

Straight talk and straight answers

Fort Simpson health centre to begin offering no-holds-barred 'Teen Life Class'

by Nathalie Heiberg-Harrison

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Liidlii Kue/Fort Simpson

Students shouldn't be afraid to ask questions about their physical, mental and sexual health, according to Karen Simon, a community health representative with Dehcho Health and Social Services.

However, they often are, which is why Simon

and Bernice Hardisty-Isaiah, a health promotion officer, decided to create a place where teens can go to ask the tough questions.

"Basically we're open to different discussions, because they're either not getting the information provided by their parents or through the school or through the health centre itself," Simon said.

"It's nobody's fault, it's just that kids aren't brave enough to ask the questions."

Starting Oct. 28, Simon will run a "Teen Life Class" at the health centre in Fort Simpson from 3:45 to 5 p.m.

All boys and girls ages 13 to 18 are invited to take part for free.

Topics they plan to dis-

cuss include birth control and feminine protection, what to expect during a breast, pelvic or physical exam, how to properly fit a bra, the symptoms of different sexually transmitted diseases and how traditional Dene knowledge fits into the mix.

COFFEE Break

"We had things that we wanted to talk about as kids and were like, 'Oh gosh, I'm not talking to my parents about that,'" she said.

"It is open for discussion for all the kids to ask questions that they're not going to in class. Even if we have one or two (teens) come in and we can say, 'Well, what do you want to know? What don't you know about STDs?'"

In addition, Simon said they would be bringing in RCMP officers to talk about the age of sexual consent, and the effects of drugs and alcohol on the body.

Simon said the goal is to present the facts, not to judge, so teens can make informed choices about their physical, mental and sexual health.

"Gonorrhea is on the rise



Nathalie Heiberg-Harrison/NNSL photo

Karen Simon, a community health representative with Dehcho Health and Social Services, says students don't have to be shy when asking personal health questions.

in the Northwest Territories so we would show full pictures, like testicular pictures, breast pictures, mouth pictures, with sores on them," she said.

"In school they wouldn't

do that, so we try and do a lot more visuals and say, 'Hey! This is what it looks like having Gonorrhea. That's what to look for.' Because the kids say, 'Oh, it won't happen to me.'"

In the NWT, the rate of gonorrhea infection doubled between 2004 and 2008, according to the 2011 Health Status Report.

Simon said she hopes teens will feel open enough

to attend the class with their parents, and admitted it's natural for both parties to feel awkward or shy about the subject matter.

"There will probably be lots of giggling," she said.