

## Toronto teens tour Hamilton in the dark



Most tourists visit in the daytime — when the sun's up and stores and restaurants are still open. But 16-year-old Kathy Vuu and a handful of Toronto teens came to Hamilton for a "nightwalk" this weekend, touring the downtown streets late Saturday night, by the light of the street lamps. "I thought it would be all like farmland," she laughed of her previous impression of the city. The group stayed two nights at the Hamilton Guesthouse on Mary Street downtown. The walk — dreamt up by Toronto artist Darren O'Donnell, part of arts group Mammalian Diving Reflex (MDR) — gives the youth group a glimpse at cityscapes they might not otherwise visit. As well, "it creates an experience for the adults and teens to meet and interact when they might not otherwise. It breaks down certain barriers," said Annie Wong, youth wing director for MDR.

A number of Hamilton organizations teamed up to show off local youth skills this weekend, with a graffiti workshop and break dancing demonstration at Beasley Park Sunday afternoon. Hamilton Artists Inc. programming director Irene Loughlin hoped the graffiti session would shed some light on the artistic side of "tagging". She works with teens that have been in trouble with police for vandalizing but has faith they would thrive if more public spaces were available for the art form. "They need a place to do it legally...I think, personally, it's good to support these guys and provide them the right environment for their (art)," Loughlin said. This was the Inc.'s first graffiti workshop, but she is hoping to see more events like it as more public space pops up. The break dancing event was a chance for NGen (New Generation) members to show off the repertoire of moves they've built up at free weekly lessons at the downtown youth centre (what used to be SISO's Globe youth centre). While this was a one-weekend-only project, the weekly break dancing classes at NGen are an invaluable opportunity for Hamilton youth, participants said. Teens come from all across the city for the free weekly classes. "Yes, things like homework clubs, there are obvious benefits to that, but with stress of school and even everyday life it's nice to have stuff like this, to have fun and to do something new," said NGen member and beginner breaker Miquel Baxter, 19. "I think there's different ways of expressing feelings." A grant-funded photo exhibit of the teens' night walk will be displayed in November at Hamilton Artists' Inc., at James Street North and Cannon Street East.