

Empowering women and a bit of fun, too

News

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CORNWALL -- Musical performances, guest speakers and role playing will help teach young girls about how to recognize violence against women and avoid it.

Paul Henry and his Montrealbased self-defense organization the White Tiger Group are stopping in Cornwall next month as part of their conference series to teach and empower students.

The event began partly as a commemoration of the Dec. 6, 1989, massacre of women at Ecole Polytechnique, but expanded to include other cities and more resources.

"We thought we could use the day to proactively get out there and educate women to recognize and avoid different types of violence," said Henry.

Aimed at girls aged 14 to 19, the day-long seminar includes presentations from self-defense teachers, crisis workers, musical guests Shaharah and Anastasia and survivors of abusive relationships. Topics include sexual assault, stalking, date rape, and party safety.

The Cornwall event takes place on Nov. 17 at the Best Western Parkway Inn. Henry is contacting local high schools to garner interest and expects around 200 people across the region to attend.

"It's a great thing, it's a fun thing as well as an empowering thing," he said. "The girls will hear about issues but also hear from women who have lived through those experiences."

Henry said the personal stories from the singers Shaharah and Anastasia are especially compelling, since young girls seem to listen better to celebrity role models even over health professionals.

"We want to educate them and entertain them," said Henry, adding that self-defense demonstrations and role plays are also part of the conference. "It's a good mix." Though Henry admitted it's hard to measure results from seminars like this one, he believes it can be a life-changer and hopes local teachers and guidance counselors will bring back new students year after year.

"It's a no-brainer," he said. "If it works this year then we're in it for the long-term. That's always how we approach a community."

Since beginning the conference in Montreal, Henry said it has expanded across eastern Canada and into the United States.

But each city has a local flavour. Henry said Cornwall police officers, the sexual assault centre and Baldwin House will all provide resources and support during the seminar.

"If (students) need direct intervention, we can offer it to them right there," said Henry.