

Students do their part for local accessibility



From the left, Luke Anderson, Justice Currie, John Loder, Collin Sidle, Rhoda Dickinson, Nate Taylor, Dale Thompson, Jesse Mercier, Elizabeth Mulvihill and Mason Forman. John Loder's students, who constructed the ramps pictured here, pose with their teacher and StopGap founder, Luke Anderson.

/ JAKE STOREY Student reporter

By Jake Storey

The StopGap Foundation is a charitable organization, dedicated to constructing ramps in the interest of increasing accessibility while also raising awareness about the barriers our environment can present to those who need them. John Loder's class at North Hastings High School got involved with the organization and constructed six, brightly coloured ramps in order to contribute. The goal behind the vibrant greens, blues and reds of the ramps was to draw the attention of the community, and direct them to StopGap's website, the address for which is printed on the surface of the ramps.

To StopGap, the ramps are not a perfect solution, but a necessary step toward one.

"We're helping people remove their blinders. A horse, with its blinders on can only see in a 65 degree field of view. But when a horse removes its blinders, it can actually see behind itself. It's got a 340 degree field of view. It sees everything," said Luke Anderson, the founder of StopGap. "I believe that as a society, we kinda behave like horses wearing blinders. We just don't see everything and we just don't recognize people for what they can do. We tend to recognize people instead for what they can't do. When we remove our blinders, we start to see people for what they can do."

Anderson came to the school to meet the class and deliver a presentation in the gymnasium. Anderson founded the organization in 2011 after suffering a mountain biking accident which severed two of his vertebrae. From that moment on, Anderson has required the use of a wheelchair for mobility. A former athlete with a degree in civil engineering from the University of Waterloo, Anderson is now a public speaker. "It's just so cool to watch this grow from those first few ramps we put together in 2011 to the almost 1,300 we have now, all across the country. North Hastings is on our map and I'm looking forward to seeing these ramps when the town explodes in the summer," said Anderson. "It's not us that are disabled, but the places that we inhabit, where we live, work and play, that are disabling."

Before the assembly, Anderson met with the class responsible for bringing the movement to Bancroft, along with supporters from the community. Six local businesses contributed to the project, Bancroft Community Transit, Bancroft Ridge Golf Course, ReMax, Bowes and Cocks, Hannah Lithographers and West Wind Gallery and Gifts.

Anderson expressed the idea that a barrier free society was better for everyone. Whether it's because of illness, age or physical disability, everyone is going to need to use what he calls a barrier free amenity, at some point in their life. "We are all only temporarily able-bodied," said Anderson.

Loder's class was invited to the front of the gymnasium with Anderson where they expressed pride in what they'd accomplished together.

Addressing the class, Anderson said, "I want to personally thank you guys for making the world a better place. It's already pretty great, but you guys are making it just that little bit better."