

RCMP recruit students to help fight bullying

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Published on January 25, 2012

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CHAPEL ISLAND — Students at Mi'kmawey school in Chapel Island First Nation were sworn in as constables in the fight against bullying Wednesday.

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The school is one of six across Canada trying out a program developed in British Columbia that takes a different approach to bullying.

RCMP Const. Andre Sparkes, who introduced the program at Mi'kmawey school, said it concentrates on teaching strategies to victims rather than changing the behaviour of bullies.

"It is dealing with the kids and trying to teach them how to deal with conflict at a very young age so as they grow up, they will know how to deal with people who are teasing them or picking on them," he said.

Children from Grades Primary to 3 were told to try the strategies in a program called WITS, an acronym that stands for walk away, ignore, talk it out and seek help. After Sparkes read a story about how a walrus helps a boy who is being bullied, the students were sworn in as anti-bullying constables and received a badge.

Grades 4 to 6 students who are taking a larger leadership role, were told to follow the strategies in a companion program called LEADS, which stands for look and listen, explore points of view, act, did it work and seek help.

"It helps to break down the problem," said Sparkes.

Grade 4 student Tyrone Bernard, 10, had a thoughtful take on bullying and the strategies for victims.

The lesson is to stick up for yourself but to also get help from a teacher, parent or guardian if necessary, he said.

Bernard said he has been bullied in the past.

"I ignored it and walked away," he said. "I didn't mind it at all. I didn't like the feeling of it though."

Children who are bullied may feel like bullying someone else, he said.

The school will be provided with books and other resource materials meant to reinforce the program. Parents and the larger community will also be encouraged to get involved, the Sparkes said.

Principal Shauna Francis said the school is ready to adopt the bullying program.

"We are going to embrace it," she said.

Bullying is a problem in a lot of communities, to some extent, said Sparkes.

"I visit many schools in the community and I think all communities have a problem with bullying to some degree," he said.

"Different communities have different types of bullies. In close-knit communities, often it is who you are related to, who your family is. It's not just what you wear or who you are or what you weigh."

Sparkes was one of six RCMP officers recruited to help introduce it.

The bullying program will also be launched on Feb. 24 at East Richmond Education Centre in St. Peter's, said Sparkes.

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