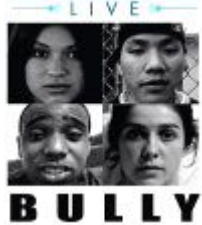


Bullying – doing nothing isn't making a difference

TEEN TRUTH

By Kathryn Reed



As footage from the Columbine shooting unfolded on screen, not a word could be heard, no one fidgeted – eerily, it was dead silent except for the 911 call.

“As far as I know I lost everyone in the library,” the dispatcher says as the phone goes silent on the other end.

This may have been the first time these 300 people had heard the word Columbine, let alone seen anything from that fateful day in April 1999. They are too young to have been affected by the mass school shooting.

It was not an assembly to scare kids or expose them to violence. It was all about empowering them to make a difference.

South Tahoe Middle School students watched “Teen Truth Live: Bully” on Monday. The sixth-graders had a slightly edited version to eliminate some of the more graphic details.

“If you aren't making a difference, what are you doing?” asked filmmaker JC Pohl as he talked to the students after the 20-minute movie ended.

“Nothing!” was the resounding reply.

That was the point. Doing nothing is bullying. Bullying comes in many forms – it includes excluding others, spreading

rumors, intimidation and physical attacks.

Bullying causes anxiety, anger and may lead someone to kill.

All of this was part of the message.

The students in the movie talk about life being complicated and empty – with more pressure than when their parents were their age. School is a place of status. Changing to fit in is common. Alienation can be routine.

The U.S. Department of Education says 30 percent of students claim to have been bullied. Pohl says 99 percent of the kids he talks to have been bullied.

“The No. 1 reason people bully is because they don’t have empathy,” Pohl told the kids. “They don’t care. They don’t know how to show respect.”

Pohl and Erham Christopher developed Teen Truth Live when it dawned on them that after the deadly Columbine shooting in Colorado 10 years ago, the adult experts kept spouting about why the two boys did what they did without anyone asking the kids why this may have occurred.

“No one was giving a voice to teens,” Pohl said.

Thus began a yearlong project where high school seniors filmed what life was like. That and more became the film STMS students saw Monday.

At the end of Pohl’s presentation he asked the students if they had been punched, kicked, hit or shoved by someone. Everyone stood. Had a rumor been spread about them? Yes, was the overwhelming response. What about making a derogatory comment? Yes.

The point was the majority of students had been on one side or the other of bullying.

Then it was illustrated that negative moments in ones life last longer than positive. The adults in the room were asked to stand if they remembered a time when they were bullied. They all stood. Everyone remembered who did it.

“A bad thing that happened can last a lifetime,” Pohl said, in an attempt to emphasize that an act of bullying today is not soon, if ever, forgotten.

Teen Truth Live has three messages. The one on drugs will come to STMS in the spring. This is because sixth-grade teacher Cindy Cowen won the opportunity.

The third film the company has made is about body image.

Principal Beth Delacour was excited Soroptimist International Tahoe Sierra paid for Monday’s movie and talk.

“There is so much pressure on kids to look a certain way, be in a certain group, to do certain things,” Delacour said. “If we can rearrange that thinking to be one of inclusion, then we could see a change at our school (and beyond). It’s all about empathy. It’s an important message.”

For more information, go to www.teentruthlive.com.