

Family Resource Center to offer anti-bullying workshops

Debbie Pfeiffer Trunnell, Staff Writer

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SAN BERNARDINO - In parenting workshops taught this year, Shannon O'Brien heard one story after another about children being bullied.

The experience was enough to make the director of Children's Resources, Inc. take action to better inform parents on how to deal with bullies and their victims.

With the help of a grant from Verizon, O'Brien will offer seminars, starting in January, to help area adults better deal with the issue.

"I want to give parents the tools to help their children be more empathetic, because when you identify with someone else's pain it is difficult to cause pain," she said.

The problems associated with bullying in area school districts mirror what is occurring in districts nationwide.

According to a recent study by the Los Angeles-based Josephson Institute of Ethics, half of all high school students admit they bullied someone in the past year and nearly half say they were taunted.

A \$4,000 grant awarded Tuesday by a nonprofit Verizon employee organization will aid O'Brien in getting the anti-bullying message out.

O'Brien's nonprofit will partner with the San Bernardino City Unified School District family resource center to offer the workshops.

The district is supportive of the effort, said spokeswoman Linda Bardere.

"The district has been proactive in our response to bullying," she said. "We feel the new series builds on workshops we offered in February."

O'Brien has long been concerned, but she decided to do something when more and more parents expressed concerns about students being picked on at school.

Cyberbullying, where children are taunted on social networking sites, is even more insidious, she said.

"Kids become suicidal because of that," O'Brien said. "Although I haven't heard of anything locally, I want to get ahead of it, so it doesn't happen here."

The seminars begin in January and will address topics such as the makings of a bully, standup strategies for bullied children and cyberbullying: keeping your child safe.

Parents who complete the seminars will earn a certificate recognizing their efforts.

"We get a lot of calls from parents who are at their wits end," said Mars Serna, family involvement officer at the center. "So we want to provide some answers."

Addressing bullying

The Bully Proof seminars begin Jan. 6 and continue every Thursday through Feb. 3 at the Family Resource Center, 1525 West Highland Ave., San Bernardino.

There are two sessions parents can attend. A morning session from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. or an evening session from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.