

Paradise Center for Tolerance and Nonviolence

Making our community a safe place for all through promoting respect for differences and human rights, and fostering alternatives to violence.

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STARS: Fall Semester Reflections

STARS (Safety, Tolerance and Respect Superstars) is PCTN's anti-bullying and violence-prevention after school program. Following are reflections of **STARS** leaders, Sue Mendez and Melissa Dalzell, who recently concluded the Fall semester.

As new leaders of the **STARS** Program, we didn't know what to expect. What an eye-opening experience. After observing the children and reading the **STARS** surveys, we found most participants had been bullied and teased. From their journal entries and various discussions, unfortunately we discovered many of them live in unstable home situations.

Through the **STARS** program children are learning skills to cope with issues which trouble them. Each session includes various activities relating to different virtues. Over the weeks, we have seen the children developing techniques to help handle bullying situations, learning to relate better to others, being accepting of differences, and acquiring respect for themselves. The group has developed a rapport and trust for each other, creating a safe and accepting environment for connecting to others.

We enjoy being program leaders and, seeing the strong need for a program like this, we hope **STARS** will continue to reach more children in the future.

PCTN helps victims of bias and hate-motivated behavior

Activist for broader changes

PCTN's Victim Assistance Services are unique. People from all parts of Butte County have contacted us for help.

It may be only a small segment of the population which act on their bias and hatred with racial/ethnic slurs, harassment and, sadly, sometimes violence, but denying or minimizing the problem allows it to persist and gives confidence to the bullies and racists to be more open in their speech and actions. We hear many stories about people of color being fearful of coming to the Ridge or about negative encounters when they do visit.

Children are especially vulnerable targets. The harm they experience can affect their young lives long after the incident. They can suffer mental distress, related physical illness, damage to their self-esteem, difficulty concentrating at school, a constant sense of fear and sometimes thoughts of suicide.

PCTN has been an advocate and source of help for many individuals and families who live on the Ridge.

Consider these stories:

- ◆ Over the past 6 months a family of African-American children has been repeatedly targeted by white supremacists. Racial epithets and "white power" verbal assaults and hand signs have been spewed at them from teens, young adults and mature adults, who walk or drive past them. They are afraid to walk their dogs beyond view of their own home.
- ◆ Three black students were accosted and harassed at the high school by a group of non-student skinheads, joined by neo-Nazi student comrades.

Schools can be made safer for all students. Students of color and students who are perceived as different in any way should be comfortable and free of anxiety about being bullied and taunted at school. They should be able to walk and play in our community without being on their guard for verbal or physical assaults.

PCTN is committed to being a catalyst for change. We have begun meetings with the superintendent and other school officials. A plan of action on several fronts is in the works. We pledge to you that we will work on behalf of our children and the community to bring about positive changes.

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- ◆ A teacher chaperoning the homecoming dance was confronted and assaulted by some of these same individuals when she told them that they were not permitted at the dance and must leave.
- ◆ Youth with developmental disabilities have been picked on, put down and humiliated by fellow students.
- ◆ An African-American girl refuses to attend high school in Paradise because of fear of being targeted by racism. Another African-American girl attended Paradise High School but chose not to participate in the graduation ceremony. She said she had never felt welcome or comfortable so why walk with the class.
- ◆ Black youth on the Ridge have had rocks thrown at them and cigarettes tossed at them from passing vehicles; they have been called “nigger”, told that they belong in the dirt, and endured frequent put-downs and harassment on school buses.
- ◆ Hispanic, Asian-American and Middle Eastern-American youth are subjected to ethnic slurs and bullying.
- ◆ A white mother was on a main street in town with her bi-racial son. Hate speech was yelled at them from two passing vehicles.
- ◆ An overweight youth was taunted and demeaned by a fellow student at the high school. When a black female student tried to intervene, she was threatened with getting hit.
- ◆ A bi-racial boy who is overweight has asked to go to a private school because of the put-downs he has experienced at the public school. He is depressed and has been suicidal.

PCTN's Victim Assistance Program offers multiple options to individuals, families and parents of children who have been targets of hate, intolerance, or bullying. Beyond providing a compassionate and supportive listener in a confidential and hospitable atmosphere, PCTN:

- A) Provides direct assistance in making contact with relevant agencies and institutions.
- B) Accompanies the victim or victim's parent(s) to meetings and facilitates communication and mutual understanding.
- C) Advocates for an immediate remedy as well as a long term plan to achieve resolution.

“Violence is anything that denies human integrity and leads to hopelessness and helplessness.”

Dr. Martin Luther King

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Thank You

Our recent fundraising drive donations totaled **\$3,271.63**, and there was a 14% match by North Valley Community Foundation of \$454.82 -- so we raised **\$3,726.45**, a whopping 30% increase over last year's annual appeal! Many thanks to all our generous donors.

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