

New youth council seeks larger voice for local young people



By Tony Pearson

A group of adolescents is taking on the task of reducing crime in the Bancroft area. They're going to be working with the OPP to identify opportunities to develop community programs for kids and their families which will reduce the causes of youth criminal activity. The new Youth Advisory Board consists of ten teenagers aged from 13 to 17 who are receiving leadership training through North Hastings Children's Services, thanks to a grant from the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety. This training will include communications and media relations, team building, and technological support, which will better enable the group to come up with programs that will reach children between the ages of five and 12 and their families in order to reduce the presence of conditions of risk. The group also hopes to better inform the community about youth needs and hopes, and to enter into two-way communication about youth program development.

Thirty four teenagers submitted applications for the program, of which 21 were interviewed and ten selected. Six are from North Hastings High School, three are from York River Public School, and one is home-schooled.

Among the interview questions was one that asked "If you could wave a magic wand and bring changes to the community, what changes would you like to see?" The answers covered a spectrum. A number wanted to see more activities for young people, and more recreation and entertainment facilities, while others thought the key was greater social justice ? adequate food and housing for all and less discrimination and stereotyping. Some felt the most important thing was to reduce some of the causes of crime, like drug and alcohol abuse and bullying.

The council members were asked why they had applied. Tom Coghlin and Leah Campbell spoke of the chance to help younger people, and to work for more youth programs. Zak Boor noted his wish to create more opportunities for youth voices to be heard. Sam Kiedl talked about the chance to be an agent for change, while Mariah Brinkman stated that she responded to a challenge from her mother to increase youth involvement in the community.

The current group will spend the next couple of months working on their planning and communication skills, then move on to program development. After their term ends in April, they will then act as mentors to the next members of the advisory board.