



Amigo Leaders, Staff Advisors, Relationship Facilitator and Coordinator at Leaders Lunch

Passion is obvious as Leaders discuss Amigos Program

When twenty eight Amigo Leaders and Staff Advisors, representing seven Kawartha Pine Ridge high schools and a total of 160 Amigos, met on Thursday, February 2, their passion was palpable.

Students shared how their schools have changed as a result of Amigos. "I'm a lot more outgoing, more open," said Stephanie. "It feels like my school; people say, 'Hi,'" said Amanda. "I am more open to talking to others – to anyone," said Kyle. "When I introduce my Amigo to my other friends, they are more accepting; it's like a domino effect," said Rachel. "Amigos has become part of the fabric of the school," said Mr. Butler.

If Amigos was operating at its best, students say there would be less bullying. Students would be

happier. All students would be participating in extra curricular activities, like dances. "There would be no more LLS classes," said Amanda. "We wouldn't even know the Program was operating," said Mrs. MacQuarrie.

To make Amigos even stronger than it is today, students suggested that "Amigos can mentor the Grade 8s so we can bring in new Amigos." "We can have an information booth at Information Night to inform parents." "We can promote the Program by speaking to principals to raise awareness and to get staff support." "We can make presentations to Parent Council." "We can be recruiting leaders and Amigos year-round." And there could be an Amigos Anniversary Day so that each year the schools can celebrate the success of the Program.



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Left to Right: Steven Wood, Nicole LaPointe, Jennifer Shin and Jenny Warrington make a gingerbread house – Steven and Jenny are Amigo matches, as are Nicole and Jennifer

Leaders' favourite Amigo memories

- Feeling needed
- Reciprocal relationship
- Participating in the Santa Claus parade
- Playing baseball
- Movie Madness
- Halloween dance
- BBQ at the zoo
- Meeting new people
- Building gingerbread houses

Amigos are on the Web



Heads Up for Inclusion is launching a web site to provide students, teachers, staff and community members with information on Amigos. Through a regulated Message board, students will have the opportunity to connect with one another and exchange information and ideas about Amigos at their school. The site is also a way for participating schools to keep up to date on upcoming activities and to share pictures from events. Everyone loves to see pictures and schools will be able to share theirs on this web site. The site is designed to give students and teachers ideas to keep Amigos energized and on track. Check out Amigos on the Web at www.headsupforinclusion.ca.

Amigos is changing our school – Shasa Boshoff

by Shasa Boshoff, Grade 12, E.N.S.S.

The Amigos program is so fulfilling. It shows you there is more to school than always hanging out with the same old friends. A lot of people get stuck in the groups they hang out with. Amigos widens your perspective on school and on how people are all different.

Every week we do new crafts. The best part is at the end – the smile in my Amigo's eyes and the way she looks after we have worked on something and she has completed it. It builds her confidence up.

At our school, a lot of people are afraid. But Amigos is changing our school. It shows that we can learn so much from one another. I'm learning to be less judgmental and "not judging a book by its cover."

It's so great to have students who see things so differently. What if they are seeing things in the right perspective – being non-judgmental, having fun, getting to know a person for who they are and not what they look like? "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," and that's a fabulous thing.



Amanda Herman and Spider Jones get acquainted at the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Student Leadership Conference

Conference guests encourage students

At the recent K.P.R. board-wide Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Student Leadership Conference, Sylvia Terpstra, Director of Education, encouraged students to embrace others who have a different perspective and whose experiences are different from their own. She challenged the student leaders to go back to their schools and work on this question: "How can I engage everyone in my school?"

Another guest, well-known

broadcaster and author Spider Jones, had a similar message for the over 350 students representing all K.P.R. Board high schools. Having been discriminated against most of his young life because of poverty and the colour of his skin, he told students "to give everyone an equal opportunity." When he was in a remedial class, Mr. Jones got the message that "we don't expect much of you, so don't expect much of yourself." He encouraged all students to follow their dreams, no matter what obstacles might be in their way.



E.N.S.S. students Lee Cheese, Shasa Boshoff and Jacklyn Hearnden ham it up at Amigos Valentines celebration in Campbellford

Becoming an Amigo the best decision of my life – Michelle Moore

by Michelle Moore, T.A.S. student leader alumna, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Student Leadership Conference participant

For me, it was easy to make a friend at the beginning of my high school career through the Amigos project. And now, as I finish high school, I still have my Amigo, who has become one of my good friends.

When I joined the Amigos program in 2003, it wasn't well known yet. The project had only been running for a year. Most people that I talked to about the project had no information to tell me. Therefore, when I joined up I wasn't exactly sure what I would be doing, but I soon realized that it was the best decision of my life.

I saw what the project's goal was and decided it was definitely worth working toward, so I became a student leader. Over the years, I saw Amigos change from a project that started out being not well known within the school, to the project this year that has 41 participating students. Furthermore, most people in our school are able to tell you what our Amigos project is about.

When you sign up, you have a quick interview so you can be matched up with somebody with similar interests. Once matched, our program at T.A.S. allows us to plan with our Amigo when the best day is to get together, and then we meet with them at lunch and hang out. We can go to the gym and watch sports, sit and eat our lunch, introduce one another to each other's friends, play cards, go for walks or do whatever we are interested in. Then, once a month the whole Amigos group gets together and participates in fun activities like pizza parties, building gingerbread houses or playing bingo.

Getting involved with Amigos was



Left to Right: Michelle Moore (T.A.S., Amigos Alumna), Joe Giles (T.A.S.), Casey McIntyre (Norwood), Courtney McCarrell (T.A.S., Amigos Alumna), Brittney Cowley (Kenner), and Amanda Herman (Kenner), at the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Student Leadership Conference

definitely a great decision. My Amigo has shown me how to look at life in a positive way and find the humour in every situation. My experience with the Amigos project at T.A.S. has given me an inclusive vision for everything that I now do in my life, such as my job and planning my future.

Amigos isn't like another commitment – Sarah Oberholzer

Sarah Oberholzer knew just how to respond when another Student Leadership Conference participant said she did not have enough time for Amigos.

"At T.A.S. I'm really busy," said Sarah. "I am involved on Student Council, with the Character Education Committee, and I run all the dances. Amigos isn't like another commitment – it's all about hanging out with friends. It's about choosing how to spend your time. Darby and I meet once or twice a week at lunch. She is teaching me sign language. For me, Amigos is not just making new friendships – it's developing new skills."



Darby Allison and Sarah Oberholzer sign, "This is my school."

Amigos helps students feel more involved, confident, able to participate, says Director of Education

In a recent letter to Lucinda Hage, Heads Up for Inclusion Coordinator, the Director of Education of the K.P.R. District School Board notes that she is hearing very positive things about Amigos.

"In my role as Director, I make a point of visiting a couple of schools each week and I have to tell you that I have only heard positive things said about the Amigos program by our students, our staff and our principals," states Sylvia Terpstra in her letter. "Our trustees and

our employees place a high value on inclusive practice and the Amigos program has helped many students feel more involved, confident and able to participate in their school communities."

Ms. Terpstra states that the project's efforts "are helping our students create success for themselves and others through leadership, partnership and especially friendship." She says she hopes "that the Amigos program will continue to grow in our schools in the years ahead."

Amanda's life changes when treated equally

Involvement with Amigos has been a great experience for Amanda Herman. Recently, she spoke about her feelings at the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Student Leadership Conference.

"I've been in schools where I did not feel included," said Amanda. "I did not want to go to school because I did not feel that there was support for me if I got hurt. I felt angry because other students were mean to me and I wanted to stay home because that is where I felt safe."

Things changed drastically when she began at Kenner in 2004. "It changed my life," said Amanda. "I have so many friends here that it makes me feel happy and safe. I no longer feel angry or sad; I

now feel like myself. My friends and I hang out and I cheer them on when they play sports."

At the same conference, Brittney Cowley said that at Kenner everybody is included in school sports, after-school activities, lunch time activities and school dances.

"I'm not sure that all high schools are as inclusive as Kenner, as I know that students still make fun of each other and bullying happens every day," said Brittney. "Just saying your school is inclusive does not make it inclusive. It needs to come from each one of us feeling and knowing that we need to treat each other equally."



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Participating Schools

- Thomas A Stewart Secondary School (Amigo leader Kyle Walden)
- Adam Scott (Amigo leaders Paige Raper and Andrew Harte-Maxwell)
- Kenner Collegiate (Amigo leaders Katie Bradley, Amanda Herman and Jenny Warrington)
- Norwood District High School (Amigos leaders Stephanie Warner and Casey McIntyre)
- Campbellford District High School (Amigo leaders Donny Carter and Brittany Ossterlaken)
- East Northumberland Secondary School (Amigos leader Erica Larmer)
- Crestwood Secondary School (Amigos leader Stephanie Lakis)

Relationship Facilitator:
Catherine Foster
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Please contribute or provide comments to Lucinda Hage, Coordinator, Heads Up for Inclusion
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Visit the Heads Up for Inclusion web site at www.headsupforinclusion.ca



Casey McIntyre with educational assistant, Natalie Gage, with Norwood's Amigos display at the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Student Leadership Conference March 3

Last but not least - Thanks to Diane Cancilla, Amigo advisor, Campbellford District High School for organizing a fabulous day of bowling, pizza and dancing for Amigos on Valentines Day. Amigos came from Norwood, Campbellford and E.N.S.S. and everyone had an amazing time!