

DART targets dangers to youth from some mobile technologies

By Tabitha Wells

In a world where we are constantly connected to friends, girlfriends, boyfriends and family at all times with cell phones and other mobile technologies, the dangers to youth are even higher.

Fads such as sexting, where someone texts a semi to fully-nude picture of themselves to a partner, increase the likelihood of bullying and sexual harassment, but yet the popularity continues to rise.

That's why Dufferin/Caledon Domestic Assault Review Team (DART) launched their #DoTheRightThing Campaign. The campaign, which was launched late in 2013, is designed to reach out to students through mediums they use often, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, as well as through posters at local schools, recreation centres and community organizations.

"What we really want to do is raise awareness about sexting or sending intimate messages," explained DART Coordinator Laura Moscatiello. "We are targeting young adults and hope that they will really learn from this, because once you send out that message, it's there for everybody to see and you can't take it back."

One thing many teens and young adults don't think about is the potential legal repercussions involved with sexting. While the message may start out intended for only one individual, oftentimes, when there is a breakup or feelings on only one side, the picture gets forwarded. Those who forward the message can face charges for child pornography (if the person is younger than 18), causing them to be registered as sexual offenders, among other charges.

"With one push of a button, a picture is sent and can never be taken back," said Moscatiello. "DART developed a poster which encourages teens to '#DoTheRightThing' and delete the image instead of forwarding it. It also reminds them that there are consequences to forwarding non-consensual intimate images and doing so can lead to charges being laid, or even jail time."

While it may not be in-depth public knowledge, situations like that have occurred in Orangeville and the surrounding areas, all started with what someone thought was an innocent picture. According to Moscatiello, there are certain cases that are ongoing, while others have already seen charges laid.

The reason for the hashtag (# before a word) campaign name is that it is one of the trending methods of "communication" on social media. When a hashtag is used, if someone clicks on it, the word will automatically send the user to all posts/tweets/photos that have used it. The idea is that teens and anyone else who wants to get involved will share the poster with the hashtag to help bring more awareness to the campaign.

"They can help us send out our posters, they can take the image and forward it on social media," explained Moscatiello. "We will be sending out an electronic blast of the poster to other agencies so they can post it on their website and social media avenues like Facebook and Twitter. If teens are using social media to communicate more than ever these days, then they are sure to see our message."

The poster includes information for the DART website, where individuals who need support will be able to find out more information about the community organizations available to help them in an instance where they might be in a vulnerable situation.

"Sexual assault takes on many forms, and with communication and technology being so prevalent, it is important that teens remember to use caution when sending pictures and 'Do The Right Thing'," said Moscatiello.

DART is a community organization consisting of 18 local agencies ranging from police stations, community groups, Family Transition Place and others to work together to find ways to assist women and children who are experiencing domestic violence. For more information on DART or the #DoTheRightThing Campaign, visit www.dufferincaledondart.com