

Educators crusade for youths to be safe at school, in life

By Kathryn Reed

A 13-year-old walks into his principal's office and says he wants to write a letter to the judge. The judge lets him take the stand. His parents are in the courtroom.

"I told him, all you can do is tell your truth," Beth Delacour said.

In the end, the judge last year said the boy no longer had to visit his dad. This meant no longer being regularly exposed to guns and drugs.



Teacher Cindy Cowen, left, and South Tahoe Middle School Principal Beth Delacour talk about anti-bullying programs. Photo/Kathryn Reed

While Delacour, who is principal of South Tahoe Middle School, is not a proponent of single-family households, she knows sometimes it beats the alternative. What she most advocates for is helping her sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders find their voice so they can stick up for themselves.

That same youngster stopped by her office this school year. He said he wants to be a judge someday and asked his principal what he needs to do to make that dream come true.

Delacour and Cindy Cowen, a teacher at the South Lake Tahoe school, spoke before Soroptimist International Tahoe Sierra on Sept. 27 about how the service club's financial support is helping bring programs to the school that deal with bullying – this includes working with the aggressor and the victim.

The overall goal is to change the climate and culture of the school.

“We needed to get these kids to feel like they are people,” Cowen said.

Through Teen Truth Live the message is if you aren't making a difference, you are doing nothing. This program has been part of the school for a few years. This year a summit of between 30 and 50 students will be convened with the goal being for them to identify what other improvements can be made to the school.

As Delacour said, the kids are the ones in the trenches – they are seeing, hearing, feeling what is going on more so than any adult on campus.

One of the Soroptimists asked what the difference between bullying and teasing is.

The educators said bullying is chronic, it doesn't stop, it's harassment, it's repeated and it's unwanted.

Because bullying can be a learned behavior, another member of the service group asked if parents are part of the anti-bullying lessons.

They have been. But those who “needed” to show up to events the school sponsored didn't and therefore it was more like preaching to the choir based on who attended.

Between Horses and Humans is another component of helping youth stop being a bully and for others to stand up to the bullies. It's also a program where parents must be involved.

Oct. 1 was World Stand Up to Bullying Day.