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Student fashion show in Brentwood takes on bullying

Tania Arevalo hangs out at the inaugural Anti-Bullying Fashion Show at Brentwood High school on March 3, 2017. Photo Credit: Marlo Jappen

By Marlo Jappen

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Tania Arevalo, president of Brentwood High School Fashion Club, thought she would be the only person sharing her experience at the school's inaugural Anti-Bullying Fashion Show last Friday.

When the club's adviser asked if any other students wanted to share a story, Arevalo was surprised by how many members came forward.

"I had no idea they were bullied," she said. "I was like 'Wow, I'm not the only one.'"

— Before the show kicked off, students from every public school in Brentwood marched across the gymnasium with signs expressing anti-bullying messages such as "Don't Let Anyone Feel Left Out" and "Words Hurt Like Punches."

"It's not just the high school and it's not just in Brentwood," said PTSA member Gerri Coleman-Odom. "It's a problem everywhere."

Brentwood High School student Edwin Chicas sang while the school's dance team performed a lyrical routine. Chicas joined fashion club members in sharing his experience with overcoming bullying.

"They're able to tell their story and somebody will hear it," Coleman-Odom said. "Maybe it will empower someone else."

Arevalo spoke of how she was teased for the way she dressed and spoke once she moved from Guatemala to Brentwood in fifth grade.

"Kids couldn't wait to play outside with their friends," she said. "But instead, I couldn't wait to go home and cry."

She turned to her passion for sewing — a craft taught to her by her grandmother — to escape the negativity. After she graduates this spring, Arevalo plans to study fashion design at Nassau Community College and then transfer to the Fashion Institute of New York.

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The fashion club's vision came to life as models strut across a red carpet runway in front of an audience of more than 600 people, with ticket sales from the event benefiting the PTSA Scholarship Fund.

Each outfit was crafted and designed by students from material donated by Savers Thrift Store in Commack.

After the show, Arevalo said the difficult experience did have a silver lining.

"I feel like I can show other people to stand up for themselves and to not let the bullies get to them," she said.

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