

Students receive a lesson in tolerance



Four separate groups of 30 students had a chance to learn about diversity, democracy, and Canadian civic rights and responsibilities during a presentation on the Tour For Humanity bus at North Middlesex DHS on Wednesday, June 3rd. Those messages were presented by Education Associate Daniella Lurion (right) from the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies (FSWC).



The Tour For Humanity bus cost \$1.2 million to conceive, design and build. It is a 30-seat, wheelchair accessible, state-of-the-art, technologically advanced mobile education centre that presents information across Ontario on the effects and consequences of hate and intolerance.

By Eric Nixon, Hayter-Walden Publications

A large group of students at North Middlesex DHS received a powerful lesson on Wednesday, June 3rd about hatred and intolerance. But that lesson wasn't taught in a traditional classroom. It took place inside the Tour For

Humanity bus, a mobile human rights education center designed to teach people about the topics of diversity, democracy, and Canadian civic rights and responsibilities.

Tour For Humanity (or T4H) was created by the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies (FSWC). Accord-

ing to the organization, "The purpose of T4H is to inspire people of all ages and backgrounds, empowering them to raise their voices and take action against hate and intolerance, bullying and to promote justice and human rights."

There were four separate presentations for the students throughout the day in the bus, which can accommodate 30 people at a time, plus an extra session for parents and the public at the end of the day. They were led by FSWC Education Associate Daniella Lurion.

The main focus of the experience was on genocide, the deliberate and

systematic extermination of a national, racial, political, or cultural group.

Although much of the presentation focused on the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis in WWII, numerous other examples of genocide were also given, including those in Turkey, the Soviet Union, Cambodia, Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

Lurion told the students that today's ongoing extremist campaign being led by ISIS is not currently considered to be genocide, but she expects, one day, it will be added to that long, horrendous list.

Interspersed with Lurion's lessons to the students were short

documentaries on World War II, universal genocide and, finally, on heroes who have fought against hatred and intolerance in their lives.

Lurion outlined the 10 stages of genocide to the students: classification, symbolization, discrimination, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, persecution, extermination and denial.

A key message the FSWC hopes to get across is that these atrocities must never be forgotten - and should never happen again. As well, bigotry and hate should never be acceptable.

Lurion says she hopes the NMDHS students - and everyone who sees the presentation - will "learn from the past mistakes and make a difference going forward." She also wants to leave people with a message of hope.

The idea to bring the bus to NMDHS (and to South Huron DHS in Exeter the following day) came from Gary Eagleson, a member of the Rotary Club of Grand Bend. Eagleson and his wife were watching the Holocaust movie 'Schindler's List' earlier in the year. He was scheduled to book a guest speaker for the Rotary Club's March meeting and, since this is the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, he decided to bring a Holocaust survivor to the meeting. The man gave what Eagleson calls a "phenomenal talk" and this, in turn, gave him the idea to bring Tour for Humanity to the two schools.

"It's never been in a rural area," he explains, and he felt it would tie in with the anti-bullying campaigns at the school and also help to promote the idea of leadership in

some of the students, something he says is needed in our communities.

"Our future is the people that are young here and if they can start to look at some of things that caused a lot of people harm in the past - and how they have come to counter some of that - it should cause some percolation in some kids' minds," says Eagleson.

Lurion was pleased to be able to bring the important lessons of the presentation to Parkhill. "Part of Tour For Humanity's purpose is to reach more rural communities that can't come to Toronto or even make it to London - for us to go to them," she says. "This is a new area for us - we've never been up here before."

NMDHS Principal Drew Cook was grateful the Tour For Humanity was able to bring its message to the students of Parkhill - but he also says it's important for the school to continue reinforcing that message in the future.

"We bring about some change in thinking and perception on the day they come, but then, in the days that follow, we need to do something to make it take root in this school," he explains.

Cook is confident that he and his staff can keep the lessons learned from the presentation alive in the students' minds. That will, in the long run, make NMDHS a more tolerant and better place for them to learn.

"I think there was a message of hope and the possibility of change - I'd like to see what that might look like here in our school," Cook says.

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