

# Oak Bay High confronts sexual violence

## Students teach students after taking an in-depth course about assault and violence

Joanne Penhale  
News staff

Slurs like "fag" and "slut" are not uncommon in the halls of Oak Bay High. Neither is gossip about the sex lives of various students.

"They might not leave physical scars," said Billy Bingaman, a prevention educator at the Women's Sexual Assault Centre. "But sexual violence like this can damage someone's spiritual and emotional self."

Bingaman led a group of eleven peer-counselling students through a 10-week course about sexual violence called Project Respect.

Educating high school kids about sexual violence is important, he said.

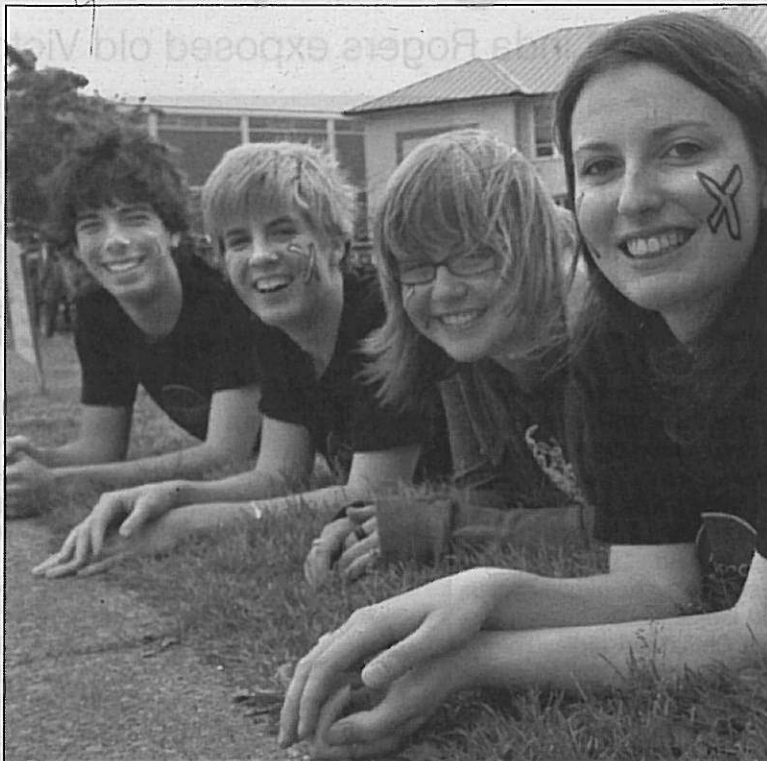
"Forty per cent of people that access the services of the Women's Sexual Assault Centre are between 14 and 25 years old."

The students discussed how gender stereotyping and derogatory labelling can contribute to more obvious forms of sexual violence such as date rape. They learned about communication skills and power relations. And they discussed ways to promote more positive messages about sexuality, and how to intervene when a fellow student's sexuality is disrespected.

"Being able to talk about sexualized violence is really difficult," Bingaman said.

The participating students, from grades nine to 11, met each Monday afternoon for two hours.

Leta Cushing, 15, says the program was a great way for students to learn more about sexuality and respect.



Dunc Malcolm/News staff

**Oak Bay High School students David Fainstein, 17, Emily-Rose Kilpatrick, 16, Leta Cushing, 15, and Samantha Dixon, 17, (left to right) put crosses on their faces to symbolize the students at Oak Bay High who, statistically, would have encountered sexual violence.**

She plans to continue with Project Respect in the coming years, and says she wants to keep spreading positive messages about sexuality.

Although Cushing says she's always tried to stand up to sexual harassment, "I have more information about the subject so I can explain to people why it's wrong."

"It's a teaching thing - because we know more," added David Fainstein, 17, who also took the course.

The students said the program dispelled some myths about sexuality, like that men always want sex.

"Guys can be victims of sexual violence too," Fainstein said.

"Women and men working together is the only way to work against this type of violence," Bingaman said.

Oak Bay's peer-counselling teacher, Allen York, agreed it was particularly important in the schools to have young men call

### Students protest unwanted sex acts

Eleven Oak Bay High students who took a course about sexual violence launched a one-day educational campaign on Wednesday called Respect Revolution Day 2007.

They wore white crosses on their faces, and painted crosses on their classmates as they explained statistics and answered questions about all kinds of unwanted sexual acts.

"We were expecting a hesitance," said student organizer Leta Cushing during the campaign. "Now actually being here, people are asking a lot of questions, asking if they can get a cross on their face, and just being enthusiastic."

They had more than enough students interested. All the painted crosses represented the estimated 255 female and 120 males students at the school who will have encountered unwanted sexual acts by the time they graduate.

"Our school is not immune," said Allen York, the students' peer-counselling teacher. The shocking statistics about sexual violence are just as likely to show up at Oak Bay High as they are anywhere else, he said. The students also posted laminated signs in the school and along the pathway between the high school's two buildings. They read things like, "You are worth protecting. Stand up for yourself," and "Communicate at every step of the way."

Organizers stood by a table at noon hour that had educational material spread across it, including stickers with the messages "I want to be heard," and "Yes means yes."

A counsellor from the Women's Sexual Assault Centre was also there, along with the Billy Bingaman, a prevention educator from the centre who has worked with the students for the last few months. "This is a positive thing - we want students to know they have sexual rights," Bingaman said.

other young men on sexist comments. "They can say 'Hey buddy, that's not cool,' or 'You know what? That's not funny,'" York said.

He compared the education about sexual violence to counter-attack education, which he says has become entrenched in students' education. "This education will last years."

"The strongest hope to address something so unacceptable is not punishment - it's the education of young people," York said.

### Project Respect

Project Respect is a program of the Women's Sexual Assault Centre at 941 Pandora Ave.

The centre has counselling and immediate support services for anyone who has been affected by sexual violence, and a crisis line at 383-3232. Project Respect is also online at [www.yesmeansyes.com](http://www.yesmeansyes.com).