

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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SVMS students making a difference with 'Beatin' Up Bullyin' play

Smithson Valley Middle School eighth grader Ryan Butler knows what it's like to be the new kid in school. He also knows what it's like to be bullied.

"When I was in elementary school, I was brand new at a school," Butler said. "I had glasses, and I wasn't the skinniest kid. I was picked on a lot."

Butler said the experience greatly affected him.

"It really lowered my self-esteem because no one wanted to be my friend," he said. "Absolutely no one should have to go through that."

Butler has now shed his glasses and has grown into the body frame of an average eighth-grade student, but that still didn't keep him from jumping at the chance to participate in SVMS theater teacher Quay Logan's anti-bullying play.

Logan got the idea of directing an anti-bullying play when she went to a Texas Education Theater Association meeting.

"A teacher had her students perform a play with an anti-bullying theme," Logan said. "I wanted to take that idea in another direction. I wanted my students to not only perform a play but to write it based on some of the things they've seen and experienced growing up."

Logan's students took the idea and ran with it, creating a play based on the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, a Keystone Grant Project that began in 2008 and will be taught to every elementary school in Comal ISD by 2011.

The premise of the play is the four Olweus anti-bullying rules: We will not bully others; We will try to help students who are bullied; We will try to include students who are left out; If we know someone who is being bullied, we will tell an adult at school and an adult at home.

"My students really took ownership in this project," Logan said. "I was very pleased with the way everything turned out. Unfortunately bullying is

something that's a reality and I thought this could be a very educational tool for both my students and the elementary audiences who see the play."

What became of Logan's idea was SVMS' "Beatin' Up Bullyin'" play.

The play begins with a video set to music, which shows examples of students being bullied and even talks about celebrities like Tom Cruise and Eva Longoria, who were bullied while growing up.

Then the SVMS students act out scenes and read poems they wrote about experiences they've had with bullying. A narrator then proceeds to describe what's happening as students act out different bullying scenes, and the roles typically taken when bullying occurs –the bully, the bullied, the defender, and the bully's supporters.

So far, the SVMS students have performed the play at Bill Brown, Specht, Arlon Seay and Johnson Ranch elementary schools.

"I think people still don't realize just how serious this problem is," said SVMS theater student Coral Loftin. "It's important to learn these things when you're young so these lessons on how to stop a bully and how not to be a bully can grow on you."

Fellow SVMS theater student Samira Abed said she has no doubt the message is getting through to those who witness the play.

"A boy came up to me after the play and said there was someone that was bullying him," Abed said. "I told him he needed to tell an adult at school and an adult at home immediately."

The theater group has certainly impressed SVMS principal Michael Keranen.

"We're very proud of our students for their leadership and mentorship to our elementary kids," Keranen said. "This play demonstrates from a student perspective and shows how important it is to respect one another. Our faculty and staff are very proud of what our students and Quay Logan have done."

Butler said he definitely doesn't have the self-esteem issues he once suffered with in elementary school and said participating in this play has been nothing but a positive experience.

"Doing something like this really builds your confidence," Butler said. "It makes you feel better, because you know you're not only talking to the people that are being bullied but also to the students doing the bullying. It lets the bullies know what they're doing is not okay or cool, and it relays the message to anyone being bullied to never be afraid to tell an adult."

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IN PHOTOS: Smithson Valley Middle theater students act out a scene in their "Beatin' Up Bullyin'" play. Pictured (from left) are Jonathan Oliver, Coral Loftin, Reme Prizer, Tristian McGonigal and Samira Abel.

Smithson Valley Middle theater students (Front Row, l-r) Lauren McNeal, Lauren Masden, Emily Young, Brianna Zamora, Sienna Antonionelli, Samira Abed, and Reme Pricer. (Middle row) Jessica Cabading, Bailey Maxwell, Ryan Butler, Eric Genovese, and Jordan Traxler. (Back row) Jonathan Oliver, Randy Platt, Tristen McGonigal, and Coral Loftin were part of a group that recently performed the 'Beatin' Up' Bullyin' play at Johnson Ranch Elementary. The play's anti-bullying theme is based on Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, a Keystone Grant Project that began in 2008 and will be taught to every elementary school in Comal ISD by 2011.