

## Kindness campaign gets kids out of comfort zone, building foundation for future



**By Brock Weir**

It was the last Wednesday of the month, but February 25 was a bit out of the ordinary for Hartman Public School students Alexa and Solanna.

It was Pink Shirt Day, the growing anti-bullying movement, and heading into their assembly that day, the girls were surprised there were more boys than girls taking the plunge to don the uniform of the day.

'I was surprised, but happy at the same time,' says Solanna.

'I think no matter what gender you were, it didn't matter,' adds Alexa. 'You just wanted to make a change.'

Solanna and Alexa were just two students at the forefront bringing both the anti-bullying campaign, as well as 'Say My Name Canada', a one-month kindness challenge into their school and the results, they say, were palpable.

Say My Name Canada was launched at the end of January, with a song to underscore the importance of tackling bullying. Through the campaign schools and the community at large were encouraged to focus on acts of kindness while keeping track of what you were doing to make the world a better place.

'For me, kindness is being there for someone,' explains Solanna. 'Kindness is also an act that shows who you really are because the way you act when you're kind could also be a huge part of you, even if you do it rarely. If you have the choice of being right or kind, choose kind. Even if you are right, kind is always the best way to go.'

This is a message imparted on the students by teacher Jenn Grant. When Principal Stephen Helston approached her with the idea to foster the campaign within their walls, Ms. Grant says they both saw it as a great initiative to spearhead.

'The whole purpose of this is to remove barriers and try to get everybody on the same page in thinking there are no barriers and there are no limitations when everyone is thinking and acting accordingly, and comfortable in their own space,' says Ms. Grant. 'We want everyone to feel like they belong and are part of a team.'

In delivering this message to students, Ms. Grant faced a number of questions. Some, she said, believed being kind is an expectation, but the idea is to 'go above and beyond what is expected of you as an individual.'

'We found that everyone was on board with being kind, and we also had follow-up activities afterwards asking [the students] that now that the activity was over how it impacted them,' she says. 'We had some students say, 'we wouldn't normally talk to this student, or that student' and you realise that even though he might not have been his best friend, it kind of brought us closer together as a family and a team at the school.'

Beyond this, kindness was also measured in the halls of Hartman in a very tangible way. As the campaign gained traction, each classroom would post acts of kindness on their doors and bulletin boards for all to see. Mr. Helston says the level of spirit displayed by students has been 'absolutely magnificent.'

These acts were compiled in to a six minute video created by staff and presented to students. In anticipation of it unspooling for a spirit assembly, he said it will drive home just how involved the students were and the positive legacy it has left behind.

Asked to pick a favourite, he selected one from a Grade 1 student named Sydney.

'It just said, 'I stood up to the bully and helped my friend,'' he says. 'I think people really now have a better understanding about just how important it is to be kind ' and how easy it is. We embrace a growth mindset in our school and we focus on positivity too. What do our words and actions say about our character? Character education at Hartman has always been a really basic tenet of what we do in our school.'