

Contest a social eye-opener for Acton High civics classes

By EAMONN MAHER
Staff Writer

Grade 10 students taking a civics class at Acton District High School are getting a close-up look at what goes into running a community-based charity and have a chance to raise \$5,000 for that cause at the same time.

It's the fourth year that ADHS has incorporated the Youth & Philanthropy Initiative program into its curriculum, in which students select a local-area charity, visit with the people who operate it and then present their project to classmates.

The YPI contest was established by a cosmetics company now known as L'Oreal Canada to empower youths to become more involved in the community, with \$5,000 for each school's winning entry in the competition going to their charity of choice. A gala event will be held in Toronto at the end of the school year to present the students of the winning projects with their cheques. YPI has awarded more than \$5 million in such grants since 2002.

Five civics classes at Acton are vying for this year's top prize and the winner will be declared in May. One of the contestant groups chose the Halton

Women's Place abuse shelter in Milton as its project and the three students were taken aback by their findings.

"Halton Women's Place is trying to make more people aware of women's abuse because a lot of children probably don't notice someone who is sitting beside them in school could be going through something like that," Chelsea Elliott said.

"The statistics are scary too. One in three people will be abused in their lifetime. Just visiting the shelter and learning about it has definitely changed me as a person."

As part of their research for the project, the students visited the shelter and although they didn't have contact with any of the victims housed there, they spoke with the executive director and took a tour of the clandestine facility.

A recurring theme in the shelter and information pamphlets handed out is the colour purple, which signifies the bruises sustained by the victims of domestic violence. The students were told of a woman recently taken in by the shelter who had traveled from Montreal to escape an abusive relationship.

"It was shocking to hear how many women need the shelter. When we were there, it was full," said Olivia Gilmore.

"You never really hear about that



Acton District High School civics teacher Shawn Brown chats with students (from left) Olivia Gilmore, Chelsea Elliott (sitting) and Taylor Dunn about their Youth & Philanthropy Initiative project they undertook this year. The students have an opportunity to win \$5,000 in the contest for the charity they selected to study, Milton's Halton Women's Place. Photo by Eamonn Maher

sort of thing, other than the odd stories in the news about it. Then you're at the shelter and you realize these women are escaping from whatever it is they've been through."

Just getting into the shelter for the visit revealed the grim reality of what victims experience, with an elaborate security system greeting visitors and residents.

Along with learning about the ser-

vices HWP provides, the students included in their project report how the shelter functions and what government agencies are involved in its funding.

"I didn't know they have things for the kids to do at the shelter, like fun activities and special trips and programs to help them deal with their situation," said Taylor Dunn.

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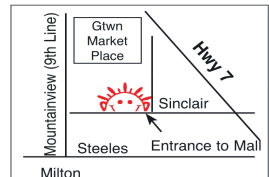


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