



‘I am enough!’: ‘Idol’ contestant brings anti-bullying message to local students

By Kelley Smith, Staff Writer

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ROLLING PRAIRIE, IN — The gymnasium floor vibrated at Rolling Prairie Elementary School Monday, as 500 students repeatedly and simultaneously yelled, “I am enough!” during an anti-bullying assembly.

The words were written on the back of the T-shirt worn by Devyn Rush, also known as “the singing waitress” from “American Idol” Season 10, who is the spokeswoman for Hey, U.G.L.Y. (Unique Gifted Lovable You), an international nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing bullying and promoting self-love and respect.

The program began with a screening of Rush’s “American Idol” audition, during which her big voice surprised former judges Steven Tyler and Jennifer Lopez and current judge Randy Jackson, because of her tiny body. At the end of the clip, Lopez told Rush to “own” her voice by dressing to fit the part.

When Rush entered the gym, she told students that she heeded the advice, and changed her look to match her voice during her Hollywood debut. However, she said, she was cut from the competition the same day because she did not believe in herself.

Rush told students about having been bullied at her elementary, middle and high schools in Pennsylvania, and even in her adult life as a waitress in New York. She said she would go home at the end of the day, look in the mirror and say to herself, “I hate you.”

“What a bully would say to me once, I would say to myself 3,000 times,” Rush said.

She talked with students about negative judgments – how it feels to be on the receiving end of them and how easy it is to form them against others. She had them hold up their hands and “squish” all of their negative judgments. Then the students yelled, “I am enough,” and turned to those sitting next to them to say, “You are enough.”

Rush described the concept of a “bullyball,” which describes the cycle of bullying. When someone is hurting, she said, it creates a ball of pain. Many people are unsure of how to deal with that hurt, so they throw the ball at someone else, who then throws it at another person, thus continuing the cycle.

To drop the bullyball calmly is the only way to stop the cycle, Rush said. She told her listeners they must remember that bullies are acting out of hurt. Showing empathy for them, she said, should help them to behave in a loving manner, even toward their bullies.

In addition to sharing anecdotes about herself and others, Rush engaged the students in two songs – “I Am Enough,” which she wrote specifically for Hey, U.G.L.Y.’s “I Am Enough” campaign, and her original ballad, “Run Away.”

After the program, she received a variety of questions and comments from students who wanted to know



Devyn Rush, "the singing waitress" from "American Idol" Season 10 and national spokesperson for anti-bullying campaign Hey, U.G.L.Y., (Unique Gifted Lovable You) smiled as Rolling Prairie Elementary School students yelled the words on the back of her shirt - "I am enough!" - during an assembly Monday. Photo by Kelley Smith

about everything from her experience as a bullying victim to her interest in music.

In response to a boy who asked her what to do in the event that one’s bully is his or her parent, Rush said, “If you’re being bullied at home, you have to tell somebody. You have to do something about it because you do not deserve to be bullied. You deserve to be loved.”

The students excitedly “fist-bumped” the singer on their way out of the gym, and a few even stole hugs. Then Rush greeted and signed an autograph for each fifth-grader.

One special fifth-grader, Sophie Lott, sat with Rush and handed her note cards to autograph. Lott said she enjoyed the entire program and could not choose a favorite part.

“It was all inspiring,” she said.

However, Lott said one thing she learned was that “there are some things that we do that can hurt people without knowing,” like saying things that hurt their feelings.

Rush said she feels grateful to be able to use her positive exposure on “American Idol” to engage students and talk about a subject that has served as her own source of pain.

“It’s about emotional awareness and giving them the tools to love themselves throughout their lives,” she said.

According to a press release from Hey, U.G.L.Y., 160,000 students stay home from school each day in order to avoid being bullied. The organization, headquartered in Rolling Prairie, travels the country with Rush to help those students and others – bullies, victims of bullies, bystanders to bullying and those who self-bully.

Horizon Bank sponsored Monday morning’s assembly as well as one provided at Barker Middle School in Michigan City later that afternoon, and one scheduled for 12:45 p.m. today at Elston Middle School.

For more information visit HeyUGLY.org, BullyingBystandersUnite.org, CyberbulliedUnite.org, or ProjectApologize.org.