

## People

School groups offer incentives to smoker classmates

# Time to 'break up' with bad habit

By JULIA LE  
Special

Mississauga's Adeola Olowe wants students to stop dating their cigarettes.

She knows first-hand what it's like, having dated the thin sticks herself for a year.

"I did it mostly because my friends were doing it," said the 19-year-old Lincoln Alexander Secondary School student.

It wasn't until Olowe moved to Canada in 2003 that she was able to end the relationship that could have killed her.

Olowe is among 14 students from different Peel high schools

who have formed a group called Extinguish.

The pupils, through a Peel Health program, attended a smoke-free summit last month.

Later this month, they will launch a Make It Your Ex campaign in each of the 14 schools to help smokers kick the habit and discourage others from starting.

Throughout the campaign, smokers who trade in their cigarettes will receive prizes in return.

"We want teens to break up with their cigarettes, and break the habit," said group member Vaibhar Gupta, 15, an Erindale Secondary School student.

Gupta said that by giving teens gift certificates to movies and stores, the group hopes to deliver the message that there are alternatives to smoking.

"They probably know that they are spending a thousand (dollars) or more on cigarettes a year, but we want to show them that they can use that money for something else," said Gupta.

"Essentially, the purpose of the campaign is to give smokers the first step to quitting, just to test out what it would be like to give away their cigarettes, or to not smoke for that day," added Extinguish member Mimosa Kabir, 17.

"The consequences of smoking outweigh the benefits. So many people are dying because (of cigarette smoking), which has no purpose when you can find other substitutions for things to do when you're bored, mad or stressed out."

The number of cigarettes traded in during the campaign will be counted at each of the schools.

"It's a motivation for other schools once they see that it's successful in the schools we go to," said Gupta.

The students hope to take the campaign to other high schools and middle schools next year.