Students Shed Their Tough Shells and Show Their True Feelings

By Amir Khadar and Catlina Xiong
Fridley Middle School 8th grade students

October is National Bullying Prevention Month and Fridley Middle School faced it with courage.

On Friday, October 26, the eighth graders of Fridley Middle School faced a chilling morning as they ventured to the Community Center by foot for this annual rite of passage, the Courage Retreat.

Stomping, cheering, screaming and dance music could be heard as they arrived. Some felt timid as they approached the door but all 228 middle schoolers were instantly warmed when greeted by enthusiastic Fridley High School juniors and seniors offering high-fives and the “thumbs up” through a tunnel of welcoming support.

The Courage Retreat is lead by the non-profit Youth Frontiers and asks students to identify one “act of courage” to change your life and, in turn, change the lives of others. The high school mentors are former Courage Retreat participants themselves and help students step out of their comfort zone by driving dialog during small group discussion. They were also the first ones on the dance floor. The morning was very exciting; it included pair games and full group activities including mongo volleyball. Most of the morning students were on their feet, in full body movement, laughing, using the full gym to build strong relationships with peers and set a tone for the day.

After lunch, all students faced the “giant jump rope challenge”. While Youth Frontiers staff twirled, all students and mentors took turns running through the moving rope. When one was caught by the rope, everyone started over. No one was left behind when the entire retreat cleared the rope in fewer than three hits. Unified now, the retreat shifted focus to small group work more focused on courage. Each student wrote a single act of courage on a card they will keep.

The final activity was the most revealing. The day ended with “A Pebble in the Pond”. For this full group activity, a bowl of water is placed in the middle of the gym with small pebbles and microphone. All students were seated quietly in a circle around the center. In dimmed light, one at a time, students had the opportunity to approach the water, speak their act of courage into the microphone, drop a pebble in the pond and return to their seats. Their fellow students supported them with a gentle rubbing together of their palms. The pebble into the bowl of water refers to the ripple effect we all have on each other.

Some stories were very touching, there were tears, in the end there was a chance for healing. Lesson learned: We should be courageous and not be bystanders of our lives.

Fridley Middle School 8th grade students discovered personal “acts of courage” through fun games and quiet reflection.

Top pictures courtesy of Jill Hentges, Fridley Middle School Yearbook Advisor; Bottom pictures courtesy of Madison Morrissey, FMS 8th grade student.