

Army aims to prevent bullying one child at a time



LA Red Shield holds one of its many workshops to educate children on safety.

Photo courtesy of Manuel Acevedo

October is Bullying Prevention Month.

BY Jared McKiernan

Bullying torments individuals worldwide and, in some cases, leads to suicide.

On Oct. 11, 15-year-old Amanda Todd of Vancouver, Canada, became the latest bullying victim to take her own life, sparking a global outcry against bullying that saw thousands flock to social media—using the hashtag #RIPAmanda—to relay their grievances.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), 37 percent of all students do not feel safe at school. The DOJ's National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) of 2009 revealed that more than 60 percent of the children surveyed had been exposed to violence in the past year.

In the spirit of National Bullying Prevention Month, The Salvation Army is taking measures to help lower these numbers, prevent tragedies like Amanda's, eliminate bullying and confront culprits.

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Red Cap, a Salvation Army anger management program to stop bullying at the source, began at Corps 614 in Toronto, Canada, and has now spread to Regina's Coronation Park, a school for high-needs children, via the Army's Haven of Hope. The program also runs in Australia.

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An early intervention program for children 8-12 who struggle to properly deal with their emotional responses in stressful situations, Red Cap teaches children to identify emotions, develop the ability to pinpoint their anger triggers and deal with their feelings in a positive manner.

Red Cap utilizes a traffic stop light as a coping tool: Red, "stop and calm down"; yellow, "think of a plan"; and green, "problem solve wisely." After the course, students receive a red baseball cap that reminds them to "put a cap" on their anger.

Locally, the Army keeps children's safety a high priority as well.

Irene Lewis, executive director of the Los Angeles Red Shield, said those who use their facility must adhere to a strict code of conduct, which outlaws any form of bullying.

"We've had a lot of parents comment and say that their kids behave better here than they do in school," Lewis said. "They police each other."

In addition to policy, Lewis said that the staff holds workshops for kids and adults to emphasize safety and how to work through confrontations.

"Our kids are very vocal," Lewis said. "Things that don't get addressed escalate."

According to a DOJ survey of American middle and high school students, 66 percent of bullying victims believed school professionals responded poorly to bullying problems. Lewis said it is imperative that adults properly deal with each situation.

"Never, when kids say, 'He called me stupid,' do staff members here say, 'Oh, don't pay attention to them.' We always ask, 'Who called you stupid?'" Lewis said. "The whole premise of anti-bullying is for kids to feel safe to express concerns about being bullied. Our philosophy here is that we're a refuge in every single way and that everyone is absolutely valued."

The Salvation Army in Pasadena partners with the Pasadena Police Department to coordinate the Police Activities League (PAL), a tutoring and mentoring program that provides anti-bullying training, with a special emphasis on cyberbullying.

Sgt. Bobby Lomeli, PAL supervisor, said that PAL is unique because police officers are always present at the Pasadena Tabernacle Corps, where the program is held.

“We mentor and counsel kids on bullying,” Lomeli said, “but we also take on each case when it does [happen].”