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THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Stopping hatred starts with you, students told



Daniella Lurion leads a discussion with a Grade 8 class at Cardinal Heights Middle School on Hamilton Mountain Thursday. The Tour for Humanity bus, a 30-seat mobile education centre is used to offer lessons in hate, tolerance and the importance of human rights. Photo credit : Barry Gray/The Hamilton Spectator

Hamilton Spectator
By Dave Churchill

Kids tell Daniella Lurion she has the "coolest classroom ever."

But along with the 30-seat classroom on wheels outfitted with floor-to-ceiling screens and a high-tech video system, Lurion is delivering a serious message. She brought her 45-minute presentation examining hatred throughout history to Hamilton's Cardinal Heights Middle School Thursday.

The Tour for Humanity hit home with Grade 6 and 7 students as they learned about the Holocaust and the treatment of native and Japanese people in Canada during the Second World War. Some of the kids had tears in their eyes as they heard the stories, including about how millions were killed.

"The Holocaust happened 70 years ago but it's still happening today," said Lurion.

She told the students that more than half of the hate crimes are committed by young people between the ages of 12 and 24.

"Kids your age are committing hate crimes," she explained. "That's why we need to have this conversation. People are being targeted just for being who they are."

Surrounded by photos of Anne Frank, Martin Luther King Jr. and Mother Teresa, Lurion told the students they can play a role in stopping hate crimes, particularly online. The message is simple: stop, block and tell — stop spreading tales or unflattering photos online, block those who are gossiping and tell an adult if things are getting out of hand.

Lurion told the students that even one small gesture can make them heroes in their school and community, and that our history isn't perfect but our future can be better.

Grade 7 student Shannon Lee said the students took the advice to heart.

"It was pretty sad to see. We've learned about the history, but I thought it was over with."

Teacher Ashley Watts said the Mountain school will have the Tour for Humanity back again in June.

"It fit in really well with what we've been doing in the classroom," she said. "We've been talking about human rights."

Since 2014, the Tour for Humanity has travelled to more than 100 schools and communities across the province, giving its presentation to about 50,000 students.

Tour for Humanity is an initiative by the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies. For more information, see tourforhumanity.com.