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Putting An End To Homophobic Bullying The Focus Of Police, Community Campaign

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CityNews.ca Staff

As Pride Week kicks off across the city, a new campaign involving police and community groups aims to wipe out homophobia, especially among teens.

The focus of the public awareness program, called Report Homophobic Violence Period (RHVP), is on targeting attitudes and behaviour in youths aged 13 to 25 before they escalate into police matters.

"When the police force this year came forward with this idea, it was wonderful to see them reaching out, wanting to work with others, and I'm very impressed with the partnership that the police have formed on this strategy,"

said City Councillor Kyle Rae.

"You can't do these things alone. You need to have partners to do this, not only to fund but also to get the message you and also to work through the issue."

More than 20 community groups are involved in RHVP. Fatima Amarshi, Executive Director of Pride Toronto, notes that gay and lesbian teens shouldn't have to go to school fearing that they'll be bullied or harassed.

"If you look at the stats right now, I think it's a third of hate crimes, a third of the motivation for them is sexual orientation," she said.

"Pockets of (Toronto) are (safe for people who are gay and lesbian), depending on where you're at. But no, the stats are really clear that our kids face an enormous amount of harassment, bullying and violence in school settings. So it's absolutely vital that we're there to support them, that the law is there to support them and that they know there's a mechanism to have their issues raised."

The campaign will involve traditional advertising, but also includes lesson plans for middle schools, secondary schools, and adult education courses.