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Student speaks out against bullying



Trina Berlo photo

Gift of the gab. Carly Burchell takes a stand against bullying in a speech that propelled her to the top of the Lions Effective Speaking Contest provincial competition May 3.

May 21, 2008

"Oh my god! Did you see what she was wearing? She looked like a freak show! Oh, and get this, today she actually tried to sit with us at lunch. It was so lame. I mean, nobody likes her. She is such a loser."

That is the opening line of the speech that won Birchview Dunes Elementary School Grade 8 student Carly Burchell the top spot in every level of competition she entered this year.

On May 3, Burchell competed against junior students in Grade 6, 7, 8 from parts of Ontario and Quebec at the Multiple District A Lions Effective Speaking Contest in Toronto. It is believed she is the first local student to win the competition.

Competition began at the classroom level, Burchell then competed in her school gym against other students in her division. A win there earned her a spot in the Wasaga Beach Lions Club's effective speaking contest Apr. 5. Winning that, she continued on, placing first again in Barrie on Apr. 12 and again in Port Carling on Apr. 19, taking her to the finals.

Burchell's four-minute-45-second speech covers the various types of bullying, something she says she has experienced and often sees around her.

She talks about physical, psychological and cyber bullying, particularly what people can do to stop it.

"I think everyone here has gossiped before," said Burchell. "And I'm also sure that many of you have been the victim. Did it feel great knowing someone has insulted you behind your back? The next time you go to say something about someone, ask yourself. "Would I really like this being said about me?"

She goes on to say, "Okay, so I've lectured you enough on the bully, but what about the people in the background? Bystanders. These are the people who encourage bullying or who see it happening right in front of them and don't do anything to stop it. These people can stop bullying, but they choose not to. I mean, of course, who would want to go up against the bully?"

"But what if all the bystanders stood up to the bully? What if someone said, 'Stop!' It takes that one word. That one simple word could keep someone from getting hurt."

Burchell goes on to talk about the consequences of bullying.

"But what if no one says stop? What actually happens when bullying goes too far? People can start doing drugs, become alcoholics, sometimes bullying gets so bad that a person will actually commit suicide. People will kill themselves because no one said, 'Stop!'"

"But there are people who will stand up to bullying," she concludes. "People can talk to a parent, teacher, sibling, friend. There's a Kids Help Phone, but it isn't enough. Bullying still happens everyday. But if one person decides 'this is wrong', they could help save someone. Maybe even a life."

Birchview Dunes vice principal Sean Philips said the topic is very timely and resonates with many people.

But in public speaking, delivery counts more than content.

"Three-quarters of public speaking is delivery," said Phillips. "She's got great expression. She is a very dynamic speaker. She's got good inflection, great tone."

Burchell, who has done well in public speaking three years running, agrees the secret to her success is the performance.

"The best thing you can do is be really dramatic and speak loudly," she said.