

Parents carry on anti-bullying fight

Mike and Brenda Neuts lost their son Myles 10 years ago.

By ELLWOOD SHREVE, SUN MEDIA

CHATHAM -- In the 10 years since a gaping hole was ripped open in their family, Mike and Brenda Neuts have been tireless advocates for the safety of children.

The lives of the Thamesville couple were shattered Feb. 6, 1998, when their 10-year-old son Myles was found unconscious hanging by his clothing from a hook on the back of a washroom stall door at St. Agnes Catholic school.

Six days later, the couple would make the painful decision to remove Myles from life support.

Twenty-five months later, the couple began the agonizing process of representing themselves during a six-week inquest into the circumstances surrounding their son's death.

The process left them frustrated as the inquest focused on the investigation conducted by police. As a result, the couple didn't get the answers they were hoping for about how Myles ended up on a coat hook and who was responsible.

Two students were questioned as suspects, but no charges were laid. The Neuts believe their son was a victim of bullying.

In the 10 years that have passed since this unimaginable tragedy, they have tried to ensure no other family has to suffer the same kind of pain.

"It would be very easy for us to sit and dwell on all who failed us," Mike said. "But why go through it? It would only be hurtful to us."

They have turned their grief and anger into action.

Since 2000, Mike estimates he has spoken to more than 100,000 students as he has taken his anti-bullying message across Canada and into parts of the U.S. They have created the Make Children Better Now (MCBN) Children's Association in honour of Myles Casey Benson Neuts.

Ask Mike what keeps him motivated to carry on and his immediate answer is "the kids."

Having collected more than 3,000 thank-you letters from students, he said, "They thank me for what I do and tell me I can't stop."

Mike has received letters from students who identify themselves as bullies and promise not to do it any more, because they never knew it could possibly hurt or kill somebody.

The couple's fight to address bullying has come at a cost in other ways. Brenda said they have lost touch with friends and know some people feel they should just try to get over what happened and move on.

Taking up the anti-bullying cause "helped with the healing process, big time," she said. But there is still the dull pain of losing Myles that they will never get over.

"I still get teary-eyed," Brenda said.

"We belong to a club you don't want to be in and it grows every day -- parents who have had their children die as a result of bullying," Mike said.

