

Video creators hope it will lead to discussion

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'Homophobia is Hate' as the screen fades to black.

"We wanted to create a video that grabbed kids' attention, involve them, even make them uncomfortable, but one that will lead to discussion," said committee member and Percy Merry School teacher Robin Coverdale, who explained that by using only words, voices and music, the video won't become dated.

According to Julie Pehar, education coordinator of Sexual Assault and Violence Interventions Services of Halton and chair of the Anti-Homophobia Committee, responses to the video have been extraordinary — usually a stunned hush often followed by applause.

Ms Pehar admitted that, in some schools, the video is first met by an uncomfortable reaction, but as the scenarios progress and the message sinks in, she can feel perceptions being altered.

"In the classrooms I've gone to there's dead silence," she said.

Mr. Coverdale also screened the video for fellow members of the Ontario Elementary Teachers' Federation, who were so impressed they covered the cost of some of the tapes.

After showering the viewer with an assortment of vindictive slang, the video carries on with several voice-only scenarios that begin with parents' assumptions about the sexuality of their baby and moves on through peer pressure, gay bashing, a father-and-son fight and adult relationships that extend beyond high school.

"I find it absolutely challenging to students," said Ms Pehar. "It's a sobering impact."

Colin Nash, a grade 12 student at St. Thomas Aquinas Secondary School in Oakville whose dramatic skills came highly recommended to the project, portrayed the son, who fights with his domineering father played by Mr. Coverdale.

Words like faggot form an unfortunate part of student vernacular, said Colin, so the video tries to get at what lies behind such terms.

"I got involved because I liked the social statement the video makes because (homophobia) is a big problem in all high schools," he said.

Grade 6 Percy Merry student Shellynn Gervais was the appropriate age and had the right voice to play a young tomboy. Also keen on drama, Shellynn is pleased to lend her support to such a worthy project, one that her parents and friends also liked.

Shannon Beaton, a grade 12 Acton High School student who played a teenaged girl, said the slang used in the video is sometimes met by nervous laughter at the start of showings but this quickly subsides as the message is driven home.

Hopefully, added Ms Pehar, such words will join other now-unacceptable phrases that were once used freely in our society, but now are generally considered racist, sexist and just plain hurtful.

Andrew Punkris, a student of St. Mike's College in Toronto, contributed the cover artwork for the tape box, using freehand and computer imagery. He said he feels the project is an important one (he has a gay uncle) and thought it wouldn't hurt to get his name out and has added the work to his portfolio.

"Having all the youth involved is fabulous," said Ms Pehar. "We couldn't have done it without them."

Integral to the production were Imagine Sound Studios creative director Mark Camilleri and studio director Shana Saloin. Mr. Camilleri wrote the original score based on the script to reinforce the tape's emotional content and cheerfully

made changes where needed. The pair subcontracted video production and even added their voices to the ensemble.

The whole project was funded on a shoestring by a \$2,500 grant from the Ministry of Health — AIDS Bureau, leading Ms Pehar to believe the Imagine staff was more than generous with their time and talents.

"To this day I really don't know how much was a gift," she said.

Anti-Homophobia Committee member Marcus Logan said Pride TV plans to edit the tape down into individual public serv-

ice announcements. It has also been submitted to the Inside Out Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. Key Toronto educators have also seen the video, which has been sent to the National Film Board.

The Anti-Homophobia Committee provides advocacy, education and support to the gay and lesbian community of Halton and their loved ones. Its mandate is to raise community awareness about homophobia and educate area services providers about the added struggles faced by the gay community — especially youths — when dealing with parental authority, peers, sexuali-

ty and personal identity.

The committee has sponsored a heterosexism and homophobia workshop and runs a youth support group. The committee conducted a workshop at the 2000 Victim-Less community policing conference and members speak at high schools from both Halton school boards. A second dance is also scheduled for February 8 at Munn's United Church.

Perhaps the highest profile activity of the committee is its involvement with the annual Halton Pride Picnic at Bronte Creek Provincial Park.

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