 rally at Somba K'e Civic Plaza on heels of high-profile sexual assault case

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Two days after an Ontario court judge found Jian Ghomeshi not guilty on four counts of sexual assault and one count of choking,

a group of approximately 30 city residents assembled outside city hall to show their support for victims of abuse.

Nancy MacNeill – a volunteer worker for victims' services in Yellowknife – said when the verdict was announced she realized many of her friends, who are victims of family violence, would need some help in dealing with the result.

"When this happened I realized that a lot of my friends and loved ones were really struggling

and really hurting," said MacNeill. "There's this demand to come together and show survivors some love and show a sense of support."

In his ruling at the end of the eight-day trial, which related to

assaults alleged to have happened between 2002 and 2003, Judge William Horkins criticized three complainants for delivering "deceptive testimony," and said there were serious deficiencies in their evidence which damaged their credibility and reliability.

MacNeill said survivors relive the traumas they've endured when watching a high-profile sexual assault case play out in the media.

"We don't always get the support

we need from the system," she said. "So as a community we have to come together and talk about why and how we support each other."

MacNeill said she found a like-minded in Nancy Vail, who helped organize the rally.

"We were both kind of independently thinking about this and we connected on Facebook and here we are," she said.

"I feel as a Northern woman we all experience those traumas first or second hand and it's nice to be able to come together."

Vail said she and many others in town felt quite upset when they learned the result.

"People are so upset about the outcome of the trial that there seemed to be a real need to give a voice to it as quickly as possible," she said. "So the purpose is to give solidarity to survivors. It takes a lot of courage for people to come forward (and report abuse). To go

through what they went through and then for them to be so quickly discounted, we have real worries for survivors and abuse victims across Canada. And we know that in the territories we have one of the highest rates of domestic violence."

Kam Lake MLA Kieron Testart and Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green turned out to show their support. Testart said he was contacted by one of the organizers and asked to speak at the rally. He said the results of a sexual assault case in Ontario matters to people in the North, because the territory's family violence rate is the second highest in the country.

"Court decisions have an impact across the country," said Testart. "If we are going to end our quite frankly embarrassing statistics for family violence in the NWT we need to start at the community level. We're all involved and we're all part of the solution."

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Nancy MacNeill