

Silence puts message across

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By Gian Verano, Special to QMI Agency

Shut up and listen.

That was the message organizers of a protest on London's Richmond Row wanted to convey during the weekend to plead the cause of children living in poverty.

With duct tape on their mouths, more than 60 high school, college and university students stood on the sidewalk of the Victoria Park entrance at Richmond St. and Central Ave. for one hour on Saturday.

"The tape represents the fact that nobody is really listening to all the children who live in poverty worldwide," said Ruth Elgamal, one of the organizers of the Break the Silence event.

"They're not being given a voice, so we're taking away ours."

Protesters collected donations and pledges from people who supported the teens' resolve to go silent for 24 hours - all without talking, texting or social networking.

The event was organized by members of Free the Children - a Canadian organization with a mandate to provide food, clean water, education and health care for impoverished youth around the globe.

"It's really an organization of kids helping kids," said 17-year-old Elgamal.

"Often, young people think they don't have a voice. They think that they have to be doctors or lawyers in order to make a difference. That's not the case. What we're trying to show people is that, as long as they care, they can change the world."

The protest took place simultaneously in 24 cities across the country, all of them organized by students.

"There's really no age limit when it comes to making a difference," said 15-year-old Danielle Prapavessis.

She admits she sometimes feels discouraged when older people doubt the effectiveness of student-run campaigns. But that only makes her want to try harder to change their minds.

"We're the next generation. All the change in the future is going to come from us," she said. "It's a pretty great feeling when people come up to you and ask how they can get involved. It just goes to show that there are a lot of people who really care about helping others."