

Award urges students to get involved

Youth newspaper honoured

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Louise Russo, the victim of a shooting in 2004, made a presentation to students about the impact of violence and violence prevention.

Grade 7 and 8 students at Fleming Public School in Scarborough learned yesterday of the importance of getting involved in their community.

Louise Russo, founder of Walk Against Violence Everywhere, presented the Louise Russo Youth Award to Malvern Youth -- Recognizing Our Opportunities To Succeed, a group that created MY ROOTS, a youth community newspaper.

Laxmi Parthasarathy, 20, founder and editor of MY ROOTS, said she started the paper to highlight the positive aspects of her Malvern community and to encourage youth to get involved.

"Nobody really thinks about the arts and I really wanted to give students that opportunity at a young age," said Parthasarathy, who also received Canada's Top 20 Under 20 Award earlier this year.

MY ROOTS encourages kids in the Scarborough area to submit their creative writing stories, poetry and photography, she said.

Encouraging kids to participate in MY ROOTS prevents violence because they're able to foster their talents in a creative way, Parthasarathy said.

"I think every student comes along a path in their life where they have to choose from right or wrong, and everybody needs that little seed of inspiration to blossom

into something greater," she said.

The quarterly paper, which was created last year, is distributed to schools, libraries, and recreational and spiritual centres across Scarborough.

The Louise Russo Youth Award is one of five presented to young people who demonstrate respect, responsibility and leadership, and work to make a positive difference in their communities, Russo said.

The 49-year-old mother of three was paralyzed from the chest down after she was hit by a stray bullet when she was caught in the crossfire at a Downsview restaurant four years ago.

Russo said she's motivated by the selflessness of others who work to reduce violence.

"I continue doing the work I'm doing because I see all the great benefits and positive things that MY ROOTS and organizations like that and individuals like (Parthasarathy) are doing," she said.

Russo recounted her personal tragedy to the students yesterday, highlighting the dangers of senseless violence and the importance of making positive choices.

"You have the power to do enormous good in all of you. All of you are our future, you are our leaders," she said.

Grade 8 student Michael Barret said the presentation inspired him.

"I'm going to try to do positive for my community and try to uplift myself to do things I would have never tried to do. I'm going to run for the extra mile."

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