

What Type of Action Must Be Taken By Schools to Prevent Bullying Suicides?

May 14, 2012

As the school year begins to come to wind down, two students have tragically taken their own lives after being subjected to anti-gay bullying. As families and friends mourn the deaths of these two teens, they are calling on their school communities to take action to prevent these tragic occurrences from happening in the future.

In mid-April, Jack Reese, a seventeen-year-old Utah teen, took his own life after being a victim of homophobic bullying at school. Jack's boyfriend, Alex Smith was speaking at a community panel following a screening of *Bully*, a movie about the effects of bullying on students, when he learned about Jack's death. Even before learning about his death, Alex Smith spoke about how Jack was subjected to anti-gay bullying and discussed the torment his boyfriend faced at school. A close friend of Jack's wrote in the mortuary's guest book that "Jack will always be remembered, I know you're looking down on all of us right now, telling us to be ourselves no matter what people say or how harshly they judge."

In early May 2012, seventeen-year-old Jay "Corey" Jones jumped off a bridge in Rochester, Minnesota. Jay was openly gay and family and friends have spoken about how bullying played a significant role in the depressed teen's suicide. According to his father, teasing was a constant struggle for his son, and Jay would "still try to keep his head up at school, but then he'd come home and be really sad about it. He just got really depressed about it because the guys weren't accepting him" because he was openly gay. When asked about the bullying her close friend endured, Rachel Born, a friend of Jay "Corey" Jones responded, "it just sucks that we had to lose somebody because of people's words, and they didn't realize that words hurt more than anything else."

Rachel Born is correct, "losing somebody to people's words" is an awful and heartbreaking occurrence. Studies show that gay teens are much more likely to be subjected to bullying, and are also much more likely to attempt suicide. While the exact cause of both of these alarming statistics is not definitively known, action must be taken in order to stop children from committing suicide.

Schools must incorporate ways to eliminate bullying and homophobia in schools in order to protect children from being subjected to the terrible and ultimately tragically events that can lead to death, like in the cases of Jack Reese and Jay Corey Jones. Cullen and Dykman has prepared a seminar on school responsibility in bullying specifically for schools. If your institution is interested in a complimentary seminar on this topic, please call Jim Ryan at 516-357-3750 or email him at jryan@cullenanddykman.com. We would be happy to set up a date convenient for you and look forward to helping you in preventing or handling bullying situations in your school.