

# Program strives to break cycle of abuse

By Sarah Pond

Too many of El Dorado County's children are growing up in homes plagued with domestic violence. Children's continually developing brains are like sponges that absorb everything, good and bad. They see the adults in their lives modeling various behaviors, ultimately being their primary source of reference.

In a home environment where violence is present, the abusive behaviors become normalized to those who are the direct or indirect victim of such behavior. As a result, the children often exhibit symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), somatic issues, and behavioral and relationship issues.

One program in El Dorado County, the Second Generation Project, is designed to aid in breaking the intergenerational cycle of domestic violence and helping this vulnerable population understand that the abusive behavior is not normal.

The Center for Violence-Free Relationships has a variety of programs that serve the residents of El Dorado County who are affected by domestic violence and/or sexual assault. One of the most influential of those programs is the Second Generation Project (SGP). SGP is a 12-week group tailored for children ages 8-12 who have been in homes where domestic violence has occurred. In a healing and therapeutic environment, children learn how to talk about their experiences, develop positive coping skills, meet other children with similar experiences, and participate in group activities that foster growth and development.

This powerful program includes sessions for children and

adults that are facilitated by a social work professional and a domestic violence peer counselor. Children respond to SGP in different ways, some exhibiting change nearly immediately, while others may have a slower response. For instance, a previous parent who was a participant called after the first session and stated that she noticed immediate changes in her child. She shared that her child was more cheerful, cooperative, affectionate, and her child had asked for their favorite breakfast, which they hadn't asked for in months. Another mother reported on an assessment administered at the intake that her child exhibited a number of behavioral and physical concerns. The total score for the average child on this assessment is below 47 and her child scored a 97. The mother reported that her child frequently experienced headaches, showed constant signs of sadness or unhappiness, consistently had a negative attitude toward others, and had frequent suicidal ideation. When the mother completed the mid-program assessment, her child's score had dropped drastically to a total of 24, reporting that her child's aforementioned symptoms had decreased significantly.

There have been many reports from parents and children alike that are similar to these two cases, sharing their enjoyment of the program, support from the other participants, and increase in confidence in sharing their thoughts and feelings. The Center is excited to share SGP with the community and is continually adjusting the program to ensure it meets the needs of the children. If you would like to hear more about SGP and the center, call 530.626.1450.

*Sara Pond is a case manager with the Center for Violence-Free Relationships.*