

Students in the pink to end bullying

EDUCATION: More than 135 elementary and high schools in the region are participating

By KATE DUBINSKI

The Grade 12 girls were on their way home when they saw a Grade 9 boy being picked on and his cellphone tumble out of his hand.

"A bunch of Grade 10 guys were pushing him around in the parking lot," said Yohanna Emun, 17, one of the teens who saw the altercation.

"By the time we got to him, he'd gotten away from them, but we asked if he was OK and we gave him a ride home," said Emun's friend, Corissa Parker, also 17.

It was that kind of intervention that needs to happen daily, the two Clarke Road secondary school students said yesterday.

They and their fellow students were decked out in pink -- T-shirts, head bands, socks, bracelets, ties and other accessories -- for the start of anti-bullying week.

The Sea of Pink event asks students and staff to take a stand against bullying by wearing pink.

More than 11,000 of the shirts were ordered for the Thames Valley District school board.

The campaign began in Nova Scotia after a student was bullied for wearing pink. The next day, a group of students attended school in pink T-shirts as a sign of solidarity, and the event took off nationwide.

"Bullying has so many more implications than you can actually see," Parker said.

"You sort of see the tip of the iceberg. You never know what might be going on at home or after school. If you just make that difference by making someone feel good at school," that could help increase self-esteem.

The reasons for wearing pink were as varied as the students themselves.

Gairot Agathos, 19, in Grade 12, said he never wants to see his younger brother bullied.

"It's the right thing to do," he said.

Agathos said many Grade 9 boys didn't wear pink yesterday, perhaps because they didn't feel comfortable.

But if they see older students standing up, they'll set the example in the future, he said.

For Robbie Chaplin, 16, in Grade 11, the pink T-shirt was about showing he'd stand up for his friends.

"I know a bunch of friends who've been bullied physically," Chaplin said. "I've stepped in once or twice. I want to show . . . there are guys who do care."

More than 135 elementary and high schools in the region are participating and activities continue all week.

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