

Students and police learn from each other

By BENDUMMETT
Herald Staff

P.E.A.C.E. participant Paul Huiskamp, 17, says police are "normal people who enjoy their work."

Mr. Huiskamp is one of the 20 students from Halton picked to participate in the eight-week Police Ethnic and Cultural Education (PEACE) pilot program which started last week. The program was started by the Halton Regional Police following a police commissioners task force on race relations.

Its purpose is to heighten understanding between ethnic groups and the police.

PEACE supervisor Bernadette Corpuz of the Halton Regional Police explained the attitudes of some new Canadians towards Canadian police are sometimes inherited from their country of origin. In many cases the children will share parents' attitudes and if they are negative their children will most likely have a negative impression of police, she said.

For example, one participant, who Ms. Corpuz wouldn't name, received pressure from others not to participate in the program because strained relationship with the police. The program is geared to showing students what the police are really like so they can form

their own opinions, Ms. Corpuz said.

Ms. Corpuz said students didn't have to be part of a visible minority to be eligible for the program. Rather they had to be representative of "Canada's cultural mosaic." Students' high school principals nominated them for the program.

Mr. Huiskamp, who is Dutch, said riding in a uniform patrol car has been the best part of the program so far. He made his comments during an interview at 11 Division in Georgetown Wednesday where he is currently working at the front desk. The Burlington Central High School student was

asked to be in the program because of his interest in pursuing a career in policing. "I'm enjoying the program, I'm getting a chance to see how things really work," Mr. Huiskamp said.

During the program, students will work at the force's 18 divisions and participate in every aspect of policing going on at each division. The students will ride in patrol cars, conduct investigations with detectives, escort people to court, issue summons, take calls and complaints, fill out accident reports, finger print people and walk a beat.

While Mr. Huiskamp was working at the front desk Wednesday, another participant, Hayden

Davidson of Queen Elizabeth Park High School, was going out with 11 Division Detectives Keith Woodstra and Brian Farrell to investigate a suspect in a break and enter case. Mr. Davidson, who is of Jamaican descent, said his day had been "so, so," noting he was looking for a little more excitement.

Det. Woodstra said that the day being slow made it difficult for him and his partner to show Mr. Davidson their function. But he said this way Mr. Davidson was seeing that policing is not all action.

Sixteen-year-old Alexandra Spiridoulias, who attends M.M. Robertson High School in Burlington, was walking the Acton beat with Village Constable Bill Riddle, Wednesday. She enjoyed the beat, saying walking around with Const. Riddle gave her a chance to meet the public. She said the constable and public got along well. "It was a real friendly atmosphere," Ms. Spiridoulias, who is of Greek descent said.

Ms. Spiridoulias thought highly of the program, saying not only do students have the opportunity to learn about policemen but policemen have the chance to learn about students.

Indeed, Const. Riddle said before meeting Ms. Spiridoulias, he never knew that Greece had national conscription.

Det. Woodstra is taking a wait-and-see approach to whether or not the program will be a success. He explained that not until the results were collected and analyzed in late August, would the force be able to accurately determine its success.

Ms. Corpuz said students are expected to produce a video of their experiences. They will show it to the students of their individual schools. The Halton Regional Police force will be drawing up a report that will act as a "how to" guide, explaining the program's set up. Ms. Corpuz said the report will be sent to Canada's other forces and those in the U.S.



Halton Regional Police constable Chris Collins of 11 Division in Georgetown helps P.E.A.C.E. participant Paul Huiskamp understand the workings of the police computer. Mr. Huiskamp signed up for the program because he wanted to see the real working life of a policeman. (Herald photo)



P.E.A.C.E. participant Alexandra Spiridoulias and Acton Village Constable Bill Riddle say goodbye after a long day's work walking the Acton beat. (Herald photo)

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