

People

Inspirational speaker wowed the pupils at St. Pat's School

by Ken Whiting

LUCAN - Imagine the joy that comes with having your newborn son placed in your arms for the first time.

Then imagine the sadness that would come when two days later your child has Down's Syndrome. And then the doctor to tell you "put him away and forget about him. Have another child".

Well that child was Robert Hajjar, a child that would grow to be a champion. Robert would go on to graduate from High school, become an avid athlete, playing hockey, baseball, golf and bocce. Robert is a strong swimmer, setting a world record in the 25M freestyle at the Special Olympics. But Robert was called to even bigger and better accomplishments. In 2006, Robert invested his life savings of \$62.05 to form IDEAL WAY. Robert had a dream to be able to reach out and help other people, especially people with intellectual disabilities. Robert, with Addie Daabous, Roberts aunt, would take this dream and make it a reality. IDEAL WAY stands for Including, Deserving, Equal, Appreciated, and Loved: traits that all people deserve, regardless of their status, creed, gender, and intellectual abilities. IDEAL WAY fosters these core beliefs. Robert formed this charity as a way



to give a voice to those who couldn't speak for themselves. Now Robert travels the country as an inspirational speaker; talking to any number of groups to get his message of inclusiveness out to the world. Since it founding Robert has spoken to over 400,000 people across North America, in over 80 cities. His charity has raised and donated over half a million dollars worth of money and merchandise to help relieve poverty.

Robert is a very spiritual man, taking time every day to pray and spend some quiet time with God, something we all could take a lesson from. One of Robert's catch phrases is; "keep the faith". In whatever you do in life, be true to yourself and to God.

On 21 March, World Down's Syndrome Day, Robert came out to St Patrick's School and gave an inspirational talk to over 200 students, staff and some parents. Also in attendance were 88 students from Sacred Heart Catholic School in Parkhill. His talk was truly moving and you can see his spiritual connection in the way he talks and handles himself in front of the audience. Robert opens by dancing through the audience. Getting the audience on their feet and dancing with him. He infuses the audience with his zeal for life and this comes out as h makes

his way through the crowd. Robert spoke on a number of subjects, but he did focus on a few specific ones. One topic was that on Down Syndrome and the added challenges it presents to the family. But he makes it clear that these are simply challenges and NOT limitations. A saying that he comes back to time and again is: "If I can do it You can do it". Disabilities should never stop a person from following your dreams. As Robert puts it: "The cards that were dealt to me in life are not as important as how I play them. I love my life". People with intellectual disabilities are just as normal as anyone else in society and can contribute to society just like anyone else.

Robert also spoke on the problems of bullying. Addressing a group of public school children, this is a big topic. It is clear that bullying should never be allowed in any way shape or form. It is something that should never be tolerated and it is everyone's responsibility to stand up against it.

Robert delivers a very uplifting message, one that everyone should take to heart. It is well worth listening to him speak and I encourage everyone to seek him out and listen to his powerful and inspirational message.