

“Changing Attitudes”: Date Rape and Dating Violence Awareness Project

The “Changing Attitudes” Project focusses on date rape and dating violence awareness, and is a project of *Muskoka/Parry Sound Sexual Assault Services*. “Changing Attitudes” is funded by a grant from the *Ontario Victims Services Secretariat* (under the auspices of the *Ministry of the Attorney General*).

This project has two main components – the “Peer Support Worker Program”, and the “Outreach Program”. The “Peer Support Worker (PSW) Program” involves providing comprehensive training sessions to high school students on a variety of issues, mostly related to violence prevention. The objectives of this training include assisting the participating students to: develop a variety of skills (e.g., in communication and helping strategies); increase their awareness of the community resources available; and, enhance their ability to support their peers when they face such issues as bullying, low self-esteem, suicide ideation, eating disorders, and dating violence.

During the 2007-2008 school year, 99 students from high schools in East and West Parry Sound and Muskoka – *Parry Sound High School; Almaguin Highlands Secondary School*, in South River; *St. Dominic Catholic Secondary School*, in Bracebridge; *Huntsville High School*; and, *Bracebridge and Muskoka Lakes Secondary School* – completed the PSW Program, and received certificates of completion. In conjunction with the training sessions, students are encouraged to utilize the newly-developed *Muskoka/Parry Sound Sexual Assault Services* PSW chat line, and the on-line PSW training manual and testing centre. For more information about these resources, visit www.daphnewymn.com/learningcentre.

Other “Peer Support Worker” initiatives include a television commercial about date-rape drugs, that was written and performed by students at *Almaguin Highlands Secondary School*, and is airing on the *A-Channel* and *CTV* during July and August 2008.

The “Outreach Program”, which is also occurring during the summer of 2008, has three components – “Bar Patrol”, “Summer Events”, and “Area Agencies”. Two summer coordinators have been hired to plan and implement this program. They spend a great deal of time dispersing information throughout the Districts of Parry Sound and Muskoka, in order to increase the awareness of the general public (particularly young adults) about sexual assault and dating violence issues, and about the risks of date-rape drugs. Informational materials include pamphlets, posters, bottles of water, condoms, bar coasters, and drink tags. Specifically, the “Bar Patrol” targets bars and clubs frequented by young people, while the “Summer Events” portion involves attendance at farmers’ markets, art festivals, area shopping malls, and various summer events and venues. These staff members also visit, and distribute material to, numerous community agencies in the area – from First Nations, to Nursing Stations, to O.P.P. detachments.

Because one in four Canadian women will be sexually assaulted in their respective lifetimes (likely by people they know); because the majority of date and acquaintance rape victims are young women aged 16 to 24; and, because less than 1% of date rapes are reported to the police, the “Changing Attitudes” Project is imperative.

If you, or someone you know, has been sexually assaulted, please call the 24-hour “Women’s Sexual Assault Help Line” at **1-800-461-2929**, or visit the agency website at www.daphnewymn.com.

For more information on the “Changing Attitudes” Project, contact the Parry Sound office of *Muskoka/Parry Sound Sexual Assault Services* at: 774-9083 or 1-877-851-6662.