

# OPINION



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## WEEKEND FORUM

# Children don't need another anti-bullying 'program'

Open letter to *Laureen Harper*.  
Re: national Red Cross anti-bullying  
program.



Karen Sebben

**A**s long-standing, grass roots organizations directly and only established to represent the voices of children and families who have been victimized by bullying, "anti-bullying" advocacy is the sole purpose of our organizations.

We have no other mandate, agenda or labour issues. We are encouraged a national approach through the Red Cross is being considered. However, we are concerned the approach will mirror existing strategies that are not working.

Child suicides are increasing, as are mental health and addiction issues.

Adults have been unable to effectively resolve bullying issues in the workplace or home. However, as adults, they now have defined legal recourse, with consequences for the offenders.

Children have no such recourse. They have no union representation. They have limited rights under the law — which are vague and rarely enforced.

With all due respect, our children do not need another anti-bullying "program". Our children need — and we have asked for years — awareness, education and enforcement of policy/procedures and the law.

Too many agencies, government groups and school boards who are charged with the responsibility of safeguarding our children have competing agendas within their own organizations.

Too much time is spent "managing" the problem, not enough on "eliminating" it.

Much depends on funding — a government commitment to making real changes in attitude, direction and consequences.

The current monies proposed for a national strategy are \$250,000 nationwide. This represents approximately \$20,000 per province/territory and within Ontario, it represents \$289.35 for each of our 72 school boards.

We respectfully ask before any official national plan is decided upon, the following be considered and that money is committed in specific areas:

- Grassroots advocacy organizations be consulted and included in the planning process;
- A rationale be provided to the public as to why the Red Cross is the suggested lead on a national anti-bullying initiative — for discussion;
- Consideration be given to other groups specifically dedicated to and nationally recognized for their work in addressing mental health and bullying; and
- Most importantly, that students are not be asked to "fix themselves"; that adults are held accountable, with clear legal, ethical and personal responsibilities.

We are politely listened to but never really heard because we are not "professionals".

Anti-bullying advocacy is all we do. Each day we are connected directly to the victims not being heard.

It is with great sadness and frustration we have watched suicides and instances of children in crisis continue to rise despite our suggestions and "real-life" experiences with victims.

Despite national recognition, we are largely ignored by those in decision-making capacities.

On behalf of children and their families, we respectfully look forward to your response.

*Karen Sebben, co-founder of the York Region Anti-Bullying Coalition (k\_sebben@hotmail.com), wrote this column in partnership with Bluewater Citizens for Education, Guelph Anti-Bullying Coalition, Halton Safe School advocate Julie Stauffer, Hamilton Safe School advocate Kathleen Williams and London Anti-Bullying Coalition.*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Other towns would welcome Whitchurch

*Time to revisit our hyphenated name, Whitchurch-Stouffville, letter to the editor by Arnold Neufeldt-Fast, June 6.*

This letter is in response to Mr. Fast. I would have, out of respect for his family, used his full name however that doesn't seem to matter to Mr. Fast.

Whitchurch was one of 19 counties formed in 1792, by John Graves Simcoe, the first lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada. By the 1840s, Whitchurch had 59 grist mills and 186 saw mills.

Stouffville was founded in 1804 by Abraham and Elizabeth Stouffer. The Stouffer family established its own saw and grist mills.

Stouffville became a village in 1871 and remained that way until it was amalgamated with Whitchurch Township in 1971.

At that time there was great concern the not very prosperous Village of Stouffville would be swallowed up by the wealthy Whitchurch Township.

I have lived in what was Whitchurch Township since

1981. When we moved here, we had a Newmarket phone number, a Newmarket mailing address, we shopped in Newmarket and Aurora and our children went to Ballantrae Public School.

*... and if one puts my postal code into a GPS, you will not find my house. Makes for interesting conversations with delivery people.*

It was long distance to call the town offices, the kids' school and any other Stouffville number. It took me five years to convince Bell Canada to switch our street to the 640 exchange.

My address remains Newmarket and if one puts my postal code into a GPS, you will not find my house. Makes for interesting conversations with delivery people.

I live in an area that has a number of estate developments where the homes generally sit on

between one and two acres. Every developer has had to pay large fees into the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville park trust. I have yet to see a new park built in this area over the past 32 years.

We finally got reasonable fire protection, thanks to the development dollars generated by the building of the Ballantrae Golf and Country club lifestyle community.

We have very little in the way of amenities up here other than 900 acres of York Regional Forest that we all enjoy year round.

So, if Mr. Fast and others wish to drop Whitchurch from the name of our town, perhaps we should revisit the amalgamation.

I know Aurora and Newmarket would be only too happy to have us join them.

I know the good folks in Vandorf would jump at the chance to become part of Aurora and their town water supply, and no, you can't have the museum back.

Please let me know what you decide. We have no downside and potentially tremendous upside.

**FRANK J. VAN VEEN**  
WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE

I GUESS THEY'RE IN MOURNING.....EXAM TIME.....  
POOR DEARS!

