

“I think that our morality is compromised because of what we’re used to seeing”

Student displays shed light on violence and social work practice

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On Monday, March 4, 2013, the Violence and Social Work Practice Class held their sixth annual Day of Visual Displays.

Scattered throughout the Agora were a number of powerful interactive displays drawing attention to the many different forms of violence this world unfortunately produces. Based on the conversations with some of the participants, the underlying messages were consistently frightening.

First and foremost, the presentations informed the audience that violence exists around every corner. It is especially real in those dark places which people miss because it hurts to look, or sometimes because the problems appear invisible. Sadly, until society learns to recognise the importance of action, fellow human beings will live in pain and suffering.

The second important take-home message was about the normalisation of cultural problems that should never be accepted. “Re-sensitising” this culture towards the hatred and obscenities that have become acceptable is what one presentation aimed to engage conversation in. According to partakers Sheena Zegil and Kara Savas, it’s important to re-sensitize yourself, because many things in society which become accepted as the norm really shouldn’t be.

Among the displays were themes of sexual abuse, homeless-

ness, bullying, child soldiers, children kidnapped for the sex trade, and abuse in relationships.

One display featured many different types of abuse and asked onlookers which examples they actually recognised as such. They chose from types of violence such as: domestic, verbal, emotional, prejudice, the media’s rape culture and body stereotypes, animal, environmental, racial, psychological, spiritual, and physical.

Laurie Bernard, a third-year Lakehead Social Work student, set up a display on homelessness. To make her station more effective, she included an example of a homeless person’s shelter consisting of a cardboard box with a black tarp on top. “This is a very real example of how these people live,” she said. Bernard explained that on any given night there are about 33,000 homeless people in Canada and of them, 8,000 to 11,000 thousand are youth. She said that the problem is getting worse, and people need to stop turning a blind eye because this could happen to anyone.

Stephanie Duke’s presentation, called Child’s Play, focused on bringing awareness to the recruitment of child soldiers in conflict-ridden countries. According to her, 250,000 children in the past eight years have been used as soldiers in armies. The worst part, she said, is that when they escape from these armies, they rarely get help when they go home, so many go back to the armies because at least they’re fed there.

Duke told me the story of Juliet, who was “made a ‘wife,’ which essentially means [she was] sexually abused, and became pregnant. She went into labour during a war . . . she lost her child. During the unsanitary procedure she became ill. When Rwanda had a peace meeting she was allowed to go to hospital there. Luckily, a nurse that found her, saved her. She is now becoming a lawyer to help others.”

Duke also explained: “It’s hard to think that these things are happening right now, and it’s thought of as an invisible topic because it’s so far away from us. Children can’t read or write one word, but they can assemble and AK47 in ten minutes.” She reminds readers to “open their eyes and start paying attention to what’s going. I think that our morality is compromised because of what we’re used to seeing.”

Angelina Benincasa presented *The Argus* with her findings on abuse in relationships. She is a survivor and knows firsthand the importance of providing support for those in need of help: “There is more to domestic violence than physical abuse: there is emotional, financial, sexual. . . . A big misconception on sexual abuse is that just because you’ve already been intimate with your partner they can demand it any time they want. You have a right to say no.”

She reminds readers that name calling, lying, having to get permission to go out, constantly being accused of cheating, or having a partner blackmail you with some-



GARY MUSSON/ARGUS

Stephanie Duke presents Child’s Play, discussing the active efforts of recruiting child soldiers in conflict-ridden countries.

thing you said are all forms of verbal abuse.

Kristen Smith and Bree Nistico discussed how child trafficking exists in Canada. According to their research, an estimated 16,000

Canadian children are trafficked each year. Smith said “more people are enslaved than there were before, and lots of them are young children. Sadly, there is global demand for children’s bodies.”