Members of the Teens Take Action program are committed to a peer education approach to dating violence and sexual assault. The group has performed a skit dealing with the topics for the all Grade 8 students at SAJS. Sara Klapstein (front left), Stephanie Bertsch, Tara Chisholm, project coordinator Krista DeCoste, Matt Chisholm (back left), Colleen Gosse, Leah MacEachern, Erika Chisholm and James Goldie. (Krista MacLean photo)

Teens Take Action

Dating violence, sexual assault focus of student production

by Krista MacLean

A group of Grade 12 students at Dr. J. H. Gillis Regional High School are educating Grade 8 students at St. Andrew Junior School about dating violence and sexual assault through the Teens Take Action program.

Teens Take Action is a school-community partnership that was developed nine years ago to provide young people with critical information about recognizing violence and sexual assault, knowing what to do about it and having an awareness of prevention strategies.

The program is designed to provide Grade 8 students with accurate information about different types of violence that can occur in dating and acquaintance relationships. Peer education is ideal as other teenagers and the media are the primary sources of information for many young people.

"It's important that these kids hear about and learn about dating violence from peers. It gives it a relevant voice," said James Goldie, who is participating in the program for his second consecutive year.

The Antigonish Women's Resource Centre provides Teens Take Action with youth training at the centre as well as program coordination.

The 25 hours of training prepares the older students to deliver a classroom presentation in the form of a skit and then speak to the younger students about their comprehension of dating violence and sexual assault.

The participants prepare their own skit and improv much of the dialogue to keep the performance fresh every time. This year's skit focused on Molly, a "minor niner" who went to her first dance at the Regional and met Connor, an arrogant Grade 12 student.

It demonstrates the different expectations each of them had before they were to meet again for a movie night at Molly's house.

Connor came to Molly's but brought all of his friends and some alcohol. He pressured Molly to show him her room, away from her friends in the living room.

When they rejoin the group, Molly is upset and orders everyone to leave her house, telling Connor she never wants to see him again.

The next day, Molly's older sister, Tara, takes her to see a public wellness nurse at the youth health centre to talk to a trained professional about the assault that happened in her room.

Teens Take Action performed the skit for three Grade 8 groups, at the end of which the students could ask questions and were asked to identify the healthy and unhealthy relationships portrayed.

"I was really surprised at how good some of the groups were at identifying a healthy relationship and what they said they would do if they were put in an awkward situation," Grade 12 student Leah MacEachern said.

The participants admitted that not all of the younger students were overly mature when commenting on the subject matter, but all agreed it is important to educate the younger generation about the situations they may find themselves in when they get older.

"Kids need to know what's going on. They might already know, but it's good if they see the scenario portrayed," participant Stephanie Bertsch said.