



Student enthusiastic about being Amigo

"I just love being an Amigo," says Robyn Dewar in a telephone interview. "Oh man! I absolutely love it."

Robyn shows a great deal of enthusiasm, despite this being her first year of involvement in Amigos. She is in Grade 9 at TAS Secondary School and intends to be an Amigo throughout her high school career.

Some of Robyn's peers wonder why she has gotten involved with Amigos, and it's obvious that it's just part of who she is. Robyn went to elementary school with a friend who is blind. "She had a big impact on me," says Robyn. "I've been around her my whole life. She's my friend. I still get together with her and her mom. We go out and do things together."

It was because of her relationship with this friend that Robyn decided to get involved with Amigos. It's been a great experience, she says.

"I've learned a lot," she says. "I have definitely learned how to be patient. It takes a while for Jessica to learn something



Jessica and Robyn enjoy some together time

new. When she is learning something, she has to do it over and over. I keep trying to help her until she gets it."

It took a while for Robyn and Jessica Rumbolt's relationship to grow. At first, Jessica would not really respond to Robyn when she arrived in the classroom. But after a while, that changed.

"Now she knows my name," says Robyn excitedly. "When I come into the classroom, she runs and gets the cups we play with. That's our thing."

As a result of being an Amigo, Robyn feels she has become

more aware of people who live with disabilities. She realizes that it doesn't take much to make a difference in their lives. Even a quick hello could be enough to make a person's day, she says. "It's like feeling like you belong."

"In our school, there are two wings – north and south," says Robyn when asked what impact Amigos might have on her and her school. "The LLS students are in the south wing. All the students should come together. Then everyone would be so much happier and we would have a better environment in the school."

Physical separation is road block, says Kurt West

"I'd like to think I'll make a bit of a difference one day," says Kurt West in a telephone interview. If his experience at a recent visit to Parliament Hill in Ottawa is any indication, he definitely will.

Along with other students who were sponsored to attend the event by their local Rotary Clubs, this Grade 12 Campbellford District High School student had a chance to inform his Member of Parliament about his various endeavours at school.

"I met with Rick Norlock, [MP Northumberland – Quinte West, Ontario]," explains Kurt. "He asked for my opinion about things going on in my community, so I told him about being an Amigo. I mentioned the separation of students – where students are physically separated [in our school]. Hopefully he remembers some of [our conversation]."

According to Kurt, the fact that LLS and mainstream students are physically separated is "a major

road block to what the [Amigos] program is all about."

Kurt is interested in studying political sciences and eventually law. He feels his experience with Amigos will benefit him in his studies, and later on in life.

"The experience with Amigos will definitely give me the perspective of seeing the other side of the coin. It will help me to formulate an argument, and a solution might come out of that argument."

Being Amigo busts stress

For many students, high school can be a stressful place. At least three Amigos have found something that seems to alleviate that stress.

Monica Millar says that connecting with her Amigo, Joey, is great because it doesn't put extra stress on you.

This Grade 11 TAS student says that when she first became an Amigo she did not anticipate how much she would have in common with her new friend. "There's so much different, but there's so much the same. It's something you really enjoy. It relieves stress."

Beth McClelland (Grade 10, Crestwood) says that connecting with her Amigo, Matthew Elliott, has been a very positive thing for her.

"I'm a very busy person and a lot of things make the stress level high," she says. "With Amigos, you can always go and have a great time."

Kurt West seems to agree. "I'm in the stream where it's all academics and high stress," says Kurt (Grade 12, CDHS). "Friends don't always come first. You're trying to get great grades. But then my Amigo Josh sees me in the hall and comes up to say hi. It's rewarding; it makes me feel good – that I'm a part of my Amigo's life at least once a week."



28 students, all in high spirits, after 2007 Amigos Leadership Development lunch

More discussion needed for grand scale change

"I'm more understanding of why people feel differently," said one student at the end of the 2007 Amigos Leadership Development Lunch. "I've been more exposed to other people with other backgrounds. I'm more accepting and tolerant of others."

Twenty-eight students and teachers from five of the six participating schools attended the Amigos Leadership Development lunch, held March 28, 2007 at the Burnham Mansion in Peterborough. Comments from participants indicate that Amigos is definitely having a positive impact on schools.

Student leaders say that students are stepping out of their "comfort zones," "people are not as judgmental towards one another," and "more exposure to different environments creates better understanding of others."

"I think that a discussion about changes on a grander scale would be useful," wrote one participant when asked what was missing from the discussion. "I feel that the most change will come when we change things on all levels – the school, community and individually."

Friendship is important – Leadership is too

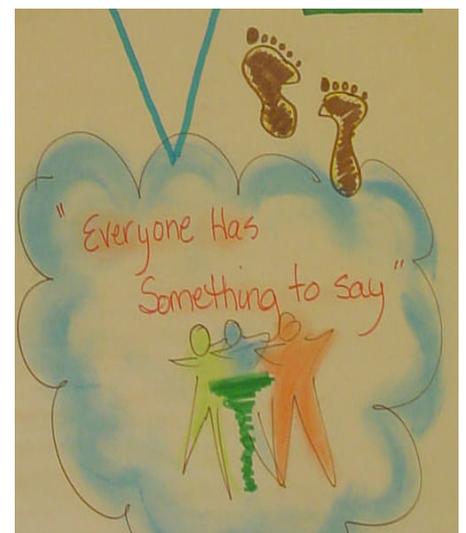
For Donny (Grade 11, CDHS) and Scott (Grade 11, Kenner), Amigos is all about making new friends and showing leadership.

These two LLS students agree that new relationships begin when you become an Amigo. And with new relationships comes the confidence to lead.

"You get to meet new friends and get to know one another," says Donny in a telephone interview. "When you have an Amigo, it's

more fun because you have someone to hang out with, and their friends hang out with you too. They become your friends too."

"You get to make new friends," agrees Scott. "That's important. And we get to show other people how to be good leaders. I've learned how to go to meetings. I speak up and give them my opinions. I can show people how to be a leader. I can show them how to be a good friend."



Amigos say, "Everyone has something to say"

Amigos initiative receives \$24,700 from Trillium Foundation

Reprinted with permission from Community Living Leaders (www.communitylivingontario.ca) Friday, April 20, 2007

A Community Living Peterborough partnership aimed at helping students with intellectual disabilities will receive a \$24,700 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF).

Community Living Peterborough CEO Jack Gillan says he is happy with the funding, which will go into effect immediately.

"I'm thrilled with it," he says.

The grant will help the sustainability of the Heads Up for Inclusion Amigos project, an initiative aimed at helping students with intellectual disabilities become integrated in public high schools.

The initiative sees students with disabilities forming friendships with students without disabilities. The Amigos program helps break down barriers by increasing interaction between students with disabilities and students without disabilities.

"The Trillium grant we applied for was about exploring the opportunity for sustainability of the Amigos program," says Gillan. "The reason we applied was in support of the sustainability of the Amigos initiative."

Heads Up for Inclusion is a grassroots committee made up

of community members. Community Living Peterborough is a member of the committee, along with Community Living Ontario, education boards representing six schools in Peterborough and Northumberland, the Rotary Club of Peterborough-Kawartha, parents, and students involved with the program, called Amigo leaders.

The Amigos initiative, which includes 179 students with and without disabilities, does not receive core funding. The \$24,700 injection will be used toward sustaining a three-step strategy, says Gillan.

The strategy includes developing a marketing plan to increase the profile of Heads Up for Inclusion and the Amigos initiative; improving the capacity on a collaborative front, which Gillan says may include partnering with existing initiatives with similar intentions; and expansion plans.

The Amigos initiative is receiving government praise.

"I am very pleased with the Inclusion Amigos project," says Peterborough MPP Jeff Leal in a press release. "It not only helps the disabled student to grow in a social environment but it also cultivates growth within everyone associated with the program."

Heads Up for Inclusion began in 2001. The Amigos initiative started in 2002.

I know what I want to do with my life, says Monica Millar

"I've learned a lot about myself by being an Amigo," says Monica Millar, in a telephone interview. "I've pretty much figured out what I want to do with my life."

After becoming an Amigo, this Grade 11 TAS student saw her self-confidence soar, and she says she now understands people with disabilities better.

"I'm less judgmental and I can relate to them," she says. "I'm a lot more open-minded, even to people who don't have disabilities. It's made me an all around good person."

Monica hopes to eventually find a job working with people who live with disabilities. "I was told that there are lots of jobs out there," she says. "I think there will be one for me."



Come on out to the Annual Amigos BBQ – Thursday, May 31 at Beavermead Park



It's all about connections, say students

Conference participants challenged to extend invitation to peers

"The students did a great job listing the ways they connect with one another in their schools," says Catherine Foster, Amigos Coordinator. "But that wasn't enough. They were challenged to do more."

workshop. During the workshop, each group was asked to write and draw what they do in their school to bring students together. The list was long, but begged a question: Does every single student in the school participate in everything

Catherine presented an Amigos workshop entitled, "It's About Connections!" at the KPR Elementary Leadership Conference held Friday, April 13, 2007 at Trent University in Peterborough.

Angel Fave	Dodge ball games	Jewel Jars	Soccer
Assemblies (4)	Drama Club (4)	Jump Rope For Heart (5)	Special Lunch
Badminton	Earth Week	Kilometer Club	Spelling Bees
Bake Sales (8)	Easter Egg Hunt (2)	Laps 4-Lungs	Sport Competitions
Band (2)	Electives Day	Library Helpers (2)	Sport Tournaments
Baseball (2)	Fairs	Light the Tree	Sports (6)
BBQ	February Birth Day	Literacy Groups	Sports Teams
Book Buddies (3)	Field Trips (3)	Literacy Week	Spring BBQ
Book Fair (3)	Flour Hockey	Lunch Buddies (2)	Sprint Days (6)
Breakfast Club (4)	French Carnival	Lunch Days	Sprint Week (7)
Builders Club	French Club	Lunch Helpers	Student Council (2)
Buildings	Fun Days (5)	Lunch Members (3)	Student of the Month (2)
Bunny Hop	Fun Fairs (2)	McDonald's Challenge	Student of the Week
Candy Grams	Fundraisers (4)	Music	Swimming
Conferences	Fundraising For Ottawa	Music Club	Talent Shows (2)
Council (3)	Game Day	Operation Christmas Child	Terrific Kid Award
Character Council	Giving Books	P.J. Day (2)	Terry Fox Run (4)
Cheer Clubs	Golden Shoe	Peer Helpers (2)	Tie Day
Chocolate Sales	Grad For grade 8's	Pitch in Day	Tiger Spirit
Chipping Awards	Grading	Pizza Day	Track and Field (8)
Clap Out (4)	Grinch Club	Play Days (6)	Trips
Clap-on-Then	Sum Day	Plays (3)	UNICEF
Class Out	Gym class	Pow Wow's	Volleyball (3)
Class Fun Fair	Gymnastics	Rams	Warm Fuzzies
Clubs	Hang outs	Read a Then	Welcome Back BBQ
Clubs for people's interest	Hat Days	Reading Buddies (6)	Winter Activity Day
Community BBQ	Helping Hands	Recess	Year Book (2)
Community Helpers	Hockey	Red Green Day	Year End BBQ
Competitions (2)	Holiday Bits	Ringette	Yearbook committee
Cookie Sale	Holiday Weeks	S.A.C.	
Cops for Cancer (3)	HomeFarm Challenges	Safety Patrol	
	Hops for Hearts (3)	School Projects	

Conference participants list inclusive activities

on the list?

The response was, "No, every student does not participate."

"I told them that, as student leaders, they have a responsibility to make sure all students participate,"

The theme of the conference was "Building School Communities: Inside, Outside and Beyond."

Three groups of elementary students from Grades 6 through 8 attended the workshop at the day-long conference. Over 60 students and teachers participated in the

says Catherine. "I challenged them to go back to their schools and ask their peers who are not participating to join in."

In response to the challenge, one teacher advised the students, "You need to listen to this. This might be the most important thing you learn today."

Beth McClelland has learned "it's okay to get outside your bubble"

"Being an Amigo is a learning experience," says Grade 10 Crestwood student Beth McClelland in a telephone interview. "You learn about yourself and other people and have fun at the same time."

More confident because of her involvement, Beth says, "It's okay to

get outside your bubble and be more outgoing, and say hello to people you've never talked to before."

Beth says that hanging out with her Amigo has made her more open to others, and more patient. "And I have a great bond with Matthew."



Spring 2007

Participating Schools

- Thomas A Stewart Secondary School (Amigo leaders Rebecca Casemore, Joe Giles, Monica Millar)
- Kenner Collegiate (Amigo leaders Emily Clements, Scott Storm, Tiffany Smith)
- Norwood District High School (Amigo Leader Natalie Gage)
- Campbellford District High School (Amigo leaders Donny, Samantha Marineau, Tia McGregor)
- East Northumberland Secondary School (Amigos leader Shasa Boshoff)
- Crestwood Secondary School (Amigos leaders Beth McClelland, Jessica Steele)

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Please contribute or provide comments to

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Visit the Amigos web site at www.headsupforinclusion.ca

