

NATIONAL POST

‘This hurts too much,’ gay teen says in last blog before suicide

Sarah Boesveld Oct 17, 2011



*Courtesy of Hubley family
James Hubley with his father Allan Hubley*

Jamie Hubley’s goodbye letter appears on a blog that gave so many signs of what was to come: powerful images of other young people attempting suicide after being bullied, dark self-harm mantras and pictures of razor-sliced skin.

Less than a week ago, an anonymous commenter told the 15-year-old openly gay student from Ottawa to stop hurting himself, to believe that he has something to live for. The comment was met with a curt “No.”

“I don’t want to wait 3 more years,” he wrote Saturday in his last message to the world. “This hurts too much. How do you even know It will get better? Its not.”

The line from Jamie’s suicide note reveals a troubling reality about many high schools that are ground zero for homophobic bullying: As more and more effort is placed on stopping discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) students, the bullying rages on — often with tragic costs.

It’s been a little more than a year since a video from syndicated sex columnist Dan Savage telling gay teens that life gets better after high school went viral, prompting a video of support from President Barack Obama and countless others.

Gay Straight Alliance groups (GSAs) have sprouted up in high schools across the United States, Canada and around the world in an effort to end homophobic bullying. Lady Gaga, a performer Jamie professed to have loved, has been a champion of their acceptance. TV shows like *Glee*, another of his favourites, have openly gay characters.

“Just when media culture is becoming more inclusive so LGBTQ students can see representations of a more safe and respectful community, their high schools aren’t getting any better,” said Catherine Taylor, an education researcher at the University of Winnipeg who has studied homophobic bullying in schools. “[When] Jamie says ‘I don’t want to wait 3 more years,’ that’s obviously a direct reference to the *It Gets Better* campaign. And when you’re 15 years old and staring down three more years of being bullied as a

fag in high school, it seems like a lifetime. Life moves slow and it's hard to project yourself into the future if you have a ruined present."

Internet-based projects like Make It Better aim to improve the situation now, she said. A post about Jamie's death appeared on its website Monday.

Recently, when Jamie tried to start a Rainbow Club at his high school to promote acceptance of others, the posters were torn down and he was called vicious names in the hallways and online, his family said. This year, Prof. Taylor co-authored the first national climate survey on homophobia in Canadian schools, released by Egale Canada. About 70% of the 37,000 students surveyed said they hear "that's so gay" and similar phrases every day in school. Almost 50% reported insults like "faggot," "lezbo" or "dyke" were hurled about daily. Three-quarters said they were heterosexual.

"They're getting symbolic permission to be mean in this way from various socially conservative segments of society and also from the enduring silence of the vast majority of their teachers," Prof. Taylor said, adding that teachers typically do not get enough resources and support from principals, school boards and ministries of education.

Jamie's father, an Ottawa-area municipal councillor, said in a statement Monday that the teenager had been suffering with depression and was under doctors' care.

"He struggled with the idea that people can judge you harshly even when you are trying to help others," said Allan Hubley. "Jamie asked a question no child should have to ask — why do people say mean things to me?"

In British Columbia, the province-wide BC Adolescent Health Survey has measured sexualization in the general population since 1992. Among students through Grade 7 and 12, those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual are significantly more likely to be bullied and harassed, said Elizabeth Saewyc, a professor of nursing and adolescent health at UBC who carries out on the survey, carried out every five years. They're also two to eight times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers. The survey's also found students coming out younger and younger, she said. And while reports of suicide attempts and thoughts among the general population of students is going down, the rate for LGBT teens remains unchanged. In 2003, there was a reported increase in suicide attempts among lesbian and bisexual girls. The next survey comes out in 2013 and has already suggested some improvements to come.

"Some of our preliminary results show that harassment isn't necessarily going down in B.C.," she said. "However when schools have GSAs, LGB kids in those schools are reporting less discrimination." One especially troubling aspect of Jamie's blog is the presence of others who are also depressed and troubled, some of whom say they are gay or bisexual.

One of his friends' blogged this sentiment on Sunday, after the news of his death: "Am I supposed to go to school and act normal tomorrow after what happened?" the girl wrote. "How can I do that? Bringing a razor blade and a lighter just in case."

There's a "diffusion of responsibility" in the online world, said Wendy Craig, a professor of psychology at Queens University in Kingston, who specializes in bullying.

"The really sad thing for me is here's a kid who cried out for help and nobody saw."
Most teens tend to seek out others who are like them online and otherwise and Jamie clearly felt

validated by the friends he connected with on his blog, she said.

“If we can learn something, it’s that the Web can give these children a voice and sometimes they might find other material that almost validate their perspective,” said Prof. Craig. “Kids have access to all of this information and can’t put it in a context that’s helpful. In this case, it became a justification for his actions going forward.”

National Post