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**NIAGARA** *this* WEEK

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## Tour for Humanity aims to make the connection

Lessons of past can apply to today, Westland students learn

Niagara This Week - Niagara Falls  
By Richard Hutton



Tour for Humanity facilitator Daniella Lurion speaks with Niagara Regional Police Chief Jeff McGuire prior to making a presentation to Grade 9 and 10 students at Westlane Secondary School Dec. 12-RICHARD HUTTON/STAFF Photo

NIAGARA FALLS — It was the type of scene that plays out often over the course of a school year, students climbing aboard a bus ready for an educational trip.

Only this time the bus wasn't going anywhere, but inside, students were taken on a journey through man's inhumanity to his fellow man.

Grade 9 and 10 students at Westlane Secondary School were the first in Niagara to witness a mobile presentation at the Friends for the Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies Tour for Humanity. The tour was invited to the school by Westlane's Me to We Club.

"Everything you are going to see is real," tour facilitator Daniella Lurion told a group of about 10 students.

Students were given a brief history of the Holocaust before being shown documentation of the residential school system in Canada where native children were taken from their homes and forced to assimilate into European way of life.

"The last residential school closed in 1996 so that was less than 20 years ago," Lurion told the group.

The presentation also touched on the Canadian treatment of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War as well as bullying and cyber bullying, including the suicide of Amanda Todd, who was subjected to a relentless barrage of bullying online after topless photos of her made the rounds.

While they may have been events from the past, students need to know so they can see the connection to what they experience today, whether it be racism or hate crimes to physical, emotional abuse or cyberbullying through social media.

"We really try to connect people to the present. If you have Hitler, who was a bully what's the connection to bullies in school? They both target people who they don't like."

For Grade 9 student Sydney Fortushniok, the presentation was an eye-opener.

"It was very inspiring to listen to," she said. "It makes you think of how you can help."

And that was exactly the point of the presentation, Lurion said.

As grim as the content of the presentation is, Lurion said that it ends on a positive and that the feelings expressed by Fortushniok show the message has sunk in.

"Cyber bullying applies to them. It's relevant," Lurion said. "We always leave on a positive note. How can you help?"

Fortushniok left the session knowing how she can help.

"I will talk to someone who is being bullied," she said. "I will help someone."

Meanwhile, Niagara Regional Police chief Jeff McGuire took in the presentation. The Chief came to his sphere while he was with the Toronto Police Service and has travelled to Europe with members of the group, and he has toured the Nazi death camps with Holocaust survivor Max Eisen.

"The trip was a life-altering experience," McGuire said. "We were walking through the camp where he lost his family."

When it was decided the tour would include a Niagara stop, the chief decided he needed to be there.

"This is valuable to anybody," McGuire said. "Not to forget."

Sarah Murdoch, staff lead for the Me to We Club at Westlane, said with the club's focus on responsible use of social media, the Tour of Humanity represented a great way to drive that point home.

"We wanted to bring awareness to the power they have," Murdoch said.

Many students, she said, were shocked by what they saw.

"A lot of them have not taken civics or Canadian history yet," she said. "I think it was an eye-opening experience for them."