

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Bryna Warshawsky, Acting Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2013 February 19

SECOND ANNUAL YOUTH EMPOWERMENT CONFERENCE

Recommendation

It is recommended that Report No.025-13 re “Second Annual Youth Engagement Conference” be received for information.

Key Points

- One hundred and fifty students and teachers from both Thames Valley District School Board and London Catholic District School Board participated in the Second Annual Youth Empowerment Conference on October 16, 2013.
- The conference focused on Healthy Relationships. Students created action plans to take back to their schools on topics such as sexting, bullying, cyber bullying, relationship abuse, and friendships. The goal of the conference was to empower students to lead change in their school community.
- Fifty four percent of students who were present at the conference are now actively involved in their Healthy School Committee, Gay Straight Alliance, Social Justice Groups or Student Council.
- Nine of the 15 schools have organized an assembly focused on relationship abuse and bullying by bringing in the keynote speaker from the conference, Ms. Jaclyn Miles.

Background

Youth Create Healthy Communities is a youth advocacy group run through the Health Unit. The group consists of one Public Health Nurse and approximately 10 youth from various schools around the City of London and Middlesex County. Their goal is to create a healthier community for youth. The group focuses on health and health-related issues that are important to them, and work together to create positive change through advocacy and supportive school environments.

Event Description

The second Annual Youth Empowerment Conference for youth in Middlesex London took place on October 16, 2012 under the leadership of the Health Unit’s Young Adult Team. The conference focused on Healthy Relationships. Fifteen (15) of the 21 secondary schools participated, involving 134 students and 16 teachers from both Thames Valley District School Board and London Catholic District School Board. The purpose of the conference was to bring students from London and Middlesex together to discuss issues present in their schools. The keynote speaker, Ms. Jaclyn Miles, was named Miss Canada 2012. Throughout the year, she led a campaign entitled “Break the Silence”. This theme spoke to many aspects of relationship abuse. Ms. Miles engaged the students at the conference by sharing her history of

relationship abuse and how she is striving to overcome the pain and emotional hardships she has experienced.

During the lunch break, students could visit three booths on the following topics: Sexual Health; Public Health Nurse promotion of healthy schools; and Craigwood Youth Mental Health services. These displays provided an opportunity for youth to see community partners that are available to them both inside and outside of their schools. The Health Unit was available to provide situational support to students who had further questions or wished to discuss their personal concerns and issues.

The conference also included a number of breakout brainstorming sessions called “Open Spaces”. A Youth Create Healthy Communities leader facilitated sessions on the following topics: bullying, cyber bullying, sexting, relationship abuse, physical abuse, and friendships. The sessions were based on the four foundations of the Healthy Schools Framework: 1) high-quality instruction and programs (education); 2) a healthy physical environment; 3) a supportive social environment, and 4) community partnerships. Healthy school action plans were developed by participants and presented back to the entire group. The conference concluded with a 30-minute fitness dance session facilitated by Ms. Laura Grande from Groove Fitness.

Event Outcomes

Since the conference, 54% of students who were present, are actively involved in their Healthy School Committee, Gay Straight Alliance, Social Justice Groups or Student Council, and nine (9) of the 15 schools have created an assembly focused on relationship abuse and bullying with Ms. Miles as their keynote speaker. There has been positive feedback about the impact her story is having on the school culture, as students are relating to her situation and comprehensive activities at schools are being implemented. The Youth Create Healthy Communities group plans to administer a six month post-event evaluation to determine how the action plans were implemented and the outcomes aligned with them.

This annual conference is a launching pad for health promoting school activities led by youth for youth. The Youth Create Healthy Communities group will continue to recruit members from this conference. The Committee will grow as a strong youth engagement group that advocates for change in the community.

This report was prepared by Ms. Michelle Cowin, Public Health Nurse, and Ms. Christine Preece, Manager, Young Adult Team.



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Acting Medical Officer of Health

<p>This report addresses the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards: Child Health Standard 4, 5, 7 and Sexual Health, Sexually Transmitted Infections, and Blood-borne Infection Standard 5 and the Foundational Standard.</p> <p>This report also addresses Youth Mental Health.</p>
