



News Release

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The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities

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Students Take Action Against Violence

May 29, 2007—More than 170 students participated in the *Students Stepping Forward* Youth Action Conference, hosted by the Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities in Edmonton. *Youth Action* engages young people in identifying and addressing important issues, such as bullying and violence, in their own school communities. This culmination of three pilot projects in 7 Alberta schools introduced an additional 150 students aged 11–18 years to the Youth Action program.

“Youth Action is a unique concept that the Society developed to impact this challenging group”, said Executive Director Donna Blundell, “In order to reach Junior and Senior High students, programming must provide opportunities for youth to take ownership and develop their own strategies to address issues that they consider important”. The *Students Stepping Forward* Youth Action Conference allows for students in pilot schools to present their projects and experiences to the other conference participants, to inspire them to create their own action projects in following years.

By taking students through this process, schools identify the issues that are significant to the student body and are able to support students in gaining a personal connection to the projects they design and undertake. Student participants adopt leadership roles and develop teamwork, communication and presentation skills.

The Youth Action projects involve five main components. In curricular or extra-curricular groups, students: (1) select a focus, (2) collect data through action research, (3) analyze and interpret the data, (4) design and implement projects to address concerns, and (5) evaluate the success of their projects. The pilot projects are funded by: Alberta Education, Canadian International Development Agency and Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada.

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Backgrounder

The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities

The purpose of the *Youth Action* projects is to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors among youth. The SACSC programs: enhance respect, responsibility, and trust; increase scholastic achievement and school completion; and prevent bullying and violence, through the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that promote pro-social behaviour. Involvement in this project encourages students to improve their research skills and knowledge in the area of their action plan.

The core SACSC topics that are the focus of the Youth Action projects are:

1. Building respect and responsibility
2. Building self-esteem
3. Respecting diversity and preventing prejudice
4. Managing anger and dealing with bullying
5. Resolving conflicts peacefully

In addition to core topics, some participating schools have chosen to focus research on student attitudes and opinions toward the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the student projects will focus on how Alberta students can contribute to achieving them. Other schools have chosen to focus on discrimination and how to address issues of homophobia in the school and community.

Research into bullying/violence/crime prevention programming and the Society's 11 years of experience demonstrate that successful implementation of programs at the secondary school level is considerably more challenging than at the elementary level¹. This project will identify successful approaches and practices that lead to sustained implementation of violence prevention programming and positive outcomes in schools with students aged 11–18. The Society's greatest programming success with older youth resulted from involving students in leadership roles. The Youth Action approach develops leadership by empowering youth to become change agents reducing risk and increasing protective factors in their school communities.

The three SACSC Youth Action project titles are:

- **The Development of a Youth Action Process to Build a Safe, Caring and Inclusive Learning Community—A pilot project** (Funded through Alberta Education)
- **Dealing with Homophobia, Phase II: Expansion, Evaluation & Promotion of Phase I Resources** (Funded through the National Crime Prevention Centre, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada)
- **Towards Achievement of the Millennium Goals: Students Taking Action** (Funded through Canadian International Development Agency)

¹ Scheckner, S., Rollin, S.A., Kaiser-Ulery, C., & Wagner, R. (2002). School violence in children and adolescents: A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of current interventions. *Journal of School Violence*, 1(2), 5-33.