

## SHIELD project in Labrador integrating art, technology and culture in project involving youth

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SHIELD project coordinator Denise Cole showing participants some of the art and technology they will be using as part of the project. - Evan Careen

HAPPY VALLEY-GOOSE BAY, N.L. — A group of young men and women participated in their first photo shoot at Mealy Mountain Collegiate last week. The eight youth, part of the SHIELD (Sexual Health Information Exchange Labrador District) project, got a chance to see the technology, art and music they will be using as part of the project and have their photos taken for use online to promote the initiative. Project coordinator Denise Cole, said it gave participants a chance to see the technology and art they will be using as part of the three-year project.

The Tamarack Camera Club was in attendance taking pictures for use on an art-based and culturally relevant youth driven website, which is one of the goals of the SHIELD project.

The project got underway this year. Cole said it's about using art, culture and technology to bring in conversations that may be uncomfortable or usually given in a presentation style.

“It’s something that youth are already familiar with and have a passion for, the art and especially the technology,” she said. “It really allows them to have a voice and a way of expressing themselves.

“It’s about creating a safe space where they can use art and technology to answer questions such as what a healthy relationship looks like.”

One of the things they talk about in the group is sexual health, as an example. Cole said using art and technology is a great way for the youth to express their messaging on that topic and it helps make uncomfortable conversations comfortable. Cole said technology connects with youth since they are already using it as a platform to express themselves, but they want to integrate health experts, awareness, education and Labrador artist role models who use art as a way to express themselves.

“Having youth come and integrate this all together, giving them a chance to tell their message to the world, to their peers, to the adults around them can give them a positive experience and positive life skills,” she said.

Participant Conner Burt said the project was a good way to meet new people and learn about technology. He said it’s helping him learn about things like what a healthy relationship and a healthy life look like.

The project is funded primarily by the Public Health Agency of Canada's HIV Hep C Community Action Fund, sponsored by the Labrador Friendship Centre. In year one, underway now, youth aged 14-18 from central Labrador are involved. It will expand to include the coastal communities later in the project.

**Link:** <http://www.thetelegram.com/news/regional/shield-project-in-labrador-integrating-art-technology-and-culture-in-project-involving-youth-218497/>