

# Amigo News

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## Purpose of Heads Up Steering Committee

- ◆ Promotes connections in community that...
- ◆ Lead to development of relationships...
- ◆ So people with intellectual disabilities can lead meaningful lives

## Amigos attend Youth Speak Conference

The lecture hall and cafeteria at T.A.S. and Norwood D.H.S. were jumping on October 27 and 28 as over 30 Amigos from each school gathered to participate in a day long Youth Speak conference.

Amigo pairs had already gotten to know one another through the interview process and ice-breaker activities at their schools. The purpose of the conference was to go one step further and deepen their understanding, and appreciation, of one another.

Judith McGill from Toronto facilitated the day. Her background in Youth Speak Theater provided Amigos with the opportunity to identify with their own experiences and also those of one another. As the day progressed, students began to strengthen their capacity to look at what was going on in their lives and how similar, or different, it was to the experiences of their fellow Amigos.

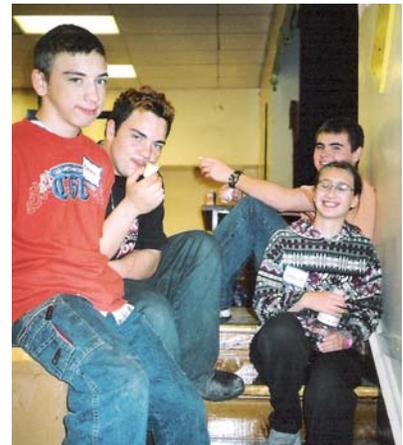
Through a variety of games, exercises and dramatizations, barriers were broken down, preconceptions of one another began to diminish, and students began to see beyond their differences to the humanness inside one another. They learned what made each other laugh, what each of them was passionate about and how everyone has dreams and goals. Although skeptical at first, Education Assistant Janice LeClair commented with great enthusiasm,

“It was an excellent way for students to *really* get to know each other. This will enhance the relationships they are building.”

*(See more photos on page 3)*



*“The day was Amigorific!”  
– Mr. Yarrow*



*Chuck, Andrew, Brock and  
Jessica share a quiet moment*



*“The pizza and ice cream were  
Amigolicious!”  
– Mrs. Stewart*

### Participating Schools

- Thomas A Stewart Secondary School since January 2003 (Amigo leaders Michelle Moore and Kyle Waldron)
- Adam Scott since March 2003 (Amigo leaders Paige Raper and Andrew Harte-Maxwell)
- Kenner Collegiate since September 2003 (Amigo leaders Katie Bradley and Jenny Warrington)
- Norwood District High School since January 2004 (Amigos leader Stephanie Warner)
- Campbellford District High School since September 2005 (Amigo leaders Donny Carter and Brittany Osterlaken)
- East Northumberland Secondary School since September 2005 (Amigos leader Erica Larmer)
- Crestwood Secondary School since October 2005 (Amigos leader Tabitha Johnson)

*The Amigos project has made me realize the importance of attitudes!!!*

*– Meghan Shanahan,  
E.N.S.S. Relationship  
Facilitator*

## 'Revel in the Light' clarifies issues for Vidler

The newest school to join Amigos is Crestwood Secondary under the enthusiastic leadership of LLS teacher, Vanessa Vidler.

Vanessa came to teach students in Learning and Life Skills somewhat by chance. She was teaching in a Kalan class with the Catholic Board in Cobourg, fell in love with the program and the students. When she came to Peterborough, the Public Board and Crestwood this fall, she was excited to learn about Amigos and immediately 'signed up.'

One of the first things Vanessa did was to show the video 'Revel in the Light' to students, staff and the coop students in her class. The video highlights the life of Rebecca Beayni, a young woman who was born with quadriplegic cerebral palsy. In 12 short minutes, Rebecca's life as a dancer, painter, teacher and friend are brought to life. The viewer is left with a dramatic presentation of her gifts, not her disability.

Vanessa feels that the video does an amazing job answering the questions, "So what do you teach students with severe disabilities?" or "What is it that people with disabilities do?" (which she feels infers their worth and the need for a school program for them).

Vanessa agrees with the message in the video that people with disabilities have so much to teach others. "We need to see someone in a wheelchair dance in order to change our perspective of what a dancer is, and what it means to be included," she says.

Vanessa plans to lend copies of the video to parents "to give them a sense of joy and hope, and a reaffirmation of their child's worth - that others are campaigning for their children's equality and a sense of 'place' in the world."

Rebecca's mother, Susan Beayni, wants the video to be used "as a call to action, a call for justice for everyone who is marginalized. I believe that as parents, professionals and community members we must work passionately to overcome the obstacles (and yes there are many) which prevent people with needs like Rebecca and others from being fully participating citizens," says Susan. "The world needs their gifts now more than ever. That is what Rebecca would like to tell people."

To view the video or order a copy please contact:  
[heads@sympatico.ca](mailto:heads@sympatico.ca)

## Amigos to float down George Street

There's a new participant in this year's Peterborough Santa Clause parade. Watch for the Amigos float Saturday, December 3 at 5:30 p.m.



## Junior Amigos a hit at Adam Scott

'Amigos' is growing as fast as the Intermediate students at Adam Scott Collegiate.

For the third year, students in Grades 7 and 8 at Scott are participating in the Amigos project. They are known as the Junior Amigos. This year 22 mainstream Intermediate students are participating. The number of students in LLS varies - but "it's a lot" according to the leaders, Paige and Andrew. One parent of a Grade 7 student spontaneously commented, "I was so excited when my son Wesley brought home an application to become a Junior Amigo. It is such a great program."

Under the leadership of three high school Amigos, the Intermediate students in LLS meet once a week at lunch to hang out and participate in fun activities with

## Heads Up steering committee puts focus on sustainability

The primary focus of the most recent Heads Up for Inclusion Steering Committee meeting was sustainability of the Amigos Program - how to keep it going long term.

Committee members were adamant: "Student led and student owned" has to be the number one objective of this committee, which expects full student ownership of the program to happen by June 2007.

The Amigos themselves will play the most important role in strengthening the Heads Up for Inclusion project. Steering committee members believe that when the Amigos Program has fully committed participants being recruited, matched and getting involved in school activities, the program will thrive.

As student activities take place, it will be important to be

their mainstream peers. In addition to group activities, several Amigos have one-to-one matches. They go to the school cafeteria with the supervision of a staff member or Senior Amigo.

Building inclusive practices in Intermediate grades is the key to developing healthy natural relationships: relationships that could carry on into high school. These relationships are instrumental in helping all students make a smooth transition to high school.

Thanks to all the Amigos at Adam Scott who are taking such an active part in making their school community more inclusive. A particular note of thanks to Paige Raper and Andrew Harte-Maxwell, Amigo Leaders and Representatives on Student Council.

consciously sharing learnings. A web page and the newsletter will be key communication tools.

Of course, it will be important to have resources in place to sustain the impact the project is making. Connections with Guidance Departments and ensuring teacher leadership in each school will help to ensure longevity. By expanding the Amigos Handbook to include audio-visual material, new schools will be more easily brought on board.

By building community relationships, we may be able to more easily secure short-term funding until such time as the program becomes part of the fabric of each school and of the school board itself. Community partnerships may also make it possible for Amigos to move beyond the walls of secondary school into the college arena and out into the community itself.



*Sarah and Darby show their stuff*



*Rachel and Lisa connect*



*Is that really Joe and Daniel?*

*"When I dare to be powerful - to use my strength in the service of my vision - then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid."*

*- Audre Lorde*



*"I thought the (Youth Speak) conference was awesome! It got Amigos off to a really good start at T.A.S. this year. What surprised me was how much everybody got to know each other in only one day. As a result of the conference, my view of students with different abilities definitely changed. I realized how smart the students in LLS are compared to how they are stereotyped to be, and that we are all not much different from one another."*

*- Selina Peterson,  
T.A.S. Amigo*

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Please contribute or provide comments to  
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E-mail:  
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## East Northumberland S.S. adopts Amigos Program

by Meghan Shanahan, Relationship Facilitator

A group of dedicated staff at East Northumberland Secondary School (E.N.S.S.) has worked hard to ensure that the Learning and Life Skills Class is included and accepted in the school and greater community. The adoption of the Amigos program at E.N.S.S. will aid in strengthening the dignity and worth of people, while continuing to promote the principles of inclusion and equality by emphasizing one-on-one friendships.

Eric Chapman, the head of Special Education at E.N.S.S., first heard about the Amigos program last spring and has high hopes for the potential outcomes of the program. Mr. Chapman emphasizes how the LLS students at E.N.S.S. are very involved in activities such as intramurals, play productions, co-op placements, making and selling cookies to other members of the school and pre-employment programs. They are also active members of the community who participate in activities such as working out at the YMCA, or going bowling or swimming. Furthermore, many LLS students are in at least one mainstream class. According to Mr. Chapman, if a particular aspect of learning cannot be achieved within the student's LLS classroom, the student will join a mainstream class in order to maximize their learning potential.

Some of the benefits Mr. Chapman hopes will occur for both mainstream and LLS students by participating in this program are: LLS students will have more opportunities to be included by forming friendships and having positive role models in their Amigo; mainstream students will have a better understanding of students they wouldn't normally associate with; both LLS and mainstream

students will be more open in their thinking (i.e. increasing confidence); LLS students will become more mature; and doors will open for all Amigos in terms of both friendships, careers and life after high school.

Currently, there are eight pairs of Amigos at E.N.S.S. including student representative, Erica Larmer, and LLS representatives Natasha Goodfellow and Philip Gray, who, along with Meghan Shanahan and staff facilitators Julie Lange and Eric Chapman, have aided in the process of implementing this program. All of the Amigos appear to be keen, motivated students who seem ideal for the first set of students at E.N.S.S. to participate in the foundation of this project. The following are some comments from students taken from the recent selection interviews:

*"I can meet new people and help someone else meet new people as well."*

*"(I want to) gain a better understanding of individuals I wouldn't have otherwise met."*

*"(The Amigos Program) would encourage peers to become more accepting of others."*

*"I am used to people who are similar - (my Amigo) can offer a new perspective."*

All participants are eager to make new friends, offer their own experiences and learn new perspectives, which is refreshing in a school that already strives towards goals surrounding inclusion. As the program continues, I am sure that we will see some of these above comments come to life and contribute to an even more inclusive, accepting, and equal school environment.