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90 per cent of teens report seeing violence

Posted By Ben Benedict

Posted 6 days ago



Tyler Chartrand (left), president and Stephanie Howlett, secretary of the London Youth Council have completed the Ontario Youth Against Violence report, supported by the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth by a \$10,000 grant.

Ben Benedict Photo

More than 90 per cent of London young people surveyed earlier this year say they have personally witnessed some form of violence and more than half of them say the violence was physical.

About 40 per cent of the teens have also witnessed bullying in city schools. More troubling is that many youth have a negative view of police.

The findings come from a unique study of violence by the London Youth Council, a fledgling organization that convinced a provincial government agency to contribute \$10,000 so young couple could survey themselves and then have a serious discussion about the problems discovered.

The discussion, in the form of a Youth Anti-Violence Forum, will be held tomorrow, Nov. 27, at Central Library. Its purpose is to generate violence prevention ideas and action steps from young people in London.

The survey of 1,091 young people by the youth council asked 10 questions regarding their perceptions and understanding of violence. The subsequent report on the findings outlined the youth council's position on violence as well as recommendations for change including provincial budgets, education health, social assistance and housing, and law enforcement.

Of the questions, the first asked what makes a young person violent. Anger and stress identified as the primary cause with 360 responses followed by media at 289, and family issues third at 276 replies.

Under violence witnessed 92 per cent of respondents had witnessed some form of violence, physical violence ranked number one with 593 respondents witnessing a violent incident. Another 414 said they had witnessed bullying. Some 478 respondents had a negative view of police.

In reporting violence, 414 said they would tell their parents, 363 said they would tell a school authority, 342 said police. Nearly one in 10, however, said they would tell no one or would deal with it themselves.

Violence prevention program awareness also ranked very low with only the Kids' Help Phone and the Safe Schools Program being recognized. In fact, when it came to preventing violence the overwhelming response from young people was, "I don't know." There was also an indication that there needs to be more awareness and media support of prevention programs. The overall sentiment of the report is that violence exists and not enough is being done.

Tyler Chartrand is president and founder of the London Youth Council – he started it, he says, because he saw a city-wide need – and project coordinator for the violence report. The youth council brings together young people ages 13 – 24 from across the city to speak up about issues that matter to them.

"We heard that the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth were bringing communities together and we wanted to get London involved in this issue. Part of the project guidelines was to circulate a questionnaire on youth experiences and perceptions on violence.

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"The advocate's office didn't have a youth wing (in London) and was working with the Children's Aide Society, which wasn't appropriate for this cause so we took it on."

The provincial advocate came through with a \$10,000 grant and Mr. Chartrand recruited three others to help him – Lisa Carter as the co-project coordinator roles and Stephanie Howlett and Joanne Fearnas as report coordinators.

The London District Catholic School Board supported the project and allowed the youth council to survey its students. The Thames Valley public board – which hosts the Safe Schools Program – refused, saying it had already done its own survey of 17,000 students.

The Thames Valley survey was to determine why youth do not report information regarding harassment and what school communities can do to create a culture that encourages youth to report information regarding harassment, not their experiences and perceptions on violence.

In the youth survey, however, Mr. Chartrand says the youth council discovered sharing is not working with nor respecting youth and their opinions, something they identify as a critical barrier to preventing violence. Only a third of respondents in the youth council survey identified school authority figures as someone they would notify if they witnessed violence.

Even more telling is that while the Thames Valley report identified 'snitching' as the dominant factor as why youth don't report violence, the youth council survey had only four respondents who indicated that as a concern.

Mr. Chartrand notes "anger, stress and coping mechanisms are the number one issue when you talk about youth violence. A lot of the issues were external factors."

In terms of preventing violence, "When we asked youth about other programs than the eight we listed the vast majority of answers was 'I don't know'. There are more than eight programs in London, but they all need increased awareness and publicity. That's why a lot of people selected 'nothing' in that programs didn't work.

"We concluded that it's (unfortunately) normalized with one-in-two people witnessing violence. I think it's important to highlight the issues. Provincially, everyone else is talking local results; we didn't have that except for this report."

As for what youth, as well as adults can do, Ms. Howlett notes "We didn't ask about taking a stand so hopefully with more awareness it will become the norm to take a stand."

That will have to wait for the Youth Anti-Violence Forum.

IF YOU WANT TO GO

! The Youth Anti-Violence Forum is tomorrow, Nov. 27 at 4 p.m., Central Library (Stevenson & Hunt Room, 251 Dundas St. There will be presentations from the Sexual Assault Centre London and the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children. You can pre-register by email to stephaniehowlett@gmail.com.

! To order a copy of the Ontario Youth Against Violence report, to learn more or join the London Youth Council contact Tyler Chartrand at tyler@you.on.ca.

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