

Say My Name aims for one million acts of kindness



By Brock Weir

Sunday is Valentine's Day, a time of year when the colour pink becomes synonymous with love, hearts, and all things warm and fuzzy ? but for local musician Glenn Marais, it is symbolic of something much larger and, sadly, rarer: kindness.

When a co-worker told Mr. Marais about the bullying her son was experiencing in school, the wheels started to turn. The result was Say My Name Canada.

The initiative, which encourages schools and businesses from across Canada to get on board with a month of kindness, has grown by leaps and bounds. The third annual campaign launched Thursday and Mr. Marais has marvelled at the legs this humble idea has found.

?We never really intended it to be much more than just trying to get people thinking and talking about just being kind to each other as a way to deal with bullying,? says Mr. Marais. ?Last year, it went through the schools and all these amazing things happened where kids were writing kindness notes on lockers. Three red-haired boys who were bullied almost the entire time they were in school created a poster and it went viral, explaining how what people said to them, even though it seemed like nothing, was hurtful to them.

?That was the whole idea of Say My Name: Someone's identity is important to them. When you make fun of them, you are taking away who they are and a little bit of what they are.?

The campaign asks everyone in Canada and around the world to keep track of their acts of kindness and post online and through social media what they do as individuals, schools, and organizations to keep the kindness train rolling.

Groups can register online at Say My Name Canada to read success stories, look at pictures of kindness in action, and be inspired.

Since the campaign's inception, they have logged nearly 450,000 acts of kindness and by this time next year Mr. Marais says he hopes they will be right over the top.

?I want one million in Canada, but it is even more important that we get every single province on board doing at least one, then I want to see it go around the world,? he says.

Over the past two years, Mr. Marais says he has seen these acts of kindness morph according to the schools involved. A post-it note

initiative, which saw students leaving yellow notes of kindness and encouragement on the lockers of peers was truly student-led, he said. Sutton High School students, he added, went all out, ensuring at least one note was left on every single locker.

'They were going out of their way to make people feel better about themselves and I don't see why we as a human race can't have that focus of living for others a bit more,' says Mr. Marais. 'We also found a lot of people, adults, have been posting on our website that these things happened to them. It was amazing to me that adults, including a friend, who had been bullied all the way through high school and I had never known. He said to me, 'Even now, I carry a little bit of that with me and I am not going to get rid of it.' There are so many people who had similar stories. Everyone has gone into it one way or another where they face this kind of oppression and cruelty.'

Mr. Marais, who now lives in Newmarket, grew up in Aurora. He returned to his old stomping grounds on Thursday evening for the campaign's third annual launch party, held at Aw, Shucks in conjunction with Mardi Gras North. The fundraiser for Say My Name was helped alongside the Mardi Gras launch which was a prelude to the February 13 Love Train Revue, hosted by George and Sher St. Kitts at the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts.

'I want to help Glenn take that 451,000 and help him get over that million mark and then we can start marching towards that and ask the rest of the world to do the same thing and help us stop bullying,' said Ms. St. Kitts.

But let's not stop at just hitting the one million mark.

'It would be great to have this as part of a Mental Health Day with youth,' says Mr. Marais. 'We need a We Day for mental health. There are so many kids who are in peril and danger and it is not the most inviting society for mental health issues yet, but it is getting better. That is what I would love to see: a whole day conference and trying to spread this as far and wide as we can.'

For more information on the campaign, visit www.saymynamecanada.com. For tickets to the Love Train Revue, call 905-787-8811.