

Day of Pink aims to end discrimination and bullying



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By Nate Smelle

Each year on April 10, students, teachers and school staff across the country and around the world wear pink to celebrate diversity, raise awareness, and put a stop to homophobia, transphobia, transmisogyny, and all forms of bullying.

The International Day of Pink first began in Nova Scotia when two straight high school students intervened when they saw a gay student wearing a pink shirt who was being bullied. Wanting to do more to prevent homophobic and transphobic bullying, they decided to purchase pink shirts, and a few days later got everyone at school to arrive wearing pink, in a showing of solidarity. Recognizing that discrimination comes in many forms ? racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, ageism, colonialism, and anti-Semitism ? Hastings Prince Edward District School Board communications officer, Kerry Donnell said ?We care deeply about students wanting to be at school, and feeling safe and included while they're there. That's one of the reasons our schools and offices have participated in International Day of Pink for the past 10 years. Through this day and other initiatives, such as our award-winning Say and Do Nice Things approach to being inclusive and welcoming, and our Growing with Character traits, we're zeroing in on the importance of being kind, welcoming and having barrier free opportunities for each student to learn in our schools.?

As one of the schools participating in the 10th International Day of Pink, the hallways and classrooms at North Hastings High School in Bancroft were a lot more colourful last Wednesday. NHHS principal Wayne Stewart sees the annual event as an important way to raise awareness of discrimination and shine a light on the social and personal impact bullying has on youth. He said it is also a powerful and effective way for everyone at the school to come together and stand up for those who have experienced or are experiencing abuse by a bully.

?It's a show of solidarity and it shows that we are accepting of all people at our school,? said Stewart.

?All people are different but we are all going for the same thing. We want to be happy and we want to be productive, and anything that goes against that is not welcome.?

Although bullying does take place on occasion at the high school, Stewart said thankfully it happens rarely. When a case is reported however, he said there are several measures that can be taken to hopefully prevent it from happening again. Ideally, Stewart said the school will offer support to the student being bullied, while working with the bully to teach them how their behaviour is cruel and unacceptable. With more severe cases, he said expulsion is also an option.

?We do provide consequences sometimes, but we have had success with restorative practices,? said Stewart.

?Instead of just firing out a consequence to somebody, we try to give them an opportunity to see the true impact of what they have

done.?

While Grade 12 student Zach Kisslinger agrees with Stewart that bullying is rare at the school, he said it definitely still takes place. He said most of the bullying he has witnessed personally tends to revolve around a student's clothing. Noting how unfair this can be considering many students in the area come from families living on a low income, he said, "A lot of people are struggling so you have to think about that. Everyone is different and some people might not take it as a joke. In Bancroft there are a lot of low income families, so not everyone has everything they need. In the wintertime someone might only have one pair of pants and the rest shorts and they don't want to be super cold, so they are stuck.?"

For more information on the International Day of Pink visit them online at: www.dayofpink.org; or email at: Info@DayofPink.org.