

Youths in workshop to fight violence

Age-old wisdom doesn't change very much. It just gets dressed up to fit the times.

Like the old saw that sticks and stones may break bones, but words won't harm.

That saying has been gussied up for modern times and re-released as the upcoming Talk Works, Violence Hurts conflict resolution workshop for teens, held by the Canadian Bar Association of Ontario (CBA-O).

It will take place Monday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the St. Volodymyr Community Centre in Oakville.

Approximately 250 high school students will take part in the event, Halton council learned last week.

The hope is they'll then take what they've learned back to their respective schools.

And that could help avoid the violence that has plagued some North American youth, resulting in tragedies such as that in Columbine, Colorado, where a student went on a horrifying killing spree last year.

The issue of youth violence arose again more recently when a teen was arrested for allegedly making threats against other students and writing a fictional story about blowing up the school.

The details of that case have been blocked by a publication ban.

Management techniques taught

But teaching students ways to deal with emotion-laden differences can go a long way in preventing violence.

"The purpose is to promote interest based conflict resolution," said Daryl Laundau, who works in the Alternative Dispute Resolution Section of the CBA-O.

"We believe students would benefit from learning these skills at an early age."

The event will include brainstorming sessions to help teens come up with ways to peaceably resolve disputes and will feature Halton chair Joyce Savoline as a keynote speaker.

"We're very excited about this millennium project," said Nancy Lowartz of the Halton Catholic District School Board. "Students will learn to create a culture of peacemaking."

She said the seminar will help teens learn to deal with contentious issues in ways that are "productive and peaceful."

But the push for alternative ways to settle differences won't end with the seminar.

"This conference is just the beginning," she said.

Still, Oakville Councillor Fred Oliver wondered why only high school students were targeted for the event.

"Has your organization considered youth in elementary schools," he asked.


They had, responded Ms Lowartz. But enough programs are already in place in the lower levels, including peer mediation.

"The elementary schools have a lot of peace-making strategies in place already," she said.

"And in high school, they're the ones most hurt by these kind of things."

The workshop received the endorsement of Ms Savoline, who agreed, along with council, to declare February Conflict Resolution Month.

"People of all ages have to learn conflict resolution," she said. "And there's no better time than in your youth."

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