

Youth program benefiting schools

by Heather MacAdam

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The Strait Regional School Board heard an update about a program run in high schools aimed at helping Grade 9 students develop healthy relationships.

Krista DeCoste, co-ordinator of the Healthy Relationships for Youth (HRY) program, made the presentation to the board on the school-based violence prevention program facilitated by the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association.

The HRY program is the successor to the Rural Youth Education Project, which was held from 2001 to 2006, DeCoste said.

The program is funded by the Canadian Women's Foundation and receives smaller grants from the Department of Education, Nova Scotia Child and Youth Strategy and the Department of Justice Lighthouses Program.

DeCoste said HRY uses a cumulative curriculum which is approved by the Department of Education and the outcomes are in line with the provincial Healthy Living 9 curriculum.

"Teachers work in partnership with a trained youth facilitation team to deliver 12 sessions during the Healthy Living 9 class," she said.

The goals of HRY are to reduce the risk of violence for youth through developing skills and knowledge related to creating and maintaining healthy relationships.

Each of the nine participating schools has its own youth team and one HRY teacher.

This year, 91 youth facilitators were trained to present the 12 healthy relationship sessions of the HRY Program.

"Each youth team is encouraged to do a youth action plan to address violence and promote respect within their school," she said.

The participating schools are Dr. John Hugh Gillis Regional High, East Antigonish Academy, St. Mary's Academy,

Canso Academy, Guysborough Academy, Cape Breton Highlands Academy, Inverness Academy, Dalbrae Academy, and Richmond Academy.

DeCoste's presentation included an endorsement from vice principal of East Antigonish Academy Darryl Breen.

"The impact of the program is visible in the climate of the school and it continues to improve each year the program is offered," Breen said.

"For example, since the beginning of this program, violent incidents at school have decreased dramatically and this is, in part, due to the training provided to students. Furthermore, the student mentors act as great role models both in and out of the school environment."

DeCoste said former minister of Education Marilyn More read a resolution in the Provincial Legislature on Nov. 16, 2010, identifying the valuable leadership role of the HRY youth facilitators supported by their teachers in delivering the 12 session healthy

relationships curriculum.

"Over the past five years the HRY program has provided valuable leadership training and information on healthy relationships to students in the Strait Regional School Board," DeCoste said.

"We hope to continue in to engage youth in this peer education model of violence prevention education."

Board member Richelle MacLaughling asked if there was a way to expand the program to be delivered past Grade 9.

DeCoste said the centre could look at another program for older grades, but added students in Grades 10, 11 and 12 can get involved in the HRY program as youth facilitators.

"The youth facilitators access more training so they do benefit from their involvement."

Superintendent Jack Beaton thanked DeCoste for her time.

"It's very obvious that the Health Relationships for Youth program has brought a lot into our schools," he said.

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