Cyber Bullying on the Rise, Says Researcher

By Janet Lobb

Children who bully appear to have found a new playground to instigate and sustain their peers. Preliminary research from the University of Toronto indicates that cyber bullying is becoming more prevalent.

"With more children and youth using the Internet, e-mail, text messaging, social networking sites and webcams, we're seeing more bullying through these forms of technology," said Professor Paye Mihnea of social work and co-principal investigator of a research initiative on the Cyber Abuse of Children and Youth, funded by Bell Canada.

Mihnea led a research team that held focus groups with students between grades 5 and 12 in the Greater Toronto Area. Among the findings was the image of the cyber aggressor hiding behind the anonymity of the keyboard. The students told researchers that they believed the Internet made it easier for kids to bully others by saying hurtful things they might not say in a face-to-face encounter. The virtual world also allowed bullying to continue after the school day ended, invading the student's home. The focus group session revealed that children and youth do not tell an adult about being cyber bullied because they fear that their computer privileges will be taken away. Participants also felt that since cyber aggressors could not be identified, there was no use in telling parents.

Based on the findings thus far, Mihnea, in consultation with Kids Help Phone, said education and communication are two of the most valuable tools that parents have to prevent cyber bullying and to encourage safe use of the Internet and other forms of technology. Mihnea emphasized that if a child is being cyber bullied, parents should intervene. If the child is being bullied by a peer at school, parents should contact the school principal. If a child is being threatened or harassed online by anyone else, parents can contact cyber-tip.ca or the police.

U of T Club Teaches Business of Chemistry

By W.D. Lightfall

The University of Toronto's chemistry club is a two parts student organization, one part entrepreneurial venture. This club for graduate chemistry students undertakes all the social and volunteer activities similar to other student organizations. But what sets the chemistry club apart is that it's a registered business. It has a business license, pays taxes, operates as a store and is run in an entrepreneurial manner.

"We're a not-for-profit organization; all the money we make from our fundraising activities and selling lab supplies, we put those funds and channel that into improving graduate student life," said Pawan Thakurandoo, who is earning her PhD in organic chemistry.

The chemistry club executive board of nine volunteer member organizers, regularly social outings and educational events. These activities succeed in getting graduate chemistry students out of their labs, said Nicole Stegakis, club president, and a masters student in organic chemistry.

"We don't have any courses or seminars together so you don't get to know other members of the department unless you have some kinds of social activities with the chemistry club," Stegakis said.

"And its not just graduate students, we also involve post-doctoral students, faculty and staff." Professor Scott Malbry, chair of the department, said the club's activities also help break down the inherent barriers that exist between chemistry sub-disciplines.

"These activities throw them all together as colleagues and in undertaking these activities, because all of them involve multiple aspects of volunteerism, collegial associations are made that often last well beyond the time they are students here," Malbry said.

Through an agreement with the graduate chemistry department, the chemistry club sells lab coats and goggles, course materials and laboratory manuals. The money is run by volunteer and any money it makes goes to support the club's activities.

The chemistry club is about more than fun and business; it also has a strong tradition of philanthropy.

A few years ago the club created an undergraduate scholarship and now is offering a scholarship for graduate students.

This year the club's charitable efforts reached far beyond the St. George campus. The group gave $2,000 to a program helping rape victims in the Democratic Republic of Congo and $1,000 to Project Hope in China, allowing 13 students there to attend school.

"We tell the department that the money they spent at this event or that event is helping a child go to school in China," Thakurandoo said. "We hope that gets the message across that there are less fortunate people and brings awareness to these very important but lesser known charities as well."