

Youth encouraged to speak up against bullying

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Abigayle Rachel Kempton was born on July 27, 1994 in Cobourg. She was the first Canadian addition to the Kempton family who emigrated from Ireland in 1975.

The first four years of Abi's life were filled with the love of her parents, younger brother Riley, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Abi attended Burnham Public School for Kindergarten and when her family moved to the country, she and her brother attended Baltimore Public School. In Grade 7, she went to Dale Road Public School where students from three feeder schools merge together to form a junior high. That seemed to be when Abi's appearance and behaviour changed dramatically. Abi went from a happy child to someone who showed a lot of frustration and anger at home. Her family tried to understand what was making her so angry and sad when she came home from school but it was only after her death that it became clear that the hurt and anger was a result of social bullying from her peers at school. Abi was no different than other teenagers her age but she was very tender-hearted. She was fun loving, outgoing, sensitive and caring, but very independent and strong. She simply wanted to be loved and accepted by everyone, not just her family. Her personality changed but through all of the hurt, she still took her schooling and grades very seriously. She graduated Grade 8 on the honour roll and was very proud of her academic achievements. Abi was artistic and enjoyed drawing and writing, horse back riding, gardening, gymnastics and especially loved animals. On Aug. 9, 2008, at the age of 14, Abi decided to take her own life. Grief was not all that Abi's family, friends and community were left with. There were questions about how such a kind and wonderful girl whose family loved her dearly, could feel so hopeless in her pain. In her short life, Abi impacted the lives of many people-virtually all of whom considered her a friend and her death a great personal loss. The future for all of us is much dimmer without Abi in it.

From the Anti-Bullying Initiative website, www.abinitiative.ca.

No one should turn a blind-eye to the problem

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NORTHUMBERLAND -- The tragic death of a teen has led to focus on a social problem - bullying.

The Anti-Bullying Awareness Initiative (ABI) was created in memory of Cobourg's Abigayle Kempton, also known as Abi, who took her own life as a result of constant bullying. Abi was 14-years-old when she died. She is described as a compassionate

young girl who loved both animals and people, and could not stand to see either hurt. She dreamed one day she would become an animator and often drew a tiny green gecko, which is now the logo for ABI.

Her family started the campaign as a way to do some good in the community as well as educate young people on the effects of bullying.

"We started the initiative to have something in memory of Abi, and since bullying played a part in her death, we thought we would start something to fight it," said Roy Kempton, Abi's grandfather.

Royston Kempton, Abi's uncle, said by no means will the initiative bring an end to bullying. However, if the anti-bullying message gets through to someone, "it's all that matters.

"The main goal of the whole program is about awareness and if one student speaks up, it's been a success," said Mr. Kempton.

Another anti-bullying campaign that started on March 1 is run by the Northumberland Youth Advisory Council (NYAC).

According to Barinder Gill, NYAC chairman and executive, the group wanted to get involved in something that effects the youth in the community.

"We want to let our local communities know that bullying happens and no one should turn a blind eye to it," said Mr. Gill.

On May 13, Cobourg District Collegiate Institute West (CDCIW) hosted its second annual 'Anti-Bullying Assembly', which featured guest speaker Jim Jordan. Sponsored by the Northumberland United Way, the assembly was run by the (NYAC).

Mr. Jordan, a motivational speaker and author, spoke to Grade 9 students from CDCI West, CDCI East and St. Mary's Secondary School. During the assembly, Mr. Jordan involved students by using simple magic tricks to demonstrate how bullying effects someone and also how a bystander can help fuel a bully's behaviour.

"If we want to stop bullying in schools, we have to really simplify the problem," he told the audience.

He explained all it takes is bystanders to say something about the bullying that is going on in schools to help minimize the issue. "All it takes is for one student to speak up," said Mr. Jordan.

The youth council's campaign will end with an anti-bullying rally and the 'Walk to End Bullying', which takes place on Saturday, June 12, at the Baltimore Recreational Centre. This all-day event features a free barbecue, activities for kids

and will also present the winners of the anti-bullying poem and poster contests, which were introduced to schools earlier this year.

A 40-minute candlelight walk, starting at 5:30 p.m., will signify the community's hopes to end bullying and mark the end of the campaign.

For more information on ABI, visit www.abinitiative.ca. For more information on Jim Jordan, bullying and bullying prevention, visit www.reportbullying.com.