



## Young lives bullied to death

### Recent child suicides illustrate anti-bullying initiatives are not working for everyone

By Moira MacDonald  
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**A man stops to read a display outside a downtown Ottawa store — articles and messages about Jamie Hubley, 15. The Ottawa teen and bullying victim took his own life last month.**  
**CHRIS ROUSSAKIS/QMI AGENCY**

Mitchell Wilson, 11. Jamie Hubley, 15. Chris Howell, 17.

Three boys, all living in Ontario, all dead within six weeks of each other, each by his own hand. Each was a kid dealing with difference.

Mitchell had muscular dystrophy. Chris had Tourette's syndrome, obsessive-compulsive disorder and ADHD. Jamie was gay.

All three were bullied.

This isn't a whodunit, or even a whatdunit.

As one researcher expressed it to me, when it comes to youth suicide, it's hard to pinpoint exactly what led to the child's fatal decision.

In these cases was it bullying? Discrimination? Was it mental illness? All three boys suffered degrees of mental distress.

No wonder.

Maybe it was some combination of all of the above.

But that shouldn't stop us from looking at the factors we know about and asking what's being done. As far as bullying goes, there's gobs of money thrown at it, but these cases strongly suggest it's not working — not for everyone.

Mitchell Wilson had his face smashed into the pavement. His alleged attacker was arrested and removed from his school — but that boy's friends continued to harass Mitchell.

Chris Howell was taunted by other kids since grade school because of how he looked and acted. Jamie Hubley had batteries stuffed down his throat in Grade 7, and his posters promoting a "Rainbow Club" at his high school ripped down.

The supposed educational counter-measures to bullying didn't work for them. So as we enter Bullying Awareness Week the question that has to be constantly asked is, "yes — but does it work?"

There is no point bringing in another new anti-bullying program or sitting teachers in front of videos if there's no proof — or no one is even looking for it — that such things actually cut down bullying and make things better for those who are targets.

Lip-service isn't enough either. If I had a dollar for every time I heard someone in the school system say, "we take bullying very seriously" I'd have a nice rainy day fund.

Ditto for the times the targets of bullying have attested they were told they could change schools — not their bullies — if they didn't feel safe.

If the targets of bullying aren't treated seriously when they're alive, how can those in charge keep saying they take bullying seriously? It's insulting.

Likewise, I've been contacted plenty of times by well-meaning people about the latest bullying awareness program or presentation.

I can't recall anyone giving me data showing these things worked.

The Toronto District School Board recently had a proposal to spend \$100,000 on an entertainer who does bullying prevention shows for students.

Apparently he's very engaging and kids love him. Yes, but does it work?

We're told by researchers that bullying in Canada is high.

But we don't know how much bullying is going on in Ontario schools. Data is kept on the number of bullying-related suspensions — but not all bullies get suspended.

Why not keep data on the number of bullying complaints at school, or even reports by staff, which they now must make to their principal? That could be one measure of whether these programs, costing Ontario \$50 million a year, are doing anything.

Then there are coroner's inquests.

The deaths of those three boys seem enough to merit one, although besides shining yet another "spotlight" on the problem, inquest recommendations have no legal teeth.

And the lack of enforcement or consequences is a common refrain in bullying.

The gay rights group Egale Canada has requested an inquest in the wake of Jamie Hubley's death (which the coroner is examining), to look at youth suicide generally and gay youth suicides particularly. It might be a start. But the circumstances behind the deaths of those three young names suggest there's even more to examine than that.