

## ANNEX: Give Peace a Dance

### Loretto College School hosted a night of music and dance to fight school violence

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An enthusiastic crowd packed the Loretto College School amphitheatre for a night of music and dance to promote the fight against school violence.

Loretto College youth worker Paulina Onilla, along with the school's Empowered Student Partnership (ESP) Committee, organized the three-hour event. Toronto Police liaison officers from 13 Division supported the annual affair.

The "Give Peace a Dance" event is meant to raise awareness about bullying, cyber-bullying, and violence in and around schools. Onilla said it's hard putting the dance together, but it can be rewarding.

"It is a lot of work," she said. "It does have its stresses but you know what, we do it for the kids, and if it's going to make a difference to them then it's well worth it."

There were musical performances by Kgomotso 'Kg' Tsatsi and Vanessa Legassi, dance performances by B-boy group Mayhem's Finest and hip hop group Culture Shock Canada, and spoken-word rhymes by poet Dwayne Morgan.

The evening's master of ceremonies was MC Bacon. Dance presentations by Loretto College students and dance groups from other Toronto Catholic District School Board schools were the featured highlights.

The TCDSB schools included Archbishop Romero Catholic Secondary School, Dante Alighieri Academy, Marshall McLuhan Catholic Secondary School, Madonna Catholic Secondary School, and St. Basil-the-Great College School.

TDCSB superintendent Pawl Crawford said his portfolio at the board includes safe schools, and ESP is a positive program he works on that is making a difference.

"The Empowered Student Partnership program comes from the energy of the students and you sort of feel it in here today," he said.

The ESP program is about students coming up with safe school initiatives in partnership with the Toronto Police, said Onilla.

Constables Tony Santeramo and Raul Cutuli were at the dance, and they visit each high school in 13 Division daily as part of a pilot project launched in September.

Santeramo said the project is working, and the proof is in the relationships formed between students and police.

"We don't expect them to call us sir or officer, they call us by our first names because that's the relationship we want," he said. "So far it's been an awesome experience, these kids love us, we love the kids and we do what we can just to be around them."

The ESP program has been in affect for six years but was always looked after by regular uniformed officers, and Santeramo said the kids specifically call for him and Raul when there's a problem.

Loretto student and ESP member Stephanie Martin, 17, said she's seen ESP membership grow from five girls to 55 girls in her four years at the school.

She said while students were wary at first, they have now warmed up to Tony and Raul. She added it would be great to stop violence in schools and events like Give Peace a Dance help with the message.

"Events like this are basically put together by us and the Toronto Police to just make other schools aware," Martin said.

She said it was a great event with a lot of energy, even though she joked that nothing on paper worked out as planned.

Tickets for the event were \$7 with proceeds going to Leave Out Violence (LOVE) and the ESP committee to help with their elementary school mentorship program.