



Business

Education

Government

Health

Living

News

Opinion

Philanthropy

Region/State

Sports

Home Opinion Commentary: Bringing adults, youth together in equal setting key to addressing violence, bullying

Commentary: Bringing adults, youth together in equal setting key to addressing violence, bullying

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By Douglas A. Wain
Special to KyForward

No one in Kentucky is immune to violence, and we at YouthAlert (YA) invite you to help us meet the needs of state's youth before it's too late.

Louisville, for example, is set to have another record number of homicides this year, and more than a third of the city's victims are between the ages of 16 and 25.

We are failing our kids. However, with your support, we can change that.

The YouthAlert Violence and Bullying Prevention/Health Program is an in-school, interactive educational experience. Our sole purpose is to reduce youth violence, bullying and abuse. We are in our sixth consecutive semester in Jefferson County Public Schools.

We are unique in that we, as adults, meet the students in their world — school. We have reached over 10,000 students in the Louisville area in the last three years. We also follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Task Force on Community Preventive Services findings in 2007 which found strong evidence that school-based programs to reduce violence. YouthAlert's program is currently in the CDC's April 2017 Community Guide publication.

When teaching all kids in a classroom setting, they all get the same equal information and education. This ensures health equity to all students. The classroom size also allows for every student's voice to be heard without exception, every session.

The model of our in-school program is where adults and youth meet equally, in person, to solve the problem of violence. This is important since youth ages 12 to 24 do half of the all the violence in the world but we adults who do the other half.

In our program, adults and youth teach each other, so we could then both teach our peers and then we can all bring it back to their homes and communities. The first or best learning model is a person's family or close unit.

There is an old saying about violence, that "people who do violence either don't know better or don't care." Our organization has ruled out that kids don't care. If our organization has learned anything in our last three years is that no matter what kids say, or do, the reality is that they all have feelings.

And some kids say their feeling are so deep and intense that there are no words to describe them. We believe that youth are just as smart as adults. Adults just have more information through experience and education. When youth gain this education and experience through live role playing, we found that they instinctively learn to recognize true choices and that they almost always make the right true choices. In fact, most kids, by far, are already peaceful.

During our program, many youth realize, for the first time, that they may be a victim of violence, bullying or abuse. That is why we distribute to each student free help telephone numbers, apps and websites at the beginning of our session so they know where to find free help should they need an intervention. Adults and youth seem to have the same amount of problems. However, youth are less likely than adults to get help. Our program also hopes to change that. And we believe that there is only one kind of unjustified violence, the kind that hurts, maims or destroys or threatens to do so.

Many kids in Louisville already know the trauma of violence, and living with it has become an accepted norm. Homicide is the leading cause of death for African Americans 10-24 years old, and the second leading cause of

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death for Hispanics, according to a CDC report. This is not acceptable. YouthAlert believes that violence among our youth, compounded with the equity of risk of violence, is the greatest problem facing America today

Kentucky youth deserve to live a life of peace, hope and productivity. Prevention is the new cure. With your support, we can reach more of our youth and make a greater impact on our community. Let us work together to save time, money and lives. Help us reach every kid by going to www.youthalert.us.



Douglas A. Wain is the CEO of YouthAlert (YA).

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