

# Province develops sexual violence fund

## THE CHRONICLE HERALD

Students from the South Shore Regional School Board will be recording a song to encourage youth to watch out for themselves and others in social situations where they may be vulnerable to sexual violence or assault.

It is one of six projects given a grant through the province's Sexual Violence Strategy through the Department of Community Services, announced on Tuesday at Acadia University by the local MLA Keith Irving.

In total, more than \$70,000 is being given to projects this spring. Another \$600,000 is coming in the fall.

"We know that public education and awareness are key tools in the work to decrease sexual violence," said Irving.

The money will support community groups and organizations that youth, African Nova Scotians, First Nations people and those who identify as LGBTQ participate in, said Irving.

Acadia University received almost \$27,000 to implement a campus-wide prevention strategy that aims to focus on consent and coercion.

Valley African Nova Scotian Development Association also received \$30,000 to help young African Nova Scotian men who participate in athletics monitor and measure their beliefs and behaviours of themselves and those around them.

Smaller amounts go to the YMCA of South West Nova Scotia, the Sexual Health Centre of Lunenburg and to Middleton Regional High School for a project to address sexualized violence against LGBTQ youth in schools.

"A lot of the youth today are into music, so we thought why not create a song they would listen to and get an understanding of what sexual harassment really is all about," said Rebecca Swinamer, a student from Parkview Education Centre, who is with the South Shore Youth Advisory Committee.

The song the high school students have written is called Got

Your Back.

"The song is about situations when you're out having fun with your friends, and you're looking out for each other and encourage to think about possibilities and precautions," said Jessica Russell, a Grade 11 student at Forest Heights.

"It's not so much what you see in the school so much as what you hear, about students who go to parties and drink or are under the influence of any kind of substance and there is non-consensual activity," said fellow student Jenna Wilson.

The girls say they know someone their age who has been a victim of sexual violence.

"I feel that they don't, they're scared that something is going to happen if they stop, or scared to tell someone about it. I do know a few people who are in that situation right now and I feel like they're a total completely different person after it's happened to them," said Parkview student Rebecca Swinamer.

"They're just not themselves any more."

"Something has to be done about it to bring awareness to it and show people it's not OK," said Jessica Russell.

"And we need to encourage youth to be more comfortable to talk about it in the event it happens. It's not an issue that is talked about enough," she said.

"We are so proud of them," said Shirley Burris, retiring coordinator with the SSRB's student outreach program, Schools Plus.

"Our South Shore youth advisory committee has been working on many projects over the years around awareness and prevention of sexual harassment and assault."

The \$4,000 grant they received Tuesday will be used to record, package and promote the song. The students also run youth wellness camps each year as part of their outreach to their peers.

They also hope to promote the song with the help of local RCMP and Bridgewater Police Services, whom they partner with.