

# Bully Busters

*Peers promote positive interactions at H.J. Lassaline*



*Zack Tessier, left, and Tanya Ciliberto are just two of the people at H.J. Lassaline Catholic Elementary School who are involved in the Bully Busters program.*

(Windsor, Ontario, Friday, Nov. 14, 2014) – Zack Tessier knows exactly what it feels like to be bullied. But he also knows what it's like to be a bully. That's exactly why he's a perfect student to champion the cause of putting an end to bullying.

"I was bullied, and I bullied, and I know that neither one feels very good," said the Grade 8 student at H.J. Lassaline Catholic Elementary School in Forest Glade. "I did it to impress my friends, but you lose friends by being a bully. You embarrass yourself."

Tessier is one of a handful of students who act as a 'Bully Buster' in his school. An innovative, peer-led initiative, Bully Busters is a relatively new program which relies on senior students to identify bullying situations and meet as a group to come up with solutions to resolve them.

“It’s a program run by the students, for the students,” says Tanya Ciliberto, a child and youth worker at the school who oversees the program. “We’re catching a lot more things than we ever did before.”

Next week is Bullying Awareness Week, when people around the world raise awareness about the issue and discuss ways to prevent it.

One of the main planks of the prevention program at H.J. Lassaline is the ‘bully box.’ Mounted just outside the school’s transition room, it’s a small box where students can anonymously report bullying situations. The group meets regularly to review those situations and discuss solutions.

“We had one recent situation that involved a student in Grade 2,” Ciliberto said. “Every time she went out for recess, there were students who would tell all the others not to play with her. We brought the students together and talked about the situation. It turns out they didn’t want to play with her because she always wanted to decide what they would play. So they came up with a solution, where every day, each student would get to pick what game they were going to play that day. It might sound like a small thing, but in their world, it’s a very big thing.”

Besides the Bully Box, the students do regular bullying presentations for the rest of the school. The presentations include slides on what defines a bully, how bullies think, ways to deal with bullies, and even how to forgive a bully.

***“It’s starting to work. I feel like it’s going to make a big difference.”***

**-Zack Tessier  
Bully Buster**

Ciliberto said the students involved in the program are visible leaders in the school, so students who may be bullying victims, or have witnessed other bullying incidents, know where to report them.

Besides the Grade 8 leaders, there are also Grade 7 students involved in the program. The older students prepare their younger counterparts so that they can assume those leadership roles the following year.

One of the trickier phenomena they’ve had to deal with is cyber-bullying, Ciliberto said. Social media and electronic devices make it much easier to bully, and it’s a problem fraught with difficulty for schools because much of it happens after school hours.

But Ciliberto said things that happen on line often make their way back into the classroom. Something said on Twitter the night before can cause a lot of problems the following day.

“The minute it comes back in to the school, that’s when we have to step in,” she said. “These are our kids, and we need to take care of them.”

To that end, the students in the program developed a presentation focused entirely on the appropriate use of social media. And while Ciliberto acknowledges they may never completely eradicate bullying, she figures they can dramatically reduce the number of incidents by running programs like Bully Busters.

For his part, Tessier just wishes it was around back when he was in Grade 3, when he said other students made fun of him because he was short. He said it bothered him at first, but he thought it would stop. Eventually it slowed down, but it might have been resolved more quickly if they had Bully Busters back then, he said.

Like Ciliberto, Tessier said he's already noticed a difference in his school.

"It's starting to work," he said. "I feel like it's going to make a big difference."