

TAKING A STAND (WITH WRISTBANDS)

WA broker **Rose de Rossi** recently became an advocate for a nationwide campaign to stop school bullying in its tracks



'YOU CAN SIT WITH ME' CAMPAIGN



Founded in 2015 by educational consultant Sophie Whitehouse, who has been teaching for over 25 years



Students wear bright yellow YOU CAN SIT WITH ME wristbands so fellow students know they are a safe person to sit with and will make them feel welcome



Proceeds go to the campaign's partner, the Australian Numeracy and Literacy Foundation, which helps further improve the education of Aboriginal and refugee communities

STUDIES HAVE shown that one in four students aged between eight and 14 years experience bullying every few weeks or more, and a global survey across 40 countries has revealed that Australian primary schools are among those with the highest reported incidence of bullying.

This is why Rose de Rossi, mortgage industry veteran and co-founder of Western Australian brokerage Diversifi, recently became the first advocate in the state for anti-bullying campaign YOU CAN SIT WITH ME.

The national campaign, which was founded last year by educational consultant Sophie Whitehouse, involves students in schools wearing yellow wristbands printed with the phrase, 'You can sit with me'. As the words suggest, kids who have been bullied, are new or feel lonely know that they can approach any other student wearing a wristband and be warmly welcomed into their circle, without fear of being turned away or left out.

"If they look for someone that's wearing this yellow band, they know that's a safe person and that they can sit with them and it's a friend to have at the school," says de Rossi.

She explains that the yellow bands are a privilege to wear and have to be earned by students, often via their schools' development or mentor programs.

With a son who was regularly bullied throughout his school years, de Rossi knows all too well the impact bullying has on children and teenagers.

"It's affected me personally because my son was bullied a lot through school and we had to change schools," says de Rossi.

"It was very traumatic and I know how lonely kids can get at school, so when I saw [the campaign] I thought, 'This is just perfect!' ... If [my son had] had someone that he'd felt safe with that he could

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actually go sit with and just eat his lunch, it may have made all the difference in his school life."

Individuals can purchase the wristbands online at the YOU CAN SIT WITH ME website for \$2 each, and community and groups can purchase them in bulk.

The funds go towards a national literacy program and so they help schools in more ways than one, says de Rossi, and clubs and communities have rapidly embraced the kindness campaign throughout Australia.

"There's about 160 schools and community groups nationally that are actually participating already."

Next month de Rossi and Whitehouse will also approach schools in WA and the local media to raise awareness of the campaign against bullying and spread the word on the "simple wristband with a life-changing message", as they have aptly put it.

Community champion

As a testament to her heavy involvement not just in the local community but also in the broking community itself, this year de Rossi was named the winner of the 2016 MFAA Community Champion Award. She is also chair of the MFAA Perth Forum, chair of the broker focus group for WA members, and mentors other brokers in her spare time

She was the initiator of a WA Facebook page for MFAA members that now has 309 local members, and the other states have since followed suit with their own pages.

"It's a great way to interact with regional brokers that can't come to our meetings," says de Rossi.

"I believe in sharing experiences and sharing business practices. There's enough business for everybody and everyone is doing something different - we can all learn from each other."

Although you wouldn't know it looking at her list of achievements and particularly at the success of her brokerage, de Rossi only branched into broking in 2009. After 14 years in banking, she joined Choice Home Loans and launched Diversifi in North Perth with business partner and fellow director Tracey Lea Gilbert. The team is now 14 strong.

"I have a really good business partner," de Rossi says. "She allows me to spend all this time volunteering to do things because in the end I'm very passionate about the industry."

Diversifi recently became the first WA broking company to partner with Moving Hub and embrace its forward-thinking white label CRM platform, allowing clients electronic access to arrange transferring utilities, insurance and other services during the home-moving process. **MB**