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Program creates positive attitudes

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The Antigonish Women's Resource Centre updated the Strait Regional School board on its youth program last week.

Krista DeCoste of the AWRC told the board about the Healthy Relationships for Youth program – offered at all Strait schools with Grade 9 students – at the working committee meeting Nov. 18.

"It's based on the belief sexism, racism and homophobia are forms of oppression and contribute to violence," she said.

The program consists of 12 sessions – led by trained high school students and teachers – which are in line with the province's goals for the Grade 9 personal development and relationships (PDR) class, DeCoste said.

"We train youth facilitators with their teachers in order to present the curriculum in classrooms," she added.

The first session defines terms such as relationship and violence. The early classes go on from to discuss diversity, communication skills and gender, DeCoste said.

"It gives the youth the chance to talk about what they like or don't like about being a boy or girl," she said of the gender session.

Later classes outline relationship boundaries, conflict resolution, stereotypes in pop culture and defining gender identity and sexual orientation.

The final classes deal with the relationship between power and violence, allow the students to share their stories and wrap up the course.

This is the fourth year the

AWRC will offer the Healthy Relationships for Youth class in Strait schools, DeCoste said.

She presented an evaluation from last year which said 31 percent of the students in the class reported a behaviour change, with the sessions on violence and conflict resolution having the most impact.

When asked to rate the course, most students said it was either helpful or very helpful, DeCoste added.

"We like to see that."

Some challenges facing the program include increasing team diversity and maintaining relationships with youth health centres, DeCoste said.

One of the biggest successes includes an increase in positive attitudes about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered students, DeCoste said.

"It helps promote more awareness and more safety."