

Kindness is the theme for middle school students

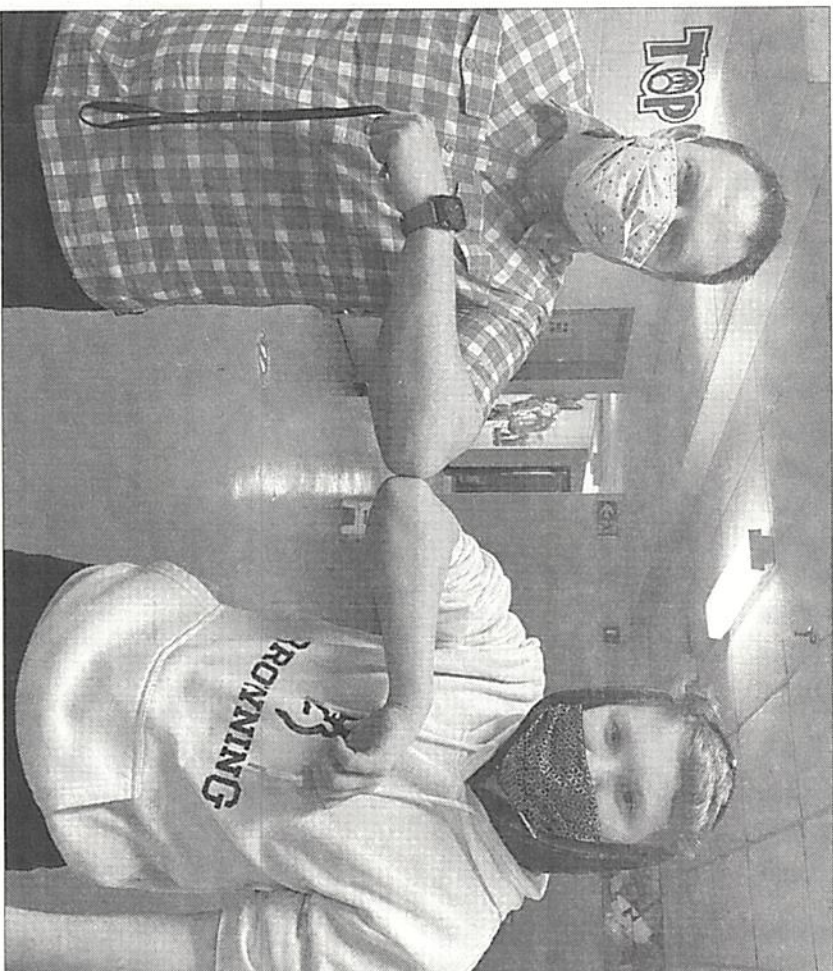
by Sari Green

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Students at St. Stephen Middle School (SSMS) are learning about kindness. Guidance counsellor and teacher Tyler Yost started a kindness programme at the school, and the students are enjoying learning about how they can affect others simply by an act of kindness or a few kind words. Yost said the kindness initiative is part of a "broader strategy on teaching social emotional learning in the school". He said this is one of the foundations of learning.

"When students are calm and feel safe, they can be more receptive and attentive to their learning, and it also has an impact on their relationships with staff," said Yost.

Yost said teachers and staff are always looking for ways to encourage kindness in the school. Each morning, Yost participates in the morning announcements. His participation can be as simple as acknowledging an act of kindness performed by a student. He said all of the teachers and staff are encouraging kindness throughout the school, and the students are benefiting from it. Not only are they learning how to be kind to others, they are also taking part in fun activities to help reinforce what they are learning. "Sometimes we do really fun, school-wide initiatives," said Yost. "In December, we did the kindness bingo. That's when we gave every student in the school a card. At the top it said, 'kindness', and there were just random acts of kindness that any stu-



Submitted photo
SSMS Grade 7 student Brady Mehan bumps elbows with Guidance Counsellor Tyler Yost after winning a prize for Kindness Bingo. Students were given cards with random acts of kindness. Once they completed 10 acts, they could enter their cards for a chance to win a prize.

dent could do, either at school or at home. An adult would sign off on the act of kindness that the student did, and once 10 acts were completed, they could submit their card for a chance to win a prize at the end of the month. We had three winners in December:

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Yost has always seen unkind acts as being the "root of many disciplinary referrals" and behavioural incidents in schools. Teaching kindness is a way

that teachers can be proactive rather than having to respond to behavioural problems after the fact. He said the students appreciate that there is an expectation of kindness, and they like that they are able to talk about things up front rather than be disciplined or talked to about their behavior.

"I'd rather approach it beforehand and try and reduce the amount of incidents in the school," said Yost. "The emphasis is really for everyone in the school. My goal is to foster an atmosphere where students and staff are intentionally kind to each other. I think that's really important. I think the science behind acts of kindness is incredibly interesting."

Yost spoke about the "domino effect" of kindness. He said when people see acts of kindness happening, they are more likely to perform their own acts of kindness for others. He wants to create this same domino effect at SSMS, encouraging students to be kind, and rewarding them when they are.

Another effect of kindness is that it helps to boost one's mood. Yost said this good feeling can become "something addictive", and it can "shape their personality and reputation for the better". When someone feels good, they are more likely to want to share that by being kind. He said it is a win/win situation, and it benefits everyone.

"They'll feel good and they'll want to do two more acts of kindness. I'm really big on the idea of teaching kindness in schools."

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