

**OICS STUDENTS CAMPAIGN AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN**

OICS students Kaileigh Russell, Stephanie Higgs and Shea Wojtus hold a banner and letters to be presented to MP Charlie Angus.

A group of students at O’Gorman Intermediate Catholic School have launched their own chapter of “Free the Children” as part of their effort to raise awareness about child labour and sexual exploitation around the world.

Since the beginning of the school year, they have visited each classroom at OICS to tell them how they can work in solidarity to promote a more just and compassionate society. Their powerful message centres on the rights of children, and how they are infringed on a daily basis around the world. They shared tragic examples of child labour, of sexual exploitation and of poverty, which in some cases have led to the premature death of young children. Their goal is to encourage their peers to stand up and take a stand for those who can’t.

After much discussion, they chose to focus a campaign on the protection of children from sexual exploitation. Through research, they discovered that there was work to be done right here in Canada, in terms of lobbying the government to make changes to Bill C-20, an Act to amend the Criminal Code (protection of children and other vulnerable persons).

Currently, this Bill sets the age of consent for sexual activity at fourteen. They approached their fellow schoolmates and invited them to write a letter to Prime Minister Paul Martin requesting that the age of sexual consent be raised to eighteen. They also prepared a ribbon of signatures of students within the school supporting this cause.

Today, the students are holding a media briefing to draw attention to this worthy endeavour. Following the briefing, they will be meeting with MP Charlie Angus to present him with their letters, with the hope that he will bring their request to Parliament Hill.

School Principal Darren Berthier is proud of the leadership role taken on by these young students on such a complex issue. “It is admirable that they have the courage to become such vocal advocates to protect all Canadian children against exploitation,” stated Berthier. “They have evidently developed a profound sense of respect for the dignity and welfare of all children of God. They are truly living out the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations by becoming effective communicators and caring members of society who give witness to the Catholic social teachings by promoting the sacredness of human life.”

Free the Children is an international network of children helping children at a local, national and international level through representation, leadership and action. It was founded by Craig Kielburger in 1995, when he was 12 years old. The primary goal of the organization is not only to free children from poverty and exploitation, but to also free children and young people from the idea that they are powerless to bring about positive social change and to improve the lives of their peers.

For more information, please contact Tanya Surridge, Educational Assistant, OICS



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