

Barbershop Show teaches kids about human rights



**By Shauntay Grant
The Daily News**

The Barbershop Show hits Halifax today. The dynamic stage presentation is a project of the Ottawa-based non-profit youth organization The 411 Initiative For Change. The show has enlisted Canadian performers including singer Melanie Durrant and spoken word artist Dwayne Morgan to educate youths on human rights issues. The show also aims to empower youth to become active members of the global community. By the time the tour wraps up on Dec. 9, it will have reached 30,000 students in rural and urban centres across Canada.

Anita Wong is the program and development director for The 411. Here's what she has to say about her organization's latest undertaking.

HFX: Tell me about The Barbershop Show.

Anita Wong: The Barbershop Show is a performance musical we had done in the past on anti-racism. What we've done is revamped it so all the content is human-rights oriented. The content is looking at our peers in the classroom as global peers who have been faced with certain experiences — conflicts, violence, war ... they may be refugees or immigrants or sons and daughters of immigrants or refugees. So it's really bringing in more Canadian experiences of the broader public.

HFX: How does the show convey those experiences to the youth audiences?

AW: Well, this particular edition of The Barbershop Show is very heavy in (the right) content. There's statistics. There's data that is brought forth in the artists' own content, as well as the dialogue, activities, workshops...

HFX: How are the youth responding to the material?

AW: The preliminary comments that have come back are overwhelming. At a school that I was at in Gatineau, Quebec, the kids were very, very solemn when we talked stats. And we encourage the kids to speak up, no matter what it is they want to speak up about — we're not there to discourage dialogue. But if [we] say, "30,000 children around the world right now are fighting in armed conflict," there's solemnity. However, when we're doing interactive activities, then they'll be quite lively.

HFX: Why is The Barbershop Show's message important for youths?

AW: (Youths) need to foster a greater understanding of different cultures. We also need to be aware that the experiences of our classmates might be quite different from ours growing up in Canada. We need more understanding and more tolerance. And we need to bring to light the fact that there are conflicts all over the world today. The reality is that there's a child in Sri Lanka who has to wake up every day to a war. And our young people are the next generation. So if we can bring a greater understanding of different cultures to the younger generation, [they] can have an impact on future generations.

The Barbershop Show stops by Lockview High School in Fall River and St. Patrick's Alexandra Junior High School in Halifax today, and Tantallon Junior High tomorrow.

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