

THE REGISTER CITIZEN

“Mr. Peace” shares message of acceptance, kindness and hope with Bakerville students

By [Ben Lambert](#), *The Register Citizen* POSTED: 12/06/16, 6:03 PM EST



Ben Lambert - The Register Citizen New Hartford students heard about the importance of treating others with love and kindness Wednesday from Kevin “Mr. Peace” Szawala.



Photo Courtesy of Ben Lambert - The Register Citizen - New Hartford students heard about the importance of treating others with love and kindness Wednesday from Kevin “Mr. Peace” Szawala.

NEW HARTFORD >> Students at the Bakerville Consolidated School in New Hartford took in a message on the power of acceptance, and the importance of spreading kindness in the face of bullying, during an assembly Tuesday afternoon.

[Kevin “Mr. Peace” Szawala](#), a youth pastor and youth speaker from Michigan, came to New Hartford Tuesday to speak to a group of elementary school students and teachers. He illustrated the importance of kindness in a number of ways during his remarks, including a parable about a \$20 bill, which kicked off the event.

He took the bill out of his pocket and offered it up, drawing rapt attention from the crowd of young people. He then proceeded to crumple up the currency, land on it with a flying stomp, and mock-sneeze on it.

Despite this degradation, the kids still wanted the money, and clamored for it as Szawala stepped through the rows of students on the floor. Szawala then used the moment to illustrate that even though it had been beaten up and altered, the money was of value — and the same was true of people, no matter their differences.

“If we don’t accept everyone, no matter how they look like on the outside, no matter where they’re from, no matter who they are, if we don’t accept everybody — like we would accept our own best friend, like they’re worth a full \$20 — then we can cause people a lot of pain,” said Szawala. “We can cause a lot of (hurt) inside their hearts.”

He also spoke about the power of a kind word — and the damage that mean remarks, or bullying, can leave in the hearts and minds of people. This damage can linger for decades, Szawala said, using the story of an 102-year-old woman who still clearly recalled being made fun of in elementary school.

But kind words and deeds, Szawala said, can heal the hearts of those that have been in pain — and heal one’s own as well. “Sometimes it just takes two seconds — one action, one word — and you can lift somebody up and encourage them and be nice to them,” said Szawala. “And it lasts on their heart forever. But in the same amount of time, you can also tear someone down, and that can stay on their heart forever too.”

During his remarks, among other stories and skits involving volunteers, he also asked students why they were friends with their best friends, and noted that most of the students said that was the case because they were treated well, as opposed to some material reason.

He led the kids in attendance through a bit of call-and-response during the assembly — “everybody say ‘heal people, heal people,” “everybody say, ‘be a best friend,” “everybody say ‘have courage,” “everybody say ‘make the right choice.” Those that are damaged themselves likely engage in bullying, he said, and suggested that, even if the bully won’t stop, the students should treat the bully with kindness and love.

He closed the event with a hip-hop song, delivered over the top of a thumping beat. “Now is the time, today is the day,” rapped Szawala. “Put a stop to the bullying — no more pain.”

The chance to spread this message of support and acceptance, Szawala said, was enough to spur him to travel around the country on his off days from his job. “It brings me life to know that, hopefully, (I’m) healing some hearts. Trying to remove interference at least, have them start to heal,” said Szawala. “Kids out there are in pain — whether you’re young or old — but especially our young people today are just in a lot of pain, and how do we start to remove some of that and replace it with love through peace.”

To learn more about Kevin Szawala and his programs, visit <http://www.mrpeace.org/>.