

Article rank | 21 Oct 2011 | The Recorder & Times (Brockville) | MEGAN BURKE

Kids using their WITS

Anti-bullying

"I promise to use my WITS to walk away, ignore, talk it out and seek help when I'm dealing with teasing and bullying.



MEGAN BURKE The Recorder and Times

Grade 3 student Zoe Cosgrove, of St. Francis Xavier Catholic School, receives her special constable badge from Brockville Police Chief John Gardiner on Thursday morning. The school has been selected as the pilot school for the WITS program, which reduces peer victimization and bullying.

"I promise to also help other kids use their WITS to keep my school and my community a safe and fun place to be and learn."

This was the oath students at St. Francis Xavier Catholic School took Thursday morning prior to a swearing-in ceremony where they all became special constables with the Brockville Police Service, after taking their WITS training.

St. Francis Xavier has become the pilot school in the area, and one of the first schools in Ontario, to take on the WITS program, which aims to reduce peer victimization and bullying in elementary school children.

WITS stands for Walk away, Ignore, Talk it out and Seek help. The program acts as a simple way to teach elementary school children the skills that they need to handle conflicts with others by reaching beyond schools and classrooms to unite emergency service professionals, teachers, parents and older children to prevent victimization and bullying.

"I think clearly there's a need in Ontario and Canada to address these issues," said Dr. Tina Daniels from Ottawa University, who helped bring the program to the Brockville area. "It's the only Canadian program I know of that is research-based."

The Grades 1-3 students gathered in the gym to listen to their principal Linda Callaghan read a story about a

bullied child, and proved to community safety officer Sgt. Doug Locke and Chief John Gardiner of the Brockville Police Service that they were trained about WITS, and even knew the sign language to go with it.

Sgt. Locke questioned the students on what the acronym stood for and asked them what they would do in certain situations if they were being bullied.

Once Locke deemed the students trained, he, along with Chief Gardiner, taught the kids how to stand at attention, salute and even perform the secret handshake.

After reciting the oath, the children lined up to receive their badge signifying their new responsibility as special constables.

"We jumped on board because we know how important it is to problem solve," Locke told The Recorder and Times, noting it is great the students are learning at a young age.

"We believe it will give these young people the tools to solve these problems. This pilot school will see a success."

Gardiner shared similar sentiments about the program which he is glad came to Brockville.

"Any tool that can instill good values in a student is good for the community. We hope they'll carry these tools with them their whole life." Student support worker at St. Francis Xavier, Cheryl Burton, acts as school champion for the project.

"The program runs parallel with social skills programs at the school. It's interactive for the kids," said Burton.

"It lets kids develop their own skill set so the kids know they aren't alone."

As a reminder of the program, the kids have their mascot Witsup the Walrus sticking around school.

Dr. Daniels and other members of her program will come back to the school twice a year for three years. They will survey the students to see if and how things are improving, as well as surveying parents.

For more information on the program and tips for parents to use the WITS tools at home, visit www.witsprogram.ca.

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