

E-eliminating bullying

Digital-first responders, fighting back and supporting victims



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W. Brett Wilson, former Dragon on CBC's Dragons' Den and corporate philanthropist, is perhaps lesser known for being bullied as a kid. Now, Wilson, along with such celebrities as Lady Gaga and Perez Hilton, is a digital-first influencer, as he uses the web as a way to help put a stop to bullying. (Supplied)

How is it that kids get bullied for years? Friends don't see? Teachers never notice? Parents never know?

Bully crap.

According to PinkShirtDay.ca, a child is bullied every seven seconds in Canada. Kids Help Phone reports up to half of young people are bullied and about 65% are cyberbullied, while 85% of incidents are witnessed by other students.

Online bullying may be on the rise at the hand of social media, but fighting back against it is also on the rise because of social media and "digital-first responders." They are the first on the scene — an everyday person who reaches out to those in need with care and support.

While W. Brett Wilson is known as a corporate philanthropist and former Dragon on CBC's Dragons' Den, he's perhaps lesser known for being bullied as a kid.

Now, Wilson, along with such celebrities as Lady Gaga and Perez Hilton, is a digital-first influencer, as he uses the web as a way to help put a stop to bullying.

"It is a powerful tool. It's hard to evaluate the impact, because social media is about raising awareness. It's not about outcomes or dollars," he said in a phone interview. "When it comes to charity, I always raise awareness before I raise money."

Wilson notes the definition of bullying is a lot broader than what many think. “Until we understand what it constitutes, it’s hard to deal with it.”

In order to deal with it, we can’t be afraid to address it.

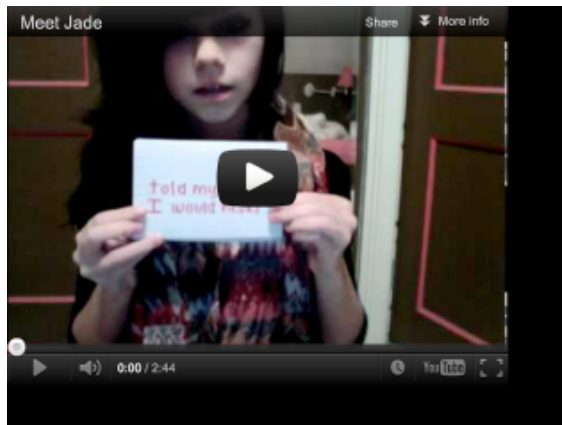
Kids Help Phone reports that when a bystander intervenes within 10 seconds, more than half the time the behaviour stops immediately. “

Just as drunk driving became socially unacceptable through strong campaigns and advocacy, first responders are leading the way to challenge the cultural normalization of bullying and speak out for those who are in the least position of power to do so,” the counselling service reports.

A national survey in the U.S. showed peers helped victims most just by spending time with them and sharing advice. And that’s exactly what’s going on online.

A year ago “Meet Jade” went viral on YouTube.

A young girl confessed her life as a victim as she displayed note cards to music: “I look happy. Don’t I. I’m not.” Countless young people were inspired and responded to her with videos.



In December, in what seems to be a confessional influenced by Jade, Jonah Mowry posted a video, “Whats going on...” [sic].



He cries and presents a series of note cards to music: “I’ve cut ... a lot. I have scars. Suicide was an option ... many times.”

With more than 9 million views (fuelled by celebrity outreach), thousands of people reached out to support Mowry with videos of their own sad or happy stories. Digital-first responders.

Things may have been different for 11-year-old Mitchell Wilson had more people responded to him. The Pickering boy committed suicide last September, days before he was to testify against his accused bully.

It was alleged that the 13-year-old suspect attacked Wilson, who suffered from muscular dystrophy, while he was out for a walk in November 2010, slamming the boy's head against the sidewalk and stealing his iPhone. From then on the bully's friends taunted Wilson too.

The accused was acquitted.

Every year in Canada, 300 kids end their own lives, due in some part to being bullied. It is tragic that the most well-known faces of these victims are the dead ones. It doesn't have to be this way.

As the movie Bully opened nationwide this past weekend, giving us a glimpse into the horrifying world of bullied kids, the fight is gaining ground. Over the past year, Bullyingcanada.ca says young people (and parents) are reaching out more than ever before. The other week alone the organization received approximately 600 chat requests and about 2,000 email support requests.

Don't wait for a child to ask for help. Many won't.

It's important to note that digital-first responders don't replace counsellors and don't replace police, but they are bringing a new face to bullying – an about face.

Have you ever bullied someone?

Yes.


No - never.

I wouldn't call myself a "bully," but I've given someone a hard time.


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