



Michelle Falardeau-Ramsay

No reason to be smug, says human rights commissioner

By KAREN SMITH
The Champion

Letting racist comments and jokes go undisputed is like accepting the behaviour, the head of the Canadian Human Rights Commission told students last Tuesday.

Michelle Falardeau-Ramsay, chief commissioner, said people can fight discrimination and stereotyping by taking objection when they hear racist comments and then setting the record straight.

"Don't let it pass unnoticed," she said. "Say 'I don't think it's appropriate to make that type of remark' and explain why."

The conference, put on by the North Halton Cultural Awareness Council, was held in conjunction with the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, declared 30 years ago on March 21. It also fell on the 50th anniversary of the United Nations' Proclamation of the International Declaration of Human Rights.

"It serves as a reminder that we have come a long way over the past 50 years, but that we also have a long way to go," said Ms Falardeau-Ramsay, the event's keynote speaker, who flew in from Ottawa.

"Just as criminal laws have not managed to eliminate crime, human rights laws have not totally eliminated racism."

About 200 north Halton students attended the Milton District High School conference, which, titled First Nations Day, centred around the rights of Canada's aboriginal people.

Not everyone sees the importance of days like March 21, the chief commissioner said, referring to people who believe society shouldn't talk about race. Instead, they say, society should be colour-blind, and not worry about people's origins or the colour of their skin.

"I wish things could be that simple. The truth of the matter is that as long as there is racism, we will need to talk about race. As long as people are still being denied employment opportunities or harassed in school or on the street because of who their ancestors were, race will remain an important topic," Ms Falardeau-Ramsay said.

"We cannot use being colour blind as an excuse to allow injustice. Instead, we must acknowledge that racism exists and do something about it."

She told students to judge people as individuals.

"Whenever someone says that everyone knows something about a particular group, watch out. That is a dangerous stereotype. The truth is that people are all different and stereotypes are

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