

Communications Office
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Health Unit Launches YOUth Talk 2010

Unique PhotoVoice Project Will Bring Community Health Concerns of Local Youth to Municipal Election Candidates

Tuesday, August 24, 2010, Peterborough

Today the Peterborough County-City Health Unit (PCCHU) launched "YOUth Talk 2010", a project designed to bring the community health concerns of local youth to municipal election candidates.

YOUth Talk 2010 is an initiative developed by the youth staff of the PCCHU that involves recruiting their peers to tell their community's story through an interactive PhotoVoice project. "The project is designed to empower youth by giving them the tools and support they need to effect change in their community," said Briana Barker, PCCHU Peer Leader and YOUth Talk 2010 organizer. "Youth throughout the county and city of Peterborough will be provided with a camera and trained how to tell a story through photos. Their stories and photos will be presented at an upcoming all candidates meeting to make sure that prospective candidates in the municipal election are aware of youth concerns in our area."

PCCHU's Youth Development Worker Keith Beecroft noted that YOUth Talk 2010 is one of several initiatives the Health Unit is undertaking this year to explore the concerns and issues of local youth from a number of different perspectives as part of the United Nations declaration of 2010 as the International Year of Youth. "The theme for International Year of Youth is dialogue and mutual understanding, and this couldn't be more in line with the goal of our work," said Mr. Beecroft. "For change to happen, we need to recognize that youth are not the leaders of tomorrow, they are the leaders of today."

Youth resiliency and engagement will be a key focus of the initiatives, highlighting the factors that influence young people to make healthy choices in spite of potential risks while providing a platform for youth to be heard. Levels of resiliency among youth will be assessed through a survey of youth in school and community settings. "The survey will allow us to identify not only the challenges but the strengths of local youth and to celebrate and enhance those areas in which our young people excel," said Mr. Beecroft. Funding support for these initiatives was provided by the Government of Ontario.

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“Research shows that engagement in itself is an effective harm prevention and reduction strategy,” said Dr. Rosana Pellizzari, PCCHU’s Medical Officer of Health. “Young people who are meaningfully involved in activities, and are connected to caring adults and role models that support their engagement are more resilient and less likely to engage in negative risky behaviours such as abuse of drugs and alcohol, dropping out of school, and breaking the law.”

Why is this important? The Peterborough Social Planning Council (PSPC) in its Quality of Life report has identified the increasing need to look at the issues of youth. “Our research is showing that young people want a say in how we plan our community. Youth have ideas of what Peterborough in the future should look like. They want a voice in leading change. We have young people who want to stay in Peterborough but as a community we need to be looking at creating job opportunities for them to be able to stay here” stated Dawn Berry Merriam, Research and Policy Analyst with the PSPC.

The Peterborough Social Planning Council will be undertaking the project, with funding received from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, in partnership with both local school boards and the Canadian Education Association to look at civic engagement with youth. “We want to work with the health unit, their wonderful PhotoVoice and resiliency projects as we look at civic engagement of youth,” said Ms. Berry Merriam, who noted that the PSPC and PCCHU are planning to launch the work of these projects at a youth summit in the spring of 2011.

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