

Fighting Chance helps keep kids safe

By Kathryn Reed

Krystal Steadman never learned the lessons taught in Fighting Chance. Her fourth-grade class at Meyers Elementary School was on the calendar that spring of 2000 a week after the 9-year-old was abducted.

It would be pure speculation that the then fourth-grader would be alive today had she been taught what to do if bad guys come after you.

Her capture occurred nine years after Jaycee Lee Dugard, then a fifth-grader at the same South Shore school, was abducted.



The Fighting Chance vehicle leads the 2009 parade celebrating Jaycee Lee Dugard's freedom. Photo/Lisa J. Tolda

Fighting Chance in large part came about as a reaction to Dugard's abduction from a bus stop. Terry Probyn, Jaycee's mom, is on the video that is used in the classrooms. This was taped on the 10-year anniversary of the abduction. (Jaycee was found alive in 2009.)

This week members of Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe are in the classrooms throughout Lake Tahoe Unified teaching the Fighting Chance curriculum.

Brooke Laine, when she was president of the club, came up with the program in the mid-1990s. It has continued on every year since then. It started in the fifth grade, but now includes grade 3, 4 and 6, too. Laine said fifth grade was not chosen because that was Jaycee's grade, but instead it had more to do with the age group molesters target.

"Pre-puberty, that is the age the child molesters want," Laine told *Lake Tahoe News*. "They plan their attack. You have to be prepared to plan your escape. I don't even want to tell them how many sexual predators are in town. I have a binder of them. I know where they live."

Laine's children were about 4 and 5 when the program started. She would read books about abductions, molestation – all to gain knowledge in her quest to put Fighting Chance together.

Laine said Probyn told her one of the biggest regrets she had was not teaching Jaycee what to do if someone grabbed her.

Soroptimist International Tahoe Sierra teaches the third-graders by using a board game that in large part looks like the South Shore. It's about figuring out routes to get to home and school safely. Different "what if" scenarios are played out so kids will start thinking about what to do if some stranger approaches or grabs them.

Fourth-graders learn via the video. But the DVD is turned on and off, with discussion in between to engage them, let them ask questions and allow time for the material to sink in.

In fifth grade they are taught what to do. Laine said she is not aware in all these years of a single parent not turning in the permission slip. She said because the material can be "shocking", parents must say it's OK for their child to learn

the message of Fighting Chance.

In sixth grade youths are taught that if the suspect gets out of the vehicle, but they're locked in, to take a button off a shirt and put it in the ignition. Kick out a taillight if stuffed in the trunk. Cops in Tahoe know to pull over a vehicle with a busted out taillight just for the reason someone could be in there.

The El Dorado County Sheriff's Office has twice donated an old vehicle for the purpose of teaching kids. And it has twice been used in a parade in Jaycee's honor – first to remember her, and then to celebrate her release from captivity.