

OPP in schools with new program

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Grade 6 students have been learning about more than reading, writing, and arithmetic thanks to the Rainy River District OPP.

Community Services Officer Cst. Guy Beaudry spent the recently-completed school year teaching the "OPP K.I.D.S." program to classes across the district.

OPP K.I.D.S., which has replaced the D.A.R.E. program province-wide, stands for

"Knowledge Issues Decisions and Choices," Cst. Beaudry told the local Police Services Board at its meeting Friday morning.

There are four components to it: "You and the Law," peer-to-peer relationships, cyber awareness, and drug awareness.

Each component is taught over an hour, and includes a video and exercises related to that day's topic.

"You and the Law," for instance, informs the students about municipal, provincial, and federal laws, and how they relate to them and society.

Peer-to-peer relationships

covers bullying, including the criminality of it.

"Most of the students are at the age of 11 or 12, and we talk about how old you have to be to be arrested, how old you have to be to be charged," Cst. Beaudry noted.

Cyber awareness covers social media, ranging from Facebook to Snapchat, and its uses and misuses.

"The thing that's becoming big with kids is 'sexting,'" said Cst. Beaudry, referring to the practice of sending sexually-explicit photographs or messages via mobile devices.

"A lot kids think, 'Well, we're just kids,'" he added. "But you're getting 12- and 13-year-olds across Canada getting charged with distribution of child pornography because of this 'sexting.'"

"They said, 'Well, what if you're just kidding and playing around?' I tell them it's usually zero tolerance," Cst. Beaudry stressed.

Drug awareness, meanwhile, covers the difference between "good drugs," such as Tylenol, and "bad drugs" like tobacco, alcohol, and worse.

Cst. Beaudry said it's impor-

tant that Grade 6 students get information so they can make the right decisions and choices as they move forward into high school.

"It seems that it's really well-received," he remarked.

"I've been asked already by some of the teachers to come back next year to speak to their new Grades 6s."

The students also seem to enjoy him being in their classroom, Cst. Beaudry added.

"I really like it," he said. "It's very interactive, there's lot of back and forth and talking."

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He recalled that in one school, after being there for a few sessions, students would come up to him whenever they saw him and ask, "Are we doing one today?"

The OPP K.I.D.S. course consists of an introductory session, followed by sessions focusing on one of the topics mentioned above.

Cst. Beaudry brought the OPP K-9 unit back for a sixth session as a sort of bonus this year.

When asked by PSB board members whether there's ever follow-up with students a few years later to see if they remember what they learned in Grade 6, Insp. Steve Shouldice noted

Insp. Robyn MacEachern, who is in charge of OPP Community Safety Services for the entire province, answered that question at a detachment commanders' meeting last week.

The OPP has discovered that the most important thing about D.A.R.E., K.I.D.S., and other such programs is the fact the police officers are in the schools, meeting the students face-to-face, rather than the actual content of the programs themselves, Insp. Shouldice added.

"When they do the follow-up, to see what they've retained and learned and whether or not it's impacted them, the response is that it's negligible," he admitted.

"By Grade 9, all they'll remember is that they had a good interaction with Guy Beaudry and the police. They won't remember really the content of what they're taught.

"That's the benefit—it's being in the schools," Insp. Shouldice stressed.

"It's what we're aiming for."

Cst. Beaudry said district schools, including the high schools, welcome OPP officers to visit them and just walk around.

The detachment here also has hosted nursery school tours.

Cst. Jim Davis in Atikokan has been instructing OPP K.I.D.S. in schools there for the past two years.