

Autism Awareness Week at St. Mark School

In an effort to raise awareness and acceptance for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Special Education Resource Teachers Maria Lein and Stacey Mahoney, along with St. Mark's Student Council, organized a week of fun activities from which all proceeds were donated to Autism Ontario. On Monday March 30th, all 407 students gathered in the gymnasium for the kick-off assembly. You could have heard a pin drop while the students watched a 17 minute video that offered five simulation activities, allowing the viewer to step into the shoes of a student with Autism and see the world through their eyes just for a few moments. Mary Gilkinson, the Itinerant Teacher on the ASD Team, along with some of St. Mark parents was among the many present.

The school promoted their first Autism Campaign with the slogans "Together for Autism" and "Toonies for Autism". The goal was to raise at least \$800. For each Toonie donated, the students participated in a variety of activities. On Tuesday, students had the luxury of rolling out of bed and coming to school in their PJ's. Many also brought along their teddy bears. Wednesday was Wacky Hair/Hat Day and each student received a complimentary Freezie. For World Autism Day



on Thursday, the students met in the yard for a one-hour walk for Autism. Most were dressed in Purple and Orange and wore the 'Together for Autism' stickers proudly on their shirts. The day could not have been more perfect; with the blue sky above, the music pumping out of the loudspeakers and of course the huge smiles on the faces of the students who knew they were walking for such a worthy cause. The week ended with Twin Day on Friday and complimentary freshly popped popcorn for everyone as well as a surprise visit by our Special Education Consultant, Selina Galvao.

St. Mark School exceeded their goal in more ways than one. Yes, they raised over \$835 for Autism, but more than that, they planted the seeds of acceptance for those who are different. As one parent so accurately said, "if you've gotten even just a few students to understand then you've made a difference". St. Mark hopes to make this an annual campaign and looks forward to planning some great spirit activities for next year's fundraiser for Autism!

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