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# COMMUNITY

## Students learn to spread anti-bullying message

By Jason Misner  
 SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

A potential employer critiquing a job applicant for having a gimp leg is ableism.

A girl ridiculed for promiscuous sex while a male is cheered for it is sexism.

A girl scared off by another girl for declaring she's gay is heterosexism.

Each of these scenarios was acted out in a skit as part of a recent two-day workshop at Central Arena in Burlington to enlighten young people about the root causes of bullying and violence and their detrimental impact on society.

The workshop also aimed to dispel the perception that affluent Halton is free of such social problems.

Called Speak Up!, the workshops were organized by ReAct, a program of the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC) and Community Development Halton.

More than 30 youth, in their mid-to-late-teens, spent part of their March Break learning how to deal with bullying while learning how to conduct similar workshops within their own schools. The two days were broken up into a series of activities illustrating the harm of bullying and violence and teaching the participants how to create similar workshops to bring to their peers.

Seventeen-year-old Burlington high school student Nicole Guarascia said she signed up to take part in the anti-violence workshop because she has seen oppression at school and wants to make a positive difference.

She's particularly keen on learning to conduct a workshop to spread the message of tolerance and understanding.

"I think oppression is a big problem in Burlington," the grade 12 student said. "I see a lot of it in high school."

For example, she said there were posters plastered at school alerting students to a Web site to deal with homophobia and many were ripped down. Also, Guarascia said she's seen incidents of classism — a bias based on social or economic class — due to the style of clothing a person wears.

"It comes down to that age old thing — if you don't have good clothes you're not cool," she said, as others had split



**SPEAKING UP:** Above (from left), Claudia Rios, Chelsea Takalo, Alyssa Asomani and George Phu put on a skit sending a message about racism during youth workshop 'Speak Up!' held at Central Arena in Burlington during the March Break. At right, the high school students perform another skit showing an example of sexism.

into groups to discuss issues of discrimination.

Mischa Edwardh, a grade 12 student from Burlington, joined the workshop to arm himself with awareness about different types of oppression. For example, he said he didn't know much about heterosexism until the workshop and now has a better understanding.

Abi Salole, a social worker with Community Development Halton, said one of the key reasons for enlisting help from METRAC was to provide Halton teens a venue to speak, and to especially break down the notion nothing negative happens in the region.

Far too often people point to Toronto as the place where bad things happen and that's simply not true, Salole said.

She said issues like homophobia or sexism are underlying roots to bullying that can occur anywhere. By teaching individuals the negative consequences of these kinds of acts, she says hopefully the bullying will stop.

The intent is to create a network of awareness "to feel safe and to speak up against those things," Salole said.

"We want to provide a space for young people to talk about their experiences of violence and bullying they have seen, heard of or participated in," said Farrah Bykalo-Khan, co-ordinator of ReAct.

One of the lessons from the segment discussing negative behaviour via a skit was to teach people not to perpetuate such actions.

"It's about being an ally to people."



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Tuesday, March 28	Wednesday, March 29	Thursday, March 30	Friday, March 31	Saturday, April 1	Sunday, April 2	Monday, April 3
5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 6:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 6:30pm Optimist TV Bingo (Live) 7:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA 8:00pm Auto Experts (Live) 9:00pm Halton Hills Council Mar 20 2006 11:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	1:00pm Halton Hills Council Mar 20 2006 3:00pm - 6:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 6:00pm The Bottom Line 6:30pm - 8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 8:00pm Swap Talk (Live) 9:00pm Milton Council Mar 27 2006 11:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	12:00pm Swap Talk (Replay) 1:00pm - 6:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 6:00pm Living Healthy 7:00pm The Bottom Line 7:30pm - 9:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 9:00pm Halton Region Council Mar 29 2006 11:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	1:00pm Georgetown Hockey Heritage Awards 4:00pm - 5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 6:00pm - 9:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 9:00pm TVC Sports: Jr Hockey - Chicago vs Hamilton	6:30pm TVC Sports: AHL Hockey Chicago vs Hamilton 9:30pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	10:30am TVC Sports: Jr A Hockey Playoffs Stouville vs Oakville Game 4 1:30pm - 6:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 6:00pm Milton Council Mar 20 2006 8:00pm - 10:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA 10:30pm TVC Sports: Jr A Hockey Playoffs Stouville vs Oakville Game 5	1:00pm Milton Council Mar 20 2006 3:00pm - 8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 8:00pm Sports ZONE Live 9:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA