

Going the distance 🚗

NNEC students forego a night's sleep as a fundraiser and as a way to identify with HIV/AIDS

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PARKDALE – On Friday, North Nova students stayed at school long after the last bell had rung. In fact, they stayed there until the early hours, Saturday morning.

No one brought a sleeping bag, but they didn't have to. That was the point, actually. For Friday's Wake-A-Thon, they would stay up all night long. Breanna McNeill, 17, admitted she didn't know how she'd handle a night of no sleep.

"I was the one who was always the first to fall asleep at sleepovers. I'm not a night person," said McNeill, adding they played games – everything from Monopoly to Twister – to pass the time.

But she agreed to stay up on this night as it was, after all, for a good cause. Money raised from the Wake-A-thon would go to support the Children's AIDS Health Program, which Shamin Mohamed Jr. of Toronto founded at age 16 with a group of friends. The program is a registered Canadian charity that helps provide treatment for children and youth infected or affected by HIV/AIDS.

McNeill and her friends, Cassie Martin and Sarah-Jean McLane, decided to hold the Wake-A-Thon at the school as part of a project for their Leadership class. About 25 students participated in the event, with each student fundraising a minimum of \$20.

There's a reason it's called the Wake-A-Thon, says Martin.

"By staying up all night you become so tired, and it really makes you realize how a person infected with HIV/AIDS feels on a good day," she said.

Meanwhile, McLane said she was proud to be part of such an event. "This is a foundation that is doing so much for people living with AIDS/HIV. We're trying to help the best way we can."

Young people can make a difference, she added. Mohamed proved that by starting the foundation when he was still in high school.

"He was so young when he did it," McLane said. "It gives you inspiration to give back to your community."

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