

National Bullying Awareness Week: 'Losers' Creators, Everyone, Fight Back With Film

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Cyber-bullying affected a kid aged 8 - 17 in about every 10th household in Canada this year, according to Statistics Canada.

On top of this, 35 per cent of kids said they have witnessed bullying on a daily basis, according to a Kids Help Phone independent survey. National Bullying Awareness Week wraps up this weekend with schools and community groups pledging to "stand up" against bullying across the country. And one group of filmmakers has taken a unique approach to make the public care.

"Losers," a short film that appeared online this week, is a look at a cross-section of teens in a high school. With students portrayed as bullying or being bullied, the film conveys a similar message to the popular "It Gets Better" campaign, reassuring kids that we've all been there. But the expert filming and emotional impact go beyond that, showing the hurt and pain in the moment, and asking kids to take a step back and think about how they're actually behaving.

Daniel Mercadante, Will Hoffman, and Julius Metoyer III, the minds behind Everyone, a New York-based production company that created the short, reveal the inspirations and experiences behind the film.

Why did you choose bullying as your topic?

Bullying is a thing that inherently affects people on a very emotional level, and it is a powerful cycle. As filmmakers, we feel a certain sense of duty to observe and share things that happen every day, particularly when those things play a strong role in the shaping of the emotional state of people and communities.

Did any of you have personal experiences with bullying?

I think most people have been bullied and/or acted as bullies at some point in their lives. The scary thing is how even the most subtle comment or action can stir fairly extreme emotional trauma. Sure, we've all been picked on in some way, but the really ugly stuff is that we've been bullies without knowing it. We aren't the archetypes, but we've certainly played our part on both sides of the coin. The important thing is to achieve some sort of heightened awareness, to realize and foresee the cycle, and stop it before it digs too deep.

What was the process behind making the film?

Bullying is not an easy thing to make a film about. We were aware of that from the start. So, rather than

going in with a set plan, we started out by talking with high school kids for a week. A local high school was kind enough to let us roam the halls and conduct informal interviews. We heard their stories, we felt their pains, insecurities, care, ignorance, awareness, fear, denial, hope. It became fairly clear that in order to tackle the subject in a general but poignant way, we didn't want to make a film about specific acts or situations, but about the overall feeling. There are (too many) stories out there that need to be heard, but we realized that our job wasn't to tell specific stories, but to tell the unified story, through the thing that bullying affects most, emotion.

How were the kids involved?

All the kids are themselves, but for certain scenes we had them act out scenarios. They were incredibly helpful through the whole process, and we can't thank them enough.

What did you hope to gain from the film?

More than public awareness, we want to raise public sensitivity. You hear so many stories in different media venues that they become forgettable before they leave an impact. We wanted to cut straight to the core, to make people *feel* what it's like to be a bully and to be bullied.

What's next for the team?

We are in the midst of writing a feature film. Generally, it's about the harmony of everyday people/places/things and the transfer of energy between them.