

# A new day to inspire a new way

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COVENTRY — On April Fool's Day this year, members of S.A.V.E. celebrated a little differently than the typical pranksters.

Boys and girls in sixth, seventh and eighth grade that belong to the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry after school group known as S.A.V.E. [Students Against Violence Everywhere] launched a new holiday on that day. It's one that they made up — April Friend's Day.

Charles Blanchette, advisor of S.A.V.E., said that the kids recognized the day is often known as a day to pull pranks, poke fun and make jokes, all actions that in good natured scenarios can be harmless, but in other circumstances can generate much different emotions.

And in light of the recent tragedies to shake this nation — the brutal beating of 15-year-old Josie Lou Ratley from Deerfield Beach Florida over a text message and Phoebe Nora Mary Prince, the teenager from South Hadley, Mass. that committed suicide after months and months of bullying, as well as countless others — Blanchette said his students wanted to use the day to begin a new movement.

The students, he said, decided they would transform April Fool's Day into April Friend's Day and reach out to other youngsters and adults from around the world to establish a day specifically geared toward the goal of being nice to one another.

The students created a website, established a Facebook page, had bracelets made that bear the slogan, and work to promote the concept on a daily basis, he said.

"After a little research we found out that there was no such thing so we started it as a Rhode Island Initiative and it is really taking off," he said. "We have had thousands of friends on our Facebook page. Things rally drive electronically now-a-days so we are really promoting it on the Web."

The students said they are extremely pleased with how well the idea is being received.

Sami Gobin, vice president of S.A.V.E, said bullying does still exist at school, but she said because of initiatives like this and others created by S.A.V.E, the number of cases is down dramatically.



Jessica Selby • Daily Times

Students from the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry who are members of the school's group Students Against Violence Everywhere along with Charles Blanchette, the group's advisor, announced recently that they were promoting April 1 as April Friend's Day in an effort to further reduce incidences of bullying.



"It is not bad because they [the bullies] know that we are here and that they are being watched, but it does still happen," she said.

Blanchette said statistically too, this is true. In fact, he said, statistics done in the school found that fights are down 90 percent from last year, which was down 30 percent from the year before. He said there has also been a marked reduction in discipline referrals based on bullying.

"As soon as we hear about something happening, we try to jump on it right away," Blanchette said. "And we are trying to give students as many different options as possible to report incidents of bullying."

Blanchette said students can report bullying incidents anonymously in various tip boxes.

Blanchette said when the boxes were first installed they were averaging 30 to 40 at a time, but now, he said, members of S.A.V.E very infrequently retrieve any complaints.

He said the school also has a direct contact to their school principal, whom they can report to at any time of day.

"We want our kids to feel safe and we try to do whatever we can to make that happen," Blanchette said.

