

# Teens tackle stereotypes

By **Michelle Do**  
A Staff Reporter

Chris Marquis, 17, wants to make it perfectly clear he's a nice guy.

He's happy with his life, looks forward to the future, loves his parents, values his good friends and says he wouldn't hurt a fly.

But when he tells people he doesn't believe in a supreme being — that he's an atheist — he's often mistaken for the devil himself.

"When I tell people I don't believe in God sometimes they automatically conclude that I'm a Satan worshipper," he said with a big smile. "But the truth of the matter is that I don't believe in the devil, either."

Marquis is just one of the many teenagers who took part in the recent Youth for Youth Conference organized by the Halton Multicultural Council — a United Way agency — that, in part, studied negative stereotyping and ways to combat it.

Held at the Halton Region

## United Way

administrative headquarters, students from about nine schools in Burlington and Oakville spent the day examining many of the "isms" such as racism, sexism and ageism.

Marquis took part in a workshop where people were encouraged to talk about the stereotypes affecting them that just won't go away.

For example, a group of Chinese students let the audience know that they "aren't all good at math" nor are they all quiet and submissive.

A group of East Indians said they are fed up with being called "Pakis" and they all don't own or work in dollar stores.

About eight male students told the audience that not all men are abusive toward women and that although 98 per cent of all rapists may be male, that doesn't mean 98 per cent of all men are potential rapists.

And a solitary gay male stood

up and wanted it made clear that not every homosexual man or boy displays feminine characteristics.

"Everybody has heard the stereotypes, but this is an exercise that allows the minorities to respond," said Sophia Makridis, acting managing director of the Halton Multicultural Council. "These students are leaders and hopefully they will bring back to their schools everything they learned today. They'll be encouraged to organize similar workshops they participated in here and bring them back to their schools."

The Halton Multicultural Council has been operating since 1979 and was created to deliver multilingual services to the region, including helping immigrants and refugees integrate into the community. It also attempts to develop community education programs to increase general awareness of the needs of immigrants and refugees and to facilitate cross-cultural communication and understanding.

2001 - Halton Multicultural Council organized the Youth for Youth Conference in part with the United Way the conference examined many "isms" including racism, sexism and ageism.

**30<sup>th</sup>**  
Anniversary

Halton  
**Multicultural Council**