

# 'You have made a huge impact'

## **Grimsby Secondary School students speak out to social needs in community as Team Project S.H.A.R.E. wins \$5,000 for charity**

Joanne McDonald, Grimsby Lincoln News

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Grimsby Secondary School tapped into a force for change through the power and enthusiasm of its students who took the classroom outside to learn about their community's social issues.

GSS students researched local charity and non-profit organizations and presented them before a panel of judges as part of the Youth and Philanthropy Initiative (YPI), a ground-breaking program developed by the Toskan Casale Foundation which teaches them about the fundamentals of philanthropy.

Judges awarded the Project S.H.A.R.E. (Support, Housing, Awareness, Resources and Emergency) team first place and \$5,000 for the charity. Team members, Grade 11 students from teacher and project facilitator Chris Dueck's class included Brandon Heuving, Sarah Dowhun, Miranda Allan and Mike Tompa. They did an outstanding presentation on the non-profit charitable organization which helps meet emergency needs for individuals living below the poverty line.

While Project S.H.A.R.E. took top place, every participating team member and audience member was empowered to help make a change in their community.

"Empathy is grown and nurtured, not innate within us. YPI assists that growing process and creates a body of youth who know their community and empowers them with leadership, communication, presentation, and interview skills in a real life context," Mr. Dueck said.

Students getting up in front of 200 of their peers was a daunting task and all the groups took that task upon themselves to support others -- people they don't know and for charities they probably didn't know about before the project, said Mr. Dueck.

Five classes researched charities and presented them before a panel of judges that included Grimsby Mayor Bob Bentley.

"The presentations were tremendous," Mayor Bentley said. "A lot of time and thought went into each one. It was hard to choose."

GSS will join 200 schools across Canada May 29 in Toronto to officially receive the cheque. More than \$1 million will be distributed through the YPI program.

"You have made a huge impact," said Jackie Plessl, Youth and Philanthropy Coordinator, Leaders Today. "These are some of the best presentations I've seen," Ms. Plessl told the GSS students.

Mr. Dueck said that GSS got involved through its Students In Action social activism group which partnered with Leaders Today.

"Having students do something- research, visit, plan, present, revise, perfect the presentation for others and not for marks is a great experience for a teacher whose philosophy of education does

not involve or weight the 'grading process' as important or a part of true learning," said Mr. Dueck. "These are the best presentations of my career."

Some of the charities researched for the project included: Grimsby Benevolent Fund; Foundation of Resources for Teens (FORT); Living Rock, reaching the displaced youth of society; 10 Oaks Project, a program for children and youth with lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-identified, two spirit, queer (LGBTQ) and or/non-traditional families; Gillian's Place, a safe haven for abused women and children; Danielle's Place, providing support for people with eating disorders; Community Living; Big Brother, Big Sisters; Autism Bursary; Seeing-eye Dogs; Tender Wishes- for terminally ill children; and Hannah's House, a maternity home for teen moms.

Many of the GSS students have raised dollars or volunteered at the charities they researched "which would not have happened without this program," Mr. Dueck said, adding it supports the Ontario curriculum's 40 hours of community service.

The YPI was launched in 2002 to help high school youth learn not only about their communities' issues but also the local charities that are working to create positive change. The YPI curriculum taught the GSS students the "ins and outs" of operating a charity or non-profit organization.

Students were required to choose one charity within the social service sector, research their work and visit the site. The students then prepared a proposal for a funding request. One proposal was selected from each class and the final element was the class team presentations before the independent judging panel.

Every school in Niagara can join the YPI program and award a charity a \$5,000 grant.

