

DAY OF PINK



“I just don’t believe in any form of bullying or making anyone feel that they are not equal to anyone else, because I think everyone is equal and I think diversity is such a good thing.”

—Joseph Granata, Grade 12 Student





ABOVE: Pink Committee

On April 13, 2011 now Grade 12 student Joseph Granata heard something on the radio on his way to school that moved him to take action. A news story about Pink Shirt Day, an anti-bullying movement born in a high school in Nova Scotia that was sweeping the nation, caught his attention. The story was that a high-school boy who wore a pink T-shirt to school one day was bullied about it and his sexual orientation, so two other boys went to school the next day wearing pink T-shirts as a sign of support and inclusivity.

Joseph found himself still thinking about these students and what they did when he arrived at school that day. As he walked through the halls and talked to his friends he realized no one else seemed to be aware of Pink Shirt Day or its significance. So he taped pink paper to his uniform as an act of solidarity and that's when people began to take notice.

Sally O'Neill, Middle School Counsellor/Health & Wellness Specialist, approached him to ask whether he wanted to do more to raise awareness at the Senior School about this important day. Joseph readily agreed because every time he explained why he had taped the pink paper to his shirt he was met with a positive response. He believed then, and still believes



now, that if people were made more aware of this movement it would be another opportunity to build an open-minded and inclusive community within the school.

Despite Pink Shirt Day's humble beginnings in Nova Scotia it has now grown to significantly influence our province's Education Act and other laws, and has inspired an impressive international movement with the International Day of Pink. Last year approximately 8 million people worldwide participated in International Day of Pink.

Through the small gesture of taping pink paper to his uniform, Joseph single-handedly brought the Pink Shirt Day and International Day of Pink movement to the Senior School—and that took great courage, says Sally.

This movement gives weight to the well-known idea of the 'power of one' as students all over the world take a stand against bullying.

"I just don't believe in any form of bullying or making anyone feel that they are not equal to anyone else, because I think everyone is equal and I think diversity is such a good thing," Joseph says matter-of-factly.

His strong convictions, leadership and charisma helped Joseph form a dedicated committee of students including Meghan Waitzer, Alissa Brayley, Gita Goolsarran, Rina Plotkin and Tara Malek-Gilani, and Pink Shirt Day at The York School was born. This student-led initiative was intended to bring the community together and focus on positive language and inclusivity.

"I really liked the idea because it was such a simple concept but it could make such a difference; by doing something as simple as wearing pink and showing your support you could include people and make people who thought they were being excluded feel more included," says Meghan as she thinks back to two years ago.

In the first year the goal was to get as many people as possible engaged in the Senior School and so the committee put together a poster campaign leading up to the day. Once the day came around most Senior School students were wearing pink and joining in discussions about inclusion and how to promote anti-bullying techniques.

Confident from the success of the first year, the committee this year decided to involve the Middle School and expand the awareness campaign by creating a pledge, which hung in a prominent spot in the hallway of the first floor, stating: "I pledge to be conscious of the words I choose, where I say them and how they might affect others."

Every student had the choice whether they wanted to sign the pledge or not. Joseph and his team were thrilled when students bounded towards the pledge, eager to write their names on the pale pink paper.

During March Break this year, the dedicated Grade 12 students who make up the committee gathered together for a pin-making party. The pins were created to visually represent the bonds of the community and the inclusivity the Day of Pink aims to achieve. They also prepared hundreds of pink Post-its with different affirmations on them such as: You are kind. You are smart. You are fun. You are awesome. You are beautiful. You are caring.

On the morning of International Day of Pink 2013 every locker and office in the Middle and Senior Schools had a note on it, and inclusivity and positive language reigned. Two years, [one student-made video](#), 420 pins, countless T-shirts and pink Post-its later, the power of one has been proven.

"I just want people to reflect on their own stance on bullying and think about it on their own and come to their own conclusions," Joseph says.

