

THE MONITOR

Centennial Academy students say 'no' to bullying with their hands

Students at Centennial Academy in NDG made a commitment last week not to engage in bullying behaviour, and ratified it with painted imprints of their hands.

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After reciting a pledge out loud in one of the classrooms, they were taken over to a table where large canvases surrounded by bowls of colourful paint were laid out. After plunging a hand into the paint, each student then affixed his or her individual imprint on the unique work of art.

"This is our third year doing this," said Angela Borgos, head of the private school on Prud'homme Avenue, which subscribes to an online anti-bullying program, www.bullying.org.

and which staged special activities for a week to reinforce the point.

"We wanted to symbolize this moment, we wanted to basically have a gesture that would remind the students of the week and their pledge to be kind to one another," added Tammy Groff, director of Centennial's middle school, who coordinated the activities.

"They're making a commitment to be kind to one another and to treat each other with kindness and that's what we want to focus on," she added. "We have a policy of how we treat one another and how we respond to students who are not friendly to one another like any other school. They're asked to do this as a symbolic gesture."

The school plans to place the completed canvases prominently on display somewhere yet to be determined. "At this point in time we want to find a spot in the school to display them in an area so that we can refer to it as our friendship place," said Groff.

Last week, the Tolerance Caravan, a group which is supported by the federal government's ministry of heritage, made a stop at the school to deliver its message against prejudice and discrimination.

Two experienced researcher-hosts used their travelling exhibit to clarify and explore in depth concepts of prejudice, discrimination, genocide and tolerance with the Centennial Academy students.

The workshop exhibit, which consists of texts, photos and videos with strong images, was a backdrop for the students to come, listen and discuss issues of discrimination, such as sexual orientation, ethnic origin, age, social status, religion and handicaps, by which many people are victimized.

During the one-hour session, they were confronted with exclusion and intolerance committed as a result of practices and, in some cases, policies founded on direct or systemic discrimination. The students were progressively encouraged to reflect on the consequences of prejudice and stereotypes on the lives of themselves and other people