



Buffalo / Niagara

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www.PFLAG-buffalo-niagara.org

We meet because we have learned that someone very close to us is Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Transgendered.

We try to help one another deal with this information in a positive manner.

Although we do not agree at all times, we try to be understanding.

We offer help to those who seek it, but do not force ourselves on others.

We strive to maintain anonymity while sharing on a level that is comfortable for all of us.

We encourage all to attend meetings for their own benefit as well as that of the group.

It is our hope that when each of us reaches a point of understanding and acceptance, we realize that this is when others need us the most.

Same-Sex Marriage: Rights and Responsibilities

Monthly Meeting
Sunday, October 16, 2011
2:30–5:30 PM

Kenilworth United Church of Christ

The October meeting will begin with a presentation by local lawyer Brenda Mattar on the rights and responsibilities that come with the passage of same-sex marriage in New York State. After the presentation, there will be time for sharing. As always, newcomers will be offered the alternative of meeting privately with a PFLAG parent.

Time to Stop Bullying – Time to Take Action

Special Dinner Meeting
Wednesday, October 26, 2011
6:00 PM

Kenilworth United Church of Christ

This dinner meeting is to plan actions that can be taken to stop bullying in our schools. Anyone from Western New York who is ready to take action, whether big or small, is invited to attend. Representatives of Gay and Lesbian Youth Services (GLYS) as well as local high school and college Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) will be invited. PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara will provide pizza, wings, and soft drinks. This event is free though donations to help defray costs are greatly appreciated.

Kenilworth United Church of Christ
45 Dalton Drive
Tonawanda, NY 14223

The church is located two blocks west of Niagara Falls Boulevard at the corner of Decatur Rd and Dalton Dr. Decatur runs off of Niagara Falls Boulevard about 0.8 miles south of Sheridan Drive and about 0.8 miles north of Kenmore Ave.

Our monthly meetings are in the library, which is near the parking lot entrance. The October 26th meeting will be on the second floor in a large meeting space. The facility is handicap accessible.

New Parents Meetings are scheduled as needed at a location convenient to those involved. These self-help one-on-one meetings deal with the concerns of parents and family members who have recently learned that a loved one is Lesbian or Gay.

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, Buffalo/Niagara, is a non-profit, all volunteer, community-based organization not affiliated with any ethnic, religious, economic, or political group. Membership is open to all. PFLAG membership lists are kept confidential and mailings are sent in plain envelopes.

A Little Less Conversation, A Little More Action

Western New York got a wakeup call when the epidemic of youth suicide due to bullying came to light locally with the suicide of Jamey Rodemeyer. Jamey's death was not the first in Western New York but it captured people's attention. Ironically, while Jamey was contemplating this horribly unfortunate act, our PFLAG meeting watched a video on and discussed bullying.

While it is important that we be educated about bullying, it's time to act to prevent as many future suicides as possible. We need to make sure school districts, principals, and teachers understand that they must make a serious effort to stop bullying. Our youth and their parents must also understand that they have a role to play as well.

There are some who say, "Bullying has been around for a long time so what's the big deal?" Well, just because something has been around for a long time doesn't make it alright. Just because something has been around for a long time doesn't mean it should continue. Just because something has been around a long time doesn't mean it hasn't hurt countless people – some of whom take their own lives rather than continue to put up with bullying – and some who remember and have to deal with the trauma for a long, long time.

Bullying today is also different because of online

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Kristian Rickard and Leanne Smith
Roger Seifert & Dennis Stuart
Kathleen & George Steigauf
Linda Stefaniak

communication and social media. In the past, bullying may have been something that happened in school or in the neighborhood. But now, the very social media tools that children turn to for support also are used to bully seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

Time to Stop Bullying – Time to Take Action

On October 26, 2011, PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara will hold a dinner meeting to develop a plan of action to help stop bullying in Western New York Schools. Creating safe schools has long been a project for PFLAG National and now our chapter is getting involved.

This meeting is open to all in Western New York who want to take actions to stop bullying. The focus will be on the concrete steps that people can take to eliminate bullying and to encourage and support school districts, principals, teachers, students, and parents to be part of the solution to bullying.

There are many ways that people can help: being part of an action committee, making phone calls, writing letters, and making donations to support the efforts. There is much work that needs to be done behind the scenes. So, even if you are still dealing with bullying in your past, there are ways you can help someone today. But the bottom line is that the time for action is now.

Our chapter will be partnering with other local organizations in this effort but we can't do it alone. We need your help. We need your time. We need your energy. Or more accurately, our youth need your help, time, and energy.

Please join us as we work on practical ways to make our schools safe for all children so that they can focus on learning. Please join us as we work to eliminate bullying. For more information about Safe Schools program, please check out

<http://community.pflag.org/Page.aspx?pid=1274>

Society fed bias against Jamey

By Donn Esmonde, The Buffalo News

Jamey Rodemeyer died because of our sins. He died due to the sins of intolerance and insensitivity. He died because life for a teenager is largely about fitting in, and anyone who does not –and being gay is about as "different" as it gets –becomes a target.

The Williamsville North freshman killed himself last week, after enduring years of emotional abuse from other kids. Unlike with a lot of teenagers who kill themselves, we don't have to wonder what Jamie Rodemeyer was thinking. You can hear him say, on the video he made last spring: "People would be like 'faggot, fag' and they'd taunt me in the hallways and I felt like I could never escape it." In the world of technology, social networking sites are emotional IEDs. Rodemeyer said he was battered on Formspring, an anonymous-message site: "People just constantly sent me hate, telling me that gay people go to hell."

The abuse Rodemeyer and others like him endure – gay teens are as much as four times as likely to kill themselves as heterosexuals – is a reminder of how far we are from a day when sexual orientation is no bigger a deal than someone's hair color.

There is little doubt in my mind that the gay-hostile climate gay teens live in is shaped by a society that still delivers a spirit-breaking message: If you are gay, there is something wrong with you. As far as we have come over the years, the Gay-Is-OK finish line is not in sight. Gay marriage still is not recognized in 44 states. The military just this week shed its "don't ask, don't tell" hypocrisy, righting a centuries-old injustice done to the countless gay soldiers who served this country. Conservative religious groups piously parrot the "Love the sinner, hate the sin" mantra –oblivious to the insulting notion that someone's inherent sexual wiring is "sinful."

"If you go to church with your family, and the message from the pulpit is 'if you're gay, you're going to hell,' there's nothing about that to make a young person think that they are OK," said Marvin Henchbarger, head of WNY Gay and Lesbian Youth Services.

Teens are by nature hypersensitive to how they are seen. They do not have to extend their antennae to pick up the messages society sends—directly or implicitly – about homosexuality.

"I don't think things are any better today than they ever were for most gay [teens]," Henchbarger told me. "We have some kids who are 'out.' But most of them are still getting a negative message from the media, from churches, from their parents or other adults."

Certainly the kids who tormented Rodemeyer got—whether from inside their homes, or from the larger culture – the message that gay equals weird. If gay kids do not believe that, there are plenty of abusers who will verbally pound it into them. On behalf of Jamey and every other gay teen who saw no way out, all I can painfully say to the bullies is: Mission accomplished.

Some people refuse to accept the fact that no one "chooses" to be gay or straight or something in between. Sexuality is hard-wired, an orientation, not a preference; a characteristic, not a choice. Apart from the scientific evidence, the simple logic is inescapable. Who other than a masochist would "choose" to be gay, when it comes with a guarantee of ridicule and rejection?

It took a vast accumulation of abuses to push Jamey Rodemeyer over the edge. Kids were in his face, and they had a society packed with anti-gay messages behind them. No wonder that this kid figured the odds were stacked against him. RIP, Jamey. I wish you had been born into a kinder world.

Too Many Adults Set Bad Example

By Kathleen Ganz, The Buffalo News, Letter to the Editor
As a mother and a Williamsville North graduate, I am so very saddened by the death of Jamey Rodemeyer. This

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young man needed help, and despite his parents' best efforts, Jamey just didn't see any other solution to his pain.

The media have been calling it a preventable death. So true. The media have called upon the adults to step up and protect our children by getting serious about stopping bullying. The local radio stations and newspapers have sounded the call to come together and help our children by putting a stop of bullying.

But on Sept. 23, my sadness was almost overpowered by my disbelief at what I heard on a local radio station, on every edition of its headline news. The story made fun of one of the Buffalo Bills for his exuberant reaction to a touchdown. I am not a football fan, so I don't pretend to know the details, but I was stunned to hear the story. The player's enthusiastic screams of delight were played over and over, while the announcer and his fellow players made comments about how "girly" he sounded.

So let me understand this: Bullying is wrong. Bullying is dangerous. Talking about someone in a disparaging way is disrespectful. But it's OK for adults to do it? It's OK for our children to hear their parents publicly ridicule a football player? The player who is being publicly ridiculed is not supposed to feel bad because "we're just having fun?" If that's not bullying, what is?

If the adults are truly going to try to stop our children from treating people disrespectfully, maybe they ought to start by looking at their own behavior.

More steps needed

By The Buffalo News Editorial Board

On the problem of bullying, it is perhaps possible to cut state legislators a little slack. Their session ended before the horrific suicide of Jamey Rodemeyer and, even if they had stiffened the state law before the legislative session ended, it likely wouldn't have been in effect before Jamey's death.

Going forward is a different story. New York State lawmakers are now on notice. They know how terrible a price bullying can exact in the digital age. They know the law they passed last year is insufficient to the challenge of 21st century bullying. If they come back into session without moving on this issue, then they are turning their backs on the next victim.

The state last year enacted the Dignity for All Students Act. It bans harassment based on color, sexual orientation, race and other factors, while requiring districts to report instances of bullying to the state Education Department and to increase training of school personnel.

What it didn't do was pay attention to the way kids bully one another in the age of instant and unrelenting communication. The hallway taunts are still there, but they have also gone electronic, spreading like viruses through text messages, emails and, perhaps most damaging, social media.

Lawmakers are aware of the problem. "What we have on the books doesn't approach the situation that happened outside Buffalo," said State Sen. Stephen M.

Saland, a Dutchess County Republican and sponsor of a new anti-bullying measure that passed the Senate last session, but died in the Assembly as legislators rushed to adjourn. His bill specifically defines bullying and gives schools disciplinary authority to combat cyberbullying.

Another package introduced this week would make "bullycide" -- in which a cyberbully's actions "intentionally or recklessly" cause a victim to commit suicide -- a felony charge of manslaughter. That could permit prosecutors to charge 12- and 13-year-olds with felonies. There is a risk, as the New York Civil Liberties Union pointed out, of crossing the line into unconstitutional abridgement of free speech. We can't stop everyone from saying mean things. But there is a line beyond which protected free speech crosses into harassment. That line may be hard to define, but it has been crossed well before any child seriously contemplates suicide.

Still, as Donna E. Lieberman, executive director of the state Civil Liberties Union, observed, it is important "to train teachers and students to recognize and respond to the early signs that a student is being bullied." Indeed, that must become a crucial part of the equation. When the bullies feel outnumbered, they are more likely to back down.

The obvious fact is that bullying is not going to go away. It is a defect of human nature. Some kids will always want to pick on others, for whatever sick satisfaction that offers them. But it is possible to adopt more forceful and intelligent responses to it so that fewer kids have to endure miserable childhoods and fewer still feel the hopelessness that Jamey Rodemeyer did.

Harassment of Jamey's sister brings suspension

By Stephen T. Watson, The Buffalo News

A student accused of harassing the sister of Jamey Rodemeyer at the Williamsville North High School Homecoming dance last week has been suspended by the school district.

District officials and the Amherst Police Department continue to investigate the homecoming incident and the bullying that Jamey endured before the high school freshman killed himself last month. No other suspensions or charges have been issued.

The suspension stems from a tense encounter at the Sept. 22 homecoming dance. Alyssa Rodemeyer said that as she and friends chanted Jamey's name, a "little group" of students approached her to say they were glad her brother took his life. "I think it's a step in the right direction," Timothy Rodemeyer, the father of Jamey and Alyssa, said of the suspension.

In other developments in the case, which has grabbed intense national attention:

- Alyssa revealed new details about the day Jamey killed himself and the events at the homecoming dance in an interview with CNN's Anderson Cooper.

- Someone recorded parts of the homecoming incident, according to Alyssa, but police do not yet have the video.
- Alyssa spoke to Amherst police detectives Thursday, and she and other students are scheduled to meet with district officials Monday.
- Williamsville Schools Superintendent Scott G. Martzloff has begun to publicly defend the district's response to Jamey's suicide; he will attend a meeting Monday of the Parent Teacher Student Association at Williamsville North.

"Let me be clear: We will not let the actions of any student threaten the emotional well-being of others," Martzloff said in a video posted late Thursday on the district's website that revealed the suspension. The suspension is the first disciplinary action taken since Jamey's Sept. 18 suicide.

Jamey was subjected to relentless bullying at Heim Middle School, harassment he documented in online forums where cyberbullies attacked him.

Jamey, who had questioned his sexuality and was seeing a school social worker and a counselor, was 14 and had just started at Williamsville North.

His sister told CNN's Cooper that she was the one who found Jamey's body in their backyard. "I didn't really have time to soak it all in because I was in a state of shock and I was trying to do everything to, you know, call 911, get my parents, you know, try to save him," Alyssa says in an "Anderson Cooper 360" interview transcript.

The homecoming dance for Williamsville North, where Alyssa is a junior, was held the same night as a wake for Jamey. Alyssa went to the dance from the wake with some friends, at the urging of her parents and to take their mind off the pain of Jamey's death, she told Cooper. Jamey's favorite singer was Lady Gaga, and when one of her songs was played at the dance, Alyssa and her friends began singing along and chanting Jamey's name. That's when, Alyssa said, "like three" students came up to her group and told her they were glad Jamey took his life. Eventually, Alyssa said, the students stopped insulting her brother and they ran from the dance when it appeared they could get in trouble.

"I don't understand who would have the heart to disrespect someone even after they're dead. It's mind-blowing," she told Cooper.

A parent reported the incident to Amherst police, who interviewed a number of witnesses before talking to Alyssa on Thursday, said Amherst Police Capt. Michael Camilleri. The confrontation was over by the time off-duty police officers at the event began to investigate. Amherst police previously said two sets of students accused the other side of inciting the conflict. Police have interviewed the students named in the original police complaint but they haven't decided whether charges will be filed for anything that happened to Jamey before he died or to his sister at the homecoming event.

The student's suspension stems from the school district's ongoing investigation into what was said and done during the homecoming festivities. "While our investigation continues, we have already identified a student that we believe is responsible for this incident, and have imposed a suspension to the fullest extent allowed under education law," Martzloff said in the online video the district posted Thursday. He did not provide details, and wasn't available Friday for an interview. District spokeswoman Rita M. Wolff said she could not reveal further information on the student.

The Rodemeyers said they are glad the district has acted against a student accused of harassing their daughter, but they hope Jamey's bullies are held accountable. "I think it's awesome that all this attention is coming on. I think it's also somewhat a sad thing," Tim Rodemeyer said. "I think the reason it's getting all this attention is because [bullying] is such a big problem."

Roy, Brown join forces in anti-bullying video

The Buffalo News

Buffalo Sabres center Derek Roy and Mayor Byron W. Brown have taped a one-minute, anti-bullying public service announcement that will be unveiled early next month.

The announcement is part of an ongoing anti-bullying campaign in conjunction with Buffalo Public Schools. Students at Emerson High School won a poster and slogan contest for the campaign, dubbed "Buffalo Bulldozes Bullying." An official from AT&T, the chief corporate sponsor, also will appear in the announcement.

An anti-bullying summit, which was part of the campaign, was held at D'Youville College in January.

Empower students to help one another

By Amber Chandler, The Buffalo News, Viewpoint Article (Amber is a Frontier Middle School teacher and chair of Dignity for All, an anti-bullying conference.)

You have been a part of bullying. Before you protest, let me reiterate: Yes, you have been involved in bullying. You may not have a horror story of being shoved in a locker, mocked for your clothes, or pushed around on a school bus. You may not have secretly called anyone fat, or ugly, or have a skeleton in your closet of your past bad behavior. Even if you have not been the bullied or the bully, you've most definitely been the overlooked but crucial other "B" word — bystander.

With the media attention on a string of suicides, as well as an additional emphasis on the far-reaching consequences of social media, Gov. David Paterson (himself one of the first legally blind students to attend public school in New York, and admittedly bullied) signed the Dignity for All Students Act into law in June 2010. But

the law, which calls for public schools to prohibit “incidents of discrimination or harassment including bullying, taunting or intimidation” will actually go into effect on July 1, 2012, with a laundry list of actions schools must take.

The law states that “It is hereby declared to be the policy of the state to afford all students in public schools an environment free of discrimination and harassment.” This seems like a legitimate and logical piece of legislation, and it is. However, as we complete our first weeks of school, I’m calling on adults to do their part in preventing bullying by teaching students their role as the overlooked “bystander.” Call it a social experiment, call it empowerment training, call it whatever you will, but let’s take bullying by the horns this year.

As a teacher, I’ll be the first to admit that students have more power in schools than any of us hired to instruct usually give them credit for. Any honest adult will admit that a child has derailed plans, manipulated a situation, or forced himself or herself smack into the middle of our plans, despite the adult’s “control” of the classroom, minivan, dinner table or soccer field. Harness and direct that power and schools will be able to reduce bullying. If a culture of respect is nurtured, and students are taught to voice their displeasure when they see and hear bullying of any kind—especially if they are simply bystanders — the actions will all but disappear. To put it simply, if it is very uncool to be rude or threatening to someone, the behavior will change.

In all actuality, students have the best tools in their ability to apply positive peer pressure. If bystanders learn to say “That’s rude. Leave him alone,” or “We don’t talk to each other like that here,” then the dynamic is shifted and the bullied and bystander are united, alleviating the alienation necessary for the bully to dominate.

Bullying is a far more complex issue than any one column could ever begin to explain. However, as our children begin their journey this year, it certainly wouldn’t hurt if parents, teachers, coaches, administrators, bus drivers and lunch monitors begin to tap into the power of the bystander to stop bullying. Students are quite empathetic, often noticing the subtle snubs that can devastate the fragile ego of a developing adolescent.

By empowering students to help each other, to collectively speak up for someone being silenced, we can take the first steps in creating an environment that recognizes that bullying is every-one’s problem, a fact that must be recognized before legislation could ever hope to impact the lives of our children.

Fighting back against bullying

By **Maki Becker**, The Buffalo News

They’ve been pushed down on lunch room floors and taunted mercilessly on school buses. They’ve endured cruel remarks in locker rooms and been bombarded with hate-filled comments on social network sites on the Internet.

They’ve been bullied simply for being different. For one girl, it was because she was dark-complexioned. One girl had a medical condition that left her bald. One boy was targeted because he has Asperger’s syndrome. One teenager was born a girl but now identifies as a boy. Each of these young people has found ways to fight back against bullying -- with the help of friends, family, schools and communities.

The story of Jamey Rodemeyer, a 14-year-old Amherst boy who killed himself after being taunted by bullies, has struck a nerve with these young people. They all agree that more needs to be done to stop bullying. They are heartened to hear that lawmakers are calling for tougher legislation and educators are trying to find ways to make people aware of the problem. But they also have found strength in taking on bullying themselves, whether or not they’re the victims.

Adults alone cannot solve the problem, said Amanda Nickerson, director of the Jean M. Alberti Center for the Prevention of Bullying at the University at Buffalo. “Having kids be part of the solution is always the way to go,” she said.

Nickerson was careful to point out that urging victims to become part of the solution shouldn’t send the message that they deserved to be bullied. “This is not to blame you,” she explained. “This is to empower you. We can’t get toward the solutions unless we get to all the players. That includes the target. That includes the bystanders, whether they’re adults or peers. This is just one piece of the puzzle.”

Barrage of hurtful words

For one 14-year-old girl from Buffalo, the bullying came at school and from family. “They were telling her horrible things. Saying she was ‘retarded,’ she was ‘slow,’ she was ‘ugly,’” the girl’s mother recalled. They also made fun of the girl because she had a dark complexion. The mother and daughter spoke to The Buffalo News on the condition of anonymity because they didn’t want to spur more bullying.

The hurtful words were instigated by a girl the daughter had known since elementary school but who had turned on her in middle school. Other kids would join in with the former friend. They taunted the girl at school and were particularly nasty to her on the school bus. They started writing nasty comments on her Facebook page, too. Things got so out of control that the former friend even threatened to shoot the girl.

When the girl’s mother went to the police, she was told she had to go to the school administrators. They did nothing, the mother said. “I felt very helpless,” the mother said. Earlier this year, the victim indicated to her parents that she was thinking of taking her own life. She was hospitalized for about a week, and then was entered into a program through Gateway-Longview. She was assigned a counselor and mentors. The mother and daughter also joined several groups, some faith-based, to help them work on the girl’s self-esteem.

The mother said she has seen a change in her daughter. She was especially happy when her daughter told her about an incident that occurred on the school bus a couple of weeks ago. The daughter explained that she had "stuck up for a little kid."

"He was being bullied by an older kid. I didn't like that," she told *The News*. "That's not cool to be bullied." The older boy has stopped taunting the little boy, she said. "I felt better," the girl said.

She also now stands up to people who make fun of her. "I stand up for myself," she said. "I tell the teacher what happened and I say: 'I'm not in the mood. You really need to stop picking on me.'"

Relentless teasing

Emily Tout had been teased much of her life for being bald. The 15-year-old Cleveland Hill student has a condition called alopecia areata, which caused her immune system to attack her hair follicles. She wore a wig to school to mask her condition. Her friends didn't pay any mind to her baldness, but others at school teased her. The teasing turned nasty. People were leaving anonymous notes on her locker and on her social networking accounts. "You're worthless," they would write. "You should kill yourself."

Tout confided in a couple of friends about the extent of the bullying. One of the friends, Hannah Foss, decided something needed to be done. She went to the principal to explain what was going on. The notes at school stopped but the online comments continued.

Then Hannah came up with a radical idea. She asked Emily, "Would you find it offensive if I shaved my head?" Emily said she wouldn't. But she didn't believe her friend would do such a thing. But Hannah did. She went to the Supercuts on Harlem Road and had the hairdresser shear off all her hair. She showed up the next day and proclaimed to anyone who asked that she had done it "for Emily." Emily was blown away by her friend's gesture. "It meant so much to me," Emily recalled.

The girls shared their story with *The Buffalo News*. Emily worked up the courage to pose for a photo without her wig. The story hit the front page the next day. Since then, most of the bullying has stopped, they both said. And Emily hardly ever wears her wig anymore. "It's pretty awesome being bald," Emily said. "I like it a lot."

Facebook hijacked

The boy is not shy about calling himself a "geek." He's crazy about math and plays video games "like it's my job." The boy, a senior at a suburban private school, also has Asperger's syndrome – an autism spectrum disorder that causes him to have difficulty in social situations.

"I was bullied a lot up until my junior year," said the boy, who asked that his name not be published. "I was the kid that was always acting weird or different," he said. The teen said he was teased all the time. It always

happened when there were no teachers around. He recalled a particularly scary moment when he was in a locker room. He passed by two other boys and one of them "throws out a punch right at me as I was walking by," he said.

He recounted how someone hijacked his Facebook account and sent out messages "saying sexual things" to his friends. "It was making me look like the biggest jerk in the world," he said. The boy tried to stand up for himself on some occasions and ended up getting into a few fights. It was not until his junior year that he found out that he had Asperger's syndrome. He learned about the syndrome and how it affected his social behavior. He also switched schools. The bullying ended.

The boy said learning about Asperger's helped him realize how people might misinterpret how he expresses himself. He also sought the help of parents and school officials, actions that helped him deal with bullying. He urged other young people with Asperger's or other autism-related conditions to learn as much as possible about their conditions. "Figure out what you're doing different," he said. "I can't change the way I am, but I'm moving around who I already am."

Stares and name-calling

He was born a girl but never really felt like one. "I look in the mirror and see a guy," the 16-year-old transgender student said. "I don't see the female part of me." For the most part, friends and people at school don't give the boy any trouble, although many do trip up on whether to use male or female pronouns. "They usually catch themselves," he said.

Whether he should use the girls or boys bathroom can raise issues too. If he needs to use the restroom at school, he seeks out a male friend who comes in with him to the boys room. "He's understanding," the boy said of his friend.

The suburban high school student has gotten his share of rude stares and mean name-calling. The worst incident was when a boy pushed him to the ground in the lunch room. "Watch where you're going, you ----- --," he recalled the boy saying.

The boy knows it could be a lot worse. He's read on the Internet and in memoirs of people in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community about the worst examples of bullying. He's heartsick over what happened to Jamey Rodemeyer.

"I know I've had my fair share of struggles, but when I hear the stories about that, it's like a part of me is torn apart," he said. "I feel like someone should have done something." To ensure other young people are safe, the boy started a gay-straight alliance club at his school a couple of years ago. He learned about other such clubs at schools around the country. He collected signatures from fellow students to start the club. School staff have joined the club, too, to show support.

He's proud to have started the group. "It makes me feel that if you believe in something strong enough, you can get it done," he said. "I got to meet so many people from my school I never would have thought would stand up for that."

TV film to put spotlight on bullying

By Kevin J. Bargnes, The Buffalo News

A Midwestern Christian television network will be filming a movie in Amherst next week called "Race to the Finish" about a teenager who overcame bullying.

Based on a true story, it's about Harlan, a mentally disabled boy who is teased and beaten by bullies. A boy named Paul stands up for Harlan, and, during Harlan's first ever game of street football, they realize how fast he can run.

Though the movie has been in preproduction for several months, those involved in the project have a renewed interest in it in the wake of Amherst resident Jamey Rodemeyer's suicide.

"I really don't think that many kids have an idea of what this mean stuff does to the kids that you bully," said AJ Jabaji of Pendleton, a 16-year-old student at Starpoint High School who will be playing Paul. "I was really saddened when I heard about Jamey, and my heart just goes out to his family, having been a victim of bullying myself at times."

The film is written and directed by Amherst resident Greg Robbins and is based on events from his life. Robbins has previously done work with Tri-State Christian Television, the nonprofit TV station funding the film, and has enlisted the help of former "Matlock" star Nancy Stafford and former Arnold Schwarzenegger stunt double Peter Kent. "Bullying is not a new problem. But it's a persistent one," said Stafford, who played title character Ben Matlock's assistant in the TV show that aired on NBC and ABC from 1986 to 1995. She'll be playing the bullied boy's grandmother. "I think our story is extremely

timely, and our message has to get out there more and more and more."

Robbins, who only recently moved to the Buffalo area, said "Race to the Finish" is a film that he has wanted to do his whole life, and given recent events — given the nationwide discussion on bullying that was going on even before Jamey's death—now seemed like the right time.

"We're shooting this movie just a few blocks from where that little boy Jamey took his own life," said Robbins. "His funeral was like five blocks from my house, and I pray we can be there for future Jameys to help stop this from happening."

It's not clear when the movie will air on TCT, which broadcasts on Channel 15 in Buffalo, but DVDs are available for free at www.racetothefinishthemovie.com.

Filming will start Friday at Amherst High School. Robbins is seeking volunteer extras for filming at the high school on Oct. 9.

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