

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – Honorable Mention]

LILY: A Small Voice of Change

(Original)

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The United Nations reports that violence and discrimination against women exists in all societies. The World Health Organization estimates that 1 in 3 women will be subjected to sexual violence in their lifetime. Alcohol and drug abuse are at epidemic levels among adolescents and young adults. In a world where this is the reality, it is critical that girls of my age are supplied with the knowledge to avoid danger and rise above future challenges.

Yet at Concordia International School Shanghai, it is clear that these as well as other critical and closely related problems are not adequately addressed. Indeed, the Concordia community is a bubble that shields students from topics that ought to be addressed more, and that all female graduates will grapple with in the future.

To rectify this shortcoming, three of my peers and I founded the LILY Project as part of our Applied Global Development and Public Health course. Our mission is exemplified by the symbol of our organization: the lily flower represents knowledge and inner fortitude, which are qualities we want to promote in all girls.

To this end, LILY hosted the High School Girls' Night, a discussion-based event at which we invited female faculty members to share their own stories. These included campus violence, criticisms of Greek life, and gender-based bias both in academia and the workplace. It was intriguing to learn about these subjects, not from a segment on the news or by skimming through a lengthy study, but from the words of respected teachers whom we speak to every day. What further contributed to the effectiveness of our event was the nature of the dialogues it sparked – the women of Concordia dissected in one evening a series of issues that are scarcely mentioned during the school day. For instance, the general consensus is that the reproduction unit of the freshman year Health course was sorely lacking; sexually transmitted diseases were only perfunctorily reviewed, while contraceptives were skirted around at best. However, on March 24th, 2018, not only did we delve deep in every topic we touched upon, but together students and faculty brainstormed

methods of combatting common difficulties women face, which inspired in attendees the confidence to approach obstacles without hesitation or fear.

Yet, despite this success, our work is far from over. In fact, following the graduation of two members, my remaining teammate and I have already made arrangements to carry on the LILY Project and ensure that conversations surrounding women's issues do not fade into silence at Concordia.

Not only will we hold another HS Girls' Night next year, and aim to reach more of our female student population, but we are also seeking ways to expand our efforts beyond their current scope. Planning is in progress for a Middle School Girls' Night, which would operate similarly to its counterpart with a focus on topics that are more relevant to the target age group, e.g. body image, building healthy relationships, and high school transition.

Because we also wish to bring tangible impact on the global stage, LILY will engage in several fundraising campaigns for the ZanaAfrica Foundation, which endeavors to keep girls in Kenya in school by providing sanitary pads and offering reproductive health education. A cash donation of a mere 20 dollars is a small price to pay for a girl's future; and as students attending a private school with so many opportunities at our fingertips, we have an obligation to use our privilege to assist others.

To me, the unifying theme of all LILY Project initiatives is the fostering of both individual self-respect and female empowerment generally. I truly believe that as young as this organization may be, it has sown the seeds of change in my community. I am incredibly proud to be part of such a meaningful and rewarding experience.

This is the change I want to make. This is the change I am currently making.

Works Cited

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