

NEWS AWARDS CAMPAIGN OF THE YEAR

BULLYWALL



We all know how hard it is to build a newspaper editorial campaign that will stick.

After a few days, people get bored, the journalists are looking for something fresh and the spin doctors know that if they can outlast a week or two the issue might blow over.

We simply can't fill our news columns with the same story every day.

We're not preachers.

And you know what happens - the daily news list consigns our campaigns to pages further back in the book until the thing becomes almost invisible.

The Bullywall is our first attempt to marry the best of the newspaper and online platforms – the urgency and power of the newspaper, and the ability to build depth and long-term engagement online.

It began almost by accident in November last year after a spate of quite sickening YouTube bullying videos.

We'd had the shocking Werribee DVD and Geelong kids were now uploading their schoolyard fights.

The "Fat Boy" video in November was kicked around at our morning news conference in the Hub and we decided to go into bat for the kid.

We lined up a few local celebrities – Cat legend Billy Brownless, Olympian marathon runner Lee Troop – and put together a video.

It went up on the website and it stuck.

The story evolved in the paper. We spoke to the parents of the bully, who were horrified, and we kept plugging the video.

Bullywall was born.

On January 1 we launched the Bullywall, a 12-month campaign online to throw a spotlight on an issue with deep ramifications for some of our most vulnerable children.

(See the Bullywall here at

<http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/interactives/stopthebullies/index.html>)

"I hope this letter will help people understand how I and other people with disabilities feel about being bullied and what it's like to be just a little different."

So says Tourette's Syndrome bully victim Elijah Vetma in his moving video letter, which proved to be a turning point for the Geelong Advertiser's campaigning journalism in 2008.

Within a matter of weeks, Elijah became a national figure against bullying, appearing on TV breakfast and radio programs and will now star in an anti-bullying choir. The 12-year-old outpouring sparked hundreds of emails and letters of support from as far

Skate park rage caught on video



afield as America and the UK and from everybody from politicians to schoolchildren to grandparents of other bullying victims.

Such is the power of the Geelong Advertiser's integrated newspaper, publishing in print and online using the one pool of journalists.

The Bullywall is an innovative approach to a complex issue. It provides space for positive messages to bully victims so they feel supported to speak up.

Among community reaction, all unsolicited:

- Headspace has organised an anti-bullying forum on September 11, involving several Catholic schools.
- Elijah has been a guest speaker at several schools, has composed a rap song and has had his first sleepover with a new friend. He was "very excited".
- An Ocean Grove primary school wrote and performed an anti-bullying musical.
- Elijah will receive an award on August 20 as a "Leader of Geelong" from the Committee for Geelong.

The Geelong Advertiser will use the September forum to roll out the next stage of its anti-bullying campaign – a community pledge. Several News Ltd papers are keen to launch the campaign within their own communities.

Peter Judd
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Geelong Advertiser