

Halton not immune from domestic violence: Shelter educator

By **Kathy Yanchus**
Burlington Post

It's not easy being the only guy at the party not laughing at the sexist jokes.

It's hard to be the one to take a stand, but that's what Brent Duguid is hoping to elicit from the young men who join him to be the guy who stands up because it goes a long way.

Last year, the 26-year-old Burlington resident became the first male public educator hired by Halton Women's Place. As well as going into classrooms throughout the region to speak to kids in Grades 1-12 in an age-appropriate manner about domestic violence, Duguid will launch his well-researched male ally program next semester.

EngageMENT is an eight-week high school-based program that emphasizes healthy masculinity as opposed to the way it is often portrayed in music, sports and military cultures, as well as in the media, which contributes to a patriarchal society, said Duguid, who has degrees in criminology and teaching.

We think we've come so far from where we used to be and yet there's still so much further to go.

Private donor funding enabled HWP to triple its public educator staff to three, with one position devoted to developing EngageMENT, said Laurie Hepburn, HWP's manager of programs and services.

Brent had a good understanding of the roots of domestic violence and the male role in ending it, said Hepburn.

In formulating EngageMENT, Duguid researched similar pro-

grams like the White Ribbon campaign and Partners Accepting Responsibility (PAR), as well as relied on his close ties with the Halton Violence Prevention Council and its speaker's bureau to give him various perspectives.

I'm not so far removed from high school but I think it's a different generation already; they're surrounded by much more media pressure, social pressure.

When speaking to teenagers Duguid said he gets good feedback, but inevitably there's pushback.

There are a lot of misconceptions as to how men and women experience domestic violence.

One question that surfaces is why there is no men's shelter in Halton, a quasi-flippant query to which he thoughtfully responds.

Statistics suggest domestic violence most commonly happens in a heterosexual relationship where men are the perpetrators and a female is the victim but it can happen the other way around and it can happen in same sex relationships, he said.

But I can't have them leaving there thinking it's a 50/50 split because the fact is that over 90 per cent of the time men are perpetrators of violence and females are the victims, added Duguid. That being said just because most domestic violence is committed by men, most men aren't ever going to use domestic violence and that's kind of a take home message for them as well.

In order to eliminate violence against women, men and boys need to be engaged and part of the solution, said Hepburn.

A male brings their experi-

ence in being and identifying as male throughout their life journey which brings a perspective to the work that is unique to men and boys. Brent brings this male perspective, which will undoubtedly assist him in developing innovative programs and finding ways to engage our young men and boys in understanding their role in ending violence against women.

The odd eyebrow is raised in school offices when he arrives as the HWP representative, but it is always a pleasant surprise, smiled Duguid.

He notices a difference among male students in how they perceive the information when it comes from a woman versus a man.

Domestic violence can seem like a faraway big city problem but it's not; it's very much a Halton issue and it crosses all boundaries, said Duguid.

School presentations are connected to the Ontario curriculum in some way most often through the new phys-ed curriculum, but HWP public educators are also invited into technology, media and law classrooms as well as parenting and life skills classes.

The three team members average 40 presentations a month.

In Grade 1 the presentation is framed around healthy friendships; in Grades 3, 4 5 the talk is more about bullying and abuse and how the two aren't that different, said Duguid.

When you get into high school it's about sexual assault and consent. We talk about domestic violence and the law as well as the mental health implications of unhealthy or abusive relationships.

Every grade is offered multi sessions which can be used on three consecutive days or over several

months, at the teacher's discretion, said Duguid.

Feedback from the HWP presentations has been overwhelmingly positive.

In his role, Duguid brings the confidence needed to show men and boys how to recognize and stand up to violence against women in their daily lives whether it's on the playground or in the locker room, said Hepburn.



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