PREVENTATIVE SOLUTIONS TO THE ISSUE OF BULLYING

By

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this project is to develop an understanding of the need for anti-bullying programs in grade levels K-12 of the public educational system. This knowledge will be used to help to create a foundation grant to provide revenue that will pay for anti-bullying programs within Humboldt County. By reflecting on bullying, the research expectations of this research project are that by implementing effective, preventative programs, it will decrease the incidence of daily bullying. As programs manifest into the school systems, positive outcomes will be reported by all staff members and bullying behaviors related to force, threat, intimidation and aggression are expected to decrease as students are held accountable for their actions by becoming part of the solution rather than continuing as the perpetuating the problem.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a major issue in the schools and in the culture of today’s youth. Each bullying incident often involves several individuals and has impact beyond the school grounds including families, neighborhoods, and entire communities. Over the past several years, school systems have been taking bullying more seriously by adopting zero-tolerance policies. This issue is finally being addressed at a higher level and further defined through Assembly Bill (AB) 9 which, as of June 2012, requires schools to have anti-bullying policies in place. To fully implement this state policy, funding is needed to implement anti-bullying programs to offer peer based solutions that expand beyond mediation or conflict resolution skills. To fully support youth, it is necessary to include their traumas, to listen and learn from their experiences in order to present practical solutions and find resolutions to bullying.

Social Work Significance

In the past, many schools have used punitive, “zero-tolerance” approaches that stifle the reporting of harassing incidents that leave many students feeling powerless, and exacerbate bullying dynamics (Olweus, 1993; McGrath & Stanley, 2005). It has been found that interventions to combat bullying need to be inclusive and restorative. The “No Bully System” is effective because it builds skills to prevent and intervene when bullying is identified, strengthens relationships, and helps create a school culture of compassion and inclusion (DeNike, 2013). The team-based approach, on which the “No Bully System” is based, encourages staff and student buy-in, which increases the
probability of having an effective mediation. By bringing the No Bully trainings to additional local schools in Humboldt County, it will serve as the inspiration and motivation for this community project as a contribution to local social work practices as it addresses the social work program competencies including critical thinking, reducing oppression, advancing human rights, and engaging in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being.

Research Question

Bullying is damaging and traumatic for the targets/victims, but it also negatively affects others, including the bullies, bystanders, teachers, parents, and community members. Being a target of physical and emotional violence on a daily basis is one of the most emotionally and mentally destructive events a child can experience. The research question guiding this project is:

How can students be expected to learn when they feel unsafe or when they fear that they will be the next target?

Research Approaches

This exploratory research is to support and to help bring the “No Bully Solution” training to additional Humboldt County schools through the process of grant writing. This program is currently being used at several schools within Humboldt County; however, it is an expense that most schools have not allocated within their budgets. Since finding and researching funding is timely and costly, the written grant will be offered as a community project.
Anticipated Outcomes

The “No Bully System” is effective because it builds skills to prevent and intervene when bullying is identified. It strengthens relationships and helps create a school culture of compassion and inclusion. The program was founded in 2003 by Nicholas Carlisle, an attorney and psychotherapist. His first hand experiences of bullying while in middle school was his basis for creating a program where every child feels accepted by their peers (NoBully.com). Carlisle’s program establishes a team-based approach that unites staff and students in solution meetings, increasing the probability of having an effective intervention. This research aims show the need for programs and to increase No Bully trainings for as many local schools in Humboldt County as possible and serves as the inspiration and motivation for this community project.

Research Assumptions

As the “No Bully” program slowly integrates into Humboldt County’s public schools, this research assumes that by seeking funding solutions to implement anti-bullying programs, that this program will be welcomed in the academic setting. As the program is practiced, it will decrease incidence of bullying, open communication and develop healthy relationships between students. Although there are many others, this program is being chosen due to successful outcomes and the solution based model.
Limitations

Humboldt County has over 100 schools that span a vast rural region. Since foundation grants typically fund projects ranging $10,000-25,000, only two public schools will be the recipient of this funding to implement the full program. Although each school could benefit from this training, the funded amount will be limited to the schools that have been included in the grant request.

Conceptual Framework

Social Learning Theory emphasizes how both environmental and cognitive factors interact to impact human learning and behavior (Bandura, 1977). Observation and modeling are two of the main components of this theory that explain the affects that an observer’s behavior can have after viewing modeled actions. These views result in positive or/ or negative consequences. The theory focuses on the learning that occurs within this social context. It considers that people learn from one another, including such concepts as observational learning, imitation, and modeling (Bandura, 1986).

The theory further suggests that people devise ways of adapting to diverse environments. They create styles of behavior that bring forth desired outcomes, and pass on the learned responses by social modeling and other experiential modes of influence, as found in all types of bullying. Growth of knowledge is progressively enhancing human power to control, transform, and create environments of increasing complexity and
consequence. As physical technologies progress, they drastically alter how we live our daily lives (Bandura, 2001).

**Synthesis**

In the No Bully System, a solution is found that responds to the reality and needs of students. Often, targets are advised to not to react to the bully. However, in rural communities especially, it might be close to impossible to advise a young person to simply ‘ignore it’ or ‘mind your own business’ because of the close-knit culture of small rural schools. At times, targets may want to fight back but will experience retaliation by bullies later due to “zero-tolerance” behavioral policies. Additionally, bystanders of bullying may avoid intervening due to fear of retaliation or lack of peer and teacher support. However, students have the right to feel safe while attending school. They have the right to flourish within their studies and in the educational system. They have the right to be offered the skills that will address bullying and open a practice of equality. In corresponding with social work practices, these acts will further harness young people’s inherent empathy, their desire for fairness, justice, and kindness. The No Bully System does just this.
Purpose and Rationale of the Literature Review

Bullying incidents are receiving increased media attention at an epidemic level, especially due to the mass availability of electronics and access to information. Types of bullying include physical, verbal, relational and cyber (i.e. internet, texting, and social networks such as, blogging, Facebook, and Twitter). Many of these acts have been categorized as severe and have played out for many years (California Healthy Kids Survey, 2012). School districts face litigation over ignored or downplayed incidents of bullying. Due to recent mandates, California schools now require districts to not only publish procedures prohibiting discrimination, harassment and intimidation, but they are now required to post bullying policy. Schools are held to this rule and are no longer allowed to ignore or downplay any reports of bullying incidents.

Types of bullying

Bullying is defined as “a student being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. Negative actions can include physical contact, words, making faces or dirty gestures, and intentional exclusion from a group. An additional criterion of bullying is the imbalance of strength.” (Olweus, 1995, p. 197). The characteristics of bullying can be defined as intentional, repeated, negative behavior by one or more persons directed at the target (Olweus, 1993). In the language of school bullying literature, aggressors are called
bullies, victims are called the bullied (or targets) and witnesses are called bystanders (Coloroso, 2011, p. 36).

*Cyber bullying* is defined as “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text” (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006, p. 152) through use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices. Bullying that affects a victim’s social standing is called relational aggression (Harrison & Petrie, 2002). This tactic, also known as relational bullying, is usually more common among the female students. While they are becoming more physically aggressive, more common tactics, such as spreading rumors, intentional exclusion, or influencing others to do certain behaviors, is commonplace when describing this method of bullying. Contrary to stereotypes, both genders participate in bullying of a relational aggression type, including shunning, hazing, spreading rumors, exclusion and teasing (Dellesaga & Nixon, 2007). Bullying is different from both “rough play” and conflict in the level of power equality between participants. In bullying, both parties are not at fault and compromise is not warranted. Targets of bullies cannot stop the bullying on their own. They need the support of others (Pennsylvania Bullying Prevention Toolkit, 2012).

**Effects of bullying on individuals, families, communities**

Bullying has negative short and long term effects on students’ physical and emotional health and academic performance, as well as school engagement (Klomek, 2007; Vanderbilt & Augusty, 2010; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013). To be motivated to learn, students must feel safe from fear, apprehension, and low
self-concept, and they may avoid attending classes due to the severe intimidation and embarrassment (Long & Alexander, 2010). Bullying targets, bystanders, and bullies themselves experience negative outcomes including increased risk of alcohol and other drug abuse, depression, and/or anxiety. Bystanders often feel afraid, powerless, guilty or experience diminished empathy for victims (Pennsylvania Bullying Prevention Toolkit, 2012). Bullies are also more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior, abuse others in intimate relationships and engage in criminal activity as adults (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013).

Bullying is an interpersonal event, and there are prominent aspects of children’s development that may establish repeated bullying experiences as especially harmful. People that have experienced interpersonal events show significantly higher levels of PTSD symptoms than those who have experienced other types of events (Lancaster, Melka, & Rodriguez, 2009).

In addition, Idsoe, Dyregrov, & Idsoe Cosmovici (2012) found that children that report being bullied should be assessed for trauma symptoms and that mental health practitioners should consider bullying as a risk factor when evaluating PTSD symptoms. Both victimization and bullying is associated with depression, anxiety, and somatic complains (Baldry, 2004). Further research shows that in childhood, a history of being bullied exhibits a positive correlation with borderline personality disorder (BPD) in adulthood, external behaviors, and mental health care treatment. (Sansone, Lam, & Wiederman, 2010).
Bullies and victims of bullying are at much higher risk of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts (Klomek, 2007). Humboldt County’s teens have higher levels of depression than California state averages; over 25% of high school students reported feelings of sadness and hopelessness almost daily for two weeks or more during the past year (California Healthy Kids Survey Humboldt Summary Report, 2012). Suicide is the third leading cause of death in Humboldt County in 15-24 year olds, and Humboldt’s suicide rate is among the top ten in California counties (Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Service DHHS, Mental Health and Public Health Branches 2008). Although unconfirmed, it seems possible that in Humboldt, high rates of youth suicide are correlated with school bullying.

**Legislative action and implications**

Historically, fair treatment of people have been addressed through the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Education Amendments Act of 1972, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Chapin, 2011). Although these acts are in place to protect human rights, the actions of children challenges these laws through bullying examples of racial comments, sexual harassment, and discriminating comments of students with disabilities. Until 2012, bullying actions were undefined by law, but they are now receiving increased attention. Many school districts face litigation over ignored or downplayed incidents of bullying. Such an incident occurred in Kern County, California in 2010, when a 13 year-old boy named Seth Walsh died by suicide after persistent harassment over his sexual
orientation. His mother brought forth a lawsuit of wrongful death that would initial new laws and policies.

In March 2011, President Obama hosted an anti-bullying conference at the White House to call attention to this issue. In the state of California, Assembly Bill (AB 9) was passed and named Seth’s Law in memory of Seth Walsh. By December of 2011, forty-seven US states had passed anti-bullying laws. Effective July 2012, California schools now have a legal mandate that districts must publish a policy prohibiting discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying (ACLU, 2012). Schools are held to this policy and are no longer allowed to ignore or downplay any reports of bullying incidents.

Other recent pieces of California legislation that address bullying includes AB 746, passed in February 2001 that defines cyber bullying, and AB 1156 which includes bullying prevention in school safety plans and expands the definition of bullying. AB 1156 took effect on July 1, 2013. Combined with AB 9, recent anti-bullying legislation put pressure on Humboldt County school districts to get into compliance.

**Sexual orientation as reason for bullying/harassment**

Students that do not conform to sexual orientation and gender norms are often targets of bullying, and this can reinforce heterosexism, homophobia, and sexism (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010). A 2009 national survey of middle and high school students found that 9 out of 10 lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender youth (LGBTQI youth) reported experiencing some form of harassment at school (Kosciw, et al. 2010). Multiple studies in the United States and abroad have shown that lesbian, gay
and bisexual adolescents attempt suicide at a rate three to six times that of comparably aged heterosexual youth (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 2013). These rates also only take into account students who identify themselves as LGBTQI.

In Humboldt County, both male and female students experience more bullying based on sexual orientation than the state average, but Humboldt’s male students experience much more frequent bullying (being targeted). Of the 7th grade boys bullied for sexual orientation in Humboldt County, over 70% said that they were bullied more than once (California Healthy Kids Survey Humboldt Summary Report, 2012). Both males and females reported multiple experiences of bullying at higher than state average.

**How and why The No Bully System works in Humboldt County**

In 2012, several teachers and staff attended the 10-school No Bully Advanced Solution Coach training. This two day training offered skills in the practice of developing and running a solution team. In this model, the principal of the school plays a vital role in the prevention of bullying. Furthermore, the principal's commitment and leadership style, coupled with the attitudes and beliefs of teachers and parents, are significant in the reduction of bullying (Harris & Petrie, 2002, p. 6). When a bullying incident takes place, the social worker assesses the need for a Solution Team. This team, that includes a trained staff member, the bully, bully followers, and grade level leaders is developed after a pattern of bullying has been identified. After identifying the students that are part of the bullying problem, the target is then asked to name some students that have been helpful and have offered supportive friendships. The solution team will typically consist of a
total of eight to ten students who are both a part of the problem (bullies) and the solution (helpers). An exceptional part of this program is that at no time during this process are any of the team members named as ‘bullies’, instead this entire process offers conditions that deconstruct violence as the students are taught to find solutions rather than contribute to further oppressive effects of bullying. Weekly meetings (maximum of three) are then held to work toward solutions to eliminate bullying. Instead of identifying any one person as the bully, the Solution Team individually identifies a positive behavior or activity that they will personally extend to the target. Examples include invitations to playing games or activities, especially if the target is alone or appears upset. These acts will invite positive opportunities to engage and play with the target. Since there are many students involved in the solution team, a community commitment is made to help reduce this problem that leads to less events of future bullying. After a couple of weeks, the target attends the Solution Team meeting and gives feedback to the process. This approach is extremely effective as it holds each student accountable for positive conducts and opens communication to name unwanted behaviors.

**Summary**

The act of bullying has occurred for many decades, if not centuries. Its damaging effects can last a lifetime. The need for anti-bullying programs is not only necessary, but it has become mandated. The “No Bully System” is effective because it builds skills to prevent and intervene when bullying is identified. Additionally, it works to strengthen relationships and helps to create a school culture of compassion and inclusion. The team-
based approach encourages staff and student buy-in, which increases the probability of an effective intervention. By bringing anti-bullying trainings to as many local schools in Humboldt County as possible, it supports the vision for this community project.
METHODS

The goal of the research process is to deepen the understanding of the issue of bullying to support the need for increased programming. This exploratory research helps to define the problem of bullying as background information in grant development. If supported, it will help to bring additional No Bully trainings to Humboldt County schools through the process of grant writing.

This program is currently being used at a handful of schools within Humboldt County; however, it is an expense that most schools have not allocated within their current budgets as the curriculum and training costs approximately $10,000 per school site. With ongoing California economic issues, it is unlikely that the state will increase education budgets. Although annual expenses increase, state budgets continue to reduce funds to school systems while classrooms have increased in size. Since finding and researching funding is timely and costly, the written grant will be offered as a community project.

Research design

This research is designed to establish an assessment for anti-bullying programs in school-based programs. Additional research will be administered via internet and through a foundations search to seek and secure new sources of available funding to implement this program. Funders will be contacted for clarification, eligibility and to submit eligible grants.
Research sample

The sample includes local schools in the Humboldt County area. Contact made was to inquire about their interest in implementing this program. Since only one school (Ferndale Elementary) has received the full staff training, they were consulted on their implementation successes. Necessary data includes the size of the student body and the number of employees that will receive the training. This establishes the cost of the training per school. All employees that interact with children will be involved in the training including teachers, aides, janitors, administrators, cooks, and playground staff.

Data collection methods

The No Bully program has a system of data collection that is administered pre-and post-program implementation. Additionally, follow up takes place with schools after the program has been in place for a period of one year. Previous year’s data was available for this project.

Data analysis and synthesis plan

The No Bully program has a current system of data analysis in place. “No Bully’s Solution Teams” have been shown to succeed in resolving bullying situations 80-88% of the time within the first year of implementation (Steiger, 2010; DeNike, 2013). In following training, teachers and other staff need to be constantly vigilant about and follow through on bullying incidences in order to establish student trust and to let students know that anti-bullying advocacy will be supported by those in charge. However, multiple forces complicate and may prevent necessary staff intervention.
Overburdened, overworked teachers may be so focused on meeting rising requirements with decreased funding and time that they literally do not see or hear bullying instances, or do not prioritize addressing bullying when they do see it. Also, students who are seen as “troublemakers” by staff might have a hard time reporting incidents; students who have bad reputations may not have their accounts of bullying believed.

Busy teachers may not have enough time to investigate instances, but if there is a regular and noticeable effort made on their part for zero tolerance of bullying, faith and hope can be reaffirmed for students. Despite the complexities, consistent staff participation is one of the keys to reducing bullying. The greatest effort should be placed on empowering the target to find adequate solutions that he/she finds acceptable. Many of these solutions can be gained through prevention programs, through school wide activities, advisement, and good, consistent policies (Long, & Alexander, 2010). The No Bully program makes these efforts.
RESULTS

Searching for funding is a time consuming and tedious process. Once a funding match is located, the application is usually a lengthy, detailed process that may end in a rejection of funding. There are thousands of foundations that offer grant dollars; however, each one has different goals and requirements only accepting applications that qualify within their guidelines. Additionally, the fight for these funds is fiercely competitive as many non-profits apply for the same funding streams. Much of grant writing is the waiting process. There are timelines, deadlines, and detailed expectations. Many require a letter of inquiry that may lead to an invitation to apply for the grant. Finding the foundation that matches the agency goals is a key in successful grant writing.

After browsing numerous foundations via the internet, a match was finally found for this project. The Nick Traina Foundation was founded by author Danielle Steele in memory of her 19 year-old son that died by suicide after struggling for many years with chronic mental illness. The mission of this foundation falls within the definitions of anti-bullying as it contributes to the field of mental illness, child abuse and suicide prevention in young people. The foundations goal is to provide help and make a difference that will help people lead safe, happy and productive lives (nicktrainafoundation.com).

The grant (Appendix) was modest requiring no formal application, but a narrative explaining the reason for the funding need. The finished grant narrative was forwarded to the No Bully agency to submit with their budgeting details and a copy of their IRS letter indicating the organization’s non-profit, tax-exempt status.
DISCUSSION

The issue of bullying has roots throughout history. By making changes in schools reactions to bullying incidents, it has the potential to affect children and families on many levels, including biological, social, cultural, psychological, and spiritual development by attempting to reduce racial or sexual orientation comments and the personal pain that follows. These changes are also expected to reduce discrimination by increasing individual responsibility at a very young age (Graham, 2011). Although, it cannot change the past or the painful memories that bullying has done, it can work towards creating paths that offer social change in the dynamics of bullying through education and skill building.

Further review of the literature indicates the need for additional research that addresses the potential link between bullying and long-term mental health issues. Additionally, limitations include time constraints within this one year project. Recommendations for future projects include conducting an assessment and data analysis on the effectiveness of the No Bully program by collecting incidences of bullying in all schools in Humboldt County and then compare those to incidences of bullying at the school in which No Bully is in a current partnership. Another recommendation is a qualitative research project that assesses and interviews school participants in schools that are participating in the No Bully System with schools that do not have the program. All projects may contribute to the reduction of bullying, bringing forth community awareness and finding preventative solutions to the issue of bullying.
REFERENCES


California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) Secondary Report for Humboldt County. Ed. Humboldt Area Foundation, Humboldt Department of Health and Human
Services, Alcohol and Other Drug Programs and Tobacco Free Humboldt, Humboldt County Office of Education, Southern Humboldt Unified School District.


No Bully Solutions Program, http://nobully.com/no-bully-system/solution-coach


APPENDIX

Organizations that wish to request funding should submit a grant proposal. There is no formal application or form to apply for a grant. We ask that grant proposals be kept to three pages in addition to attachments. Grant proposals should include the following information:

- **The purpose of your organization, including a description of its history and mission and the population that your organization serves.**
- **The reason for your grant request, including the amount requested, and how the funds will be used.**
- **Indicate whether your request is seeking general support for your organization or support for a specific project. If seeking project support, please include the duration of the project and submit a financial plan for the project.**
- **A copy of your IRS letter indicating your organization’s non-profit, tax-exempt status.**
- **A copy of your most recent annual report including the last two years’ financial statements.**

I am applying for this grant as part of a community project while earning my Masters in Social Work at Humboldt State University. I am writing this grant to bring forth a training opportunity. I am requesting $25,000 which will be used to bring the Bay area based No Bully program to rural Humboldt County, as there are no structured anti-bullying workshops available in the area. This program has proven to be successful and is currently being used in many schools within California; however, it is an expense that most schools have not allocated within their budgets.

No Bully’s mission is to bring innovative, sustainable solutions to bullying and harassment in schools. It is nonprofit organization that began in San Francisco in 2003 as a collaboration of educators, psychologists and lawyers committed to preventing the current generation of students from enduring the bullying that they experienced when they were in school. Today, No Bully is helping schools in California and across the nation - from Hawaii to Delaware - stop bullying and transform into learning communities which are inclusive of everybody.

The No Bully System is a step-by-step process and set of interventions to prevent and stop bullying. It guides school leaders and staff through a series of interventions for responding to bullying and harassment, depending on the severity of the incident. When severe or persistent bullying occurs, teachers facilitate Solution Teams®, where the target’s peer group and the bully come together to stop the bullying. Teachers follow up with Solution Coaching® to help students entrenched in the role of bully or target relate more skillfully with their peers.
I chose the No Bully program as a result of spending my first social work internship in an elementary education setting that was in the process of implementing an anti-bullying program. Until 2012, bullying actions were undefined by law, but they are now receiving increased attention. Many school districts face litigation over ignored or downplayed incidents of bullying. Such an incident occurred in Kern County, California in 2010, when a 13 year-old boy named Seth Walsh died by suicide after persistent harassment over his sexual orientation. His mother brought forth a lawsuit of wrongful death that would initiate new laws and policies. In March 2011, President Obama hosted an anti-bullying conference at the White House to call attention to this issue. In the state of California, Assembly Bill (AB 9) was passed and named Seth’s Law in memory of Seth Walsh. By December of 2011, forty-seven US states had passed anti-bullying laws. Effective July 2012, California schools now have a legal mandate that districts must publish a policy prohibiting discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying. Schools are held to this policy and are no longer allowed to ignore or downplay any reports of bullying incidents. The school that I interned at expanded on this policy by introducing the school to the No Bully program.

I chose this program as I have viewed first-hand the difference that bullying prevention has on children’s lives. This experience offered a foundation of skills as I entered my senior internship at Humboldt County’s only psychiatric facility. This practicum consists of a rotation through three departments including walk-in mental health services, emergency services and long term care and stabilization.

Most of the patients are hospitalized for suicidal attempts, or because they are expressing a desire to no longer live. One of my roles is to help gather their psychiatric history. This intake includes the details of several traumatic events that led to their need for psychiatric care and suicide risk prevention. As I interview the patients, I have found a consistent theme of being bullied as a child, either within their school settings, family and/or community. These painful memories have reduced their desire to live, and the long term sufferings have effected their mental health stabilization and their ability to maintain a productive life.

The goal of this application is to find solutions and prevent the impact of bullying trauma in children as it may lead to healthier, secure and happier futures. It will contribute to not only the reduction of bullying, but it will have long lasting impact in decreasing depression and in the prevention of suicide in our youth.

Thank you for your consideration.

Carie Myers, MSWi