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# Generosity, tolerance preached at student equity conference

BY CAROLINE GRECH  
Staff Writer

Stick up for people who are victims of discrimination. Help raise funds for those who are less fortunate. Accept people for who they are.

Those are three messages Grades 9 and 10 students walked away with after attending Fusion, the fifth annual student conference on equity.

Walking into Richmond Green Secondary School in Richmond Hill last week, it was hard to miss the red T-shirts with the message, "Respect me for who I am; Respect us for who we are".

Run by students, the conference assembles students from secondary schools across the region to discuss issues ranging from racism to teenage motherhood.

About 400 attended.

For Grade 9 Milliken Mills High School students Kosta and Yiani Pachneris, the day was for sharing their experience of being disabled and needing to adjust to high school life.

Accompanied by older sister

**"Now when I see someone being bullied I go and do something about it because I know how it feels."**

Brooke Mudryku  
Vaughan Secondary student

Marianthee, a Grade 12 student at the same school, they told the group what it was like to attend secondary school and be different.

"I don't get bullied that much because my friends understand what I have, so they don't make fun of me," said Kosta who has cerebral palsy and uses a walker. "People who don't know me make comments."

When her twin brothers started attending the school, Marianthee noticed disabled students were segregated in a separate hallway and had no interaction with the rest of the student body.

"We think everybody should be together," Marianthee said of her and a friend who organized

an event called Helping Hands, where disabled students interacted with students from every grade.

"Disabled children should get the same experience as other students."

The story from Kosta prompted others in the room to share their experience of being picked on for being different.

"Everybody made fun of me because I walked with a limp after getting hit by a car," Vaughan Secondary student Brooke Mudryku said.

"Now, when I see somebody being bullied, I do something about it because I know how it feels."


The idea behind the conference is to discuss equity issues and send students back to their schools with ideas on how to stop discrimination, staff co-chairperson Jacqueline Linton said.

"We're trying to teach tolerance and acceptance and try to make people realize that the ignorance must stop," said Matthew Mahjour, a member of the student committing organizing the conference.

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