

**PREVENTION OF BULLYING  
AMONG CHILDREN AND YOUTH  
IN HAMILTON**

**A Discussion Paper  
prepared for  
Hamilton Community Foundation**

**June 28, 2002**

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**APPENDICES**

**(A) Document Review**

**(B) Internet Sites**

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## **BACKGROUND**

In response to an expression of interest by a donor to contribute to the reduction and prevention of bullying among children and youth in the Hamilton area, the Hamilton Community Foundation initiated an assessment of the problem and an analysis of the opportunities and options for effective intervention. Betty Muggah, a consultant who has been working with the Foundation on a number of community development initiatives, was asked to conduct this assessment and to prepare a discussion paper.

The following steps were undertaken in the process of completing this paper:

- review of literature examining the problem of bullying among children, as well as the related fields of youth violence and safe schools. This review included an examination of a wide range of programs and models for the prevention and reduction of bullying, as well as an assessment of the effectiveness of the models. (see Appendix A for list of documents reviewed)
- review of internet sites and materials devoted to the subject of bullying. (Appendix B)
- interviews with key informants in the Hamilton community to identify current initiatives, opportunities, trends and issues. (Appendix C)

## INTRODUCTION

### ***Why Do It To Me?***

by Garry in Quebec, Canada

*At school, I get beat up, threatened, mocked, and other things that are very painful for me to talk about. I've talked to the "mockers" and "bullies" but that did not work. I cry coming home at night. I am 13 years old (7th grade) and this has been going on since the 3rd grade. I'm very sick of it. My parents don't know what to do. The teachers, principal, and school board don't either. I've called phone help-lines, but they gave me suggestions that I've already tried. My grades are going down more and more, I am getting depressed, and I've even tried suicide. Please help.*

These is just one of the many cries for help posted daily by students on the [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) website, an award-winning international forum created two years ago by a British Columbia educator. The stories, poems, plays, and songs submitted by children and teenagers from around the world, speak to their pain and frustration, as well as their sense that adults in their lives are unwilling or unable to help.

Bullying is an old, widespread, and worldwide problem. Most adults can remember incidents of bullying in which they were bullies or intended victims. In fact, until recently, the common perception had been that bullying was a relatively harmless experience that many children experienced during their school years. However, over the past two decades, an extensive body of research in Canada and abroad has documented that bullying is a potentially damaging form of violence among children and youth. Bullying has been shown to have negative lifelong consequences both for students who bully and for their victims, as well as negative consequences for schools, teachers, and the rights of students to learn in a safe environment without fear. So while bullying is not a new phenomenon, what is new is the growing awareness that bullying has serious damaging effects for bullies, victims, schools and communities.

Concerns of parents, policymakers, educators and the public have escalated in countries around the world with the rise in the reported incidence of violence in schools and the links that have been established between violence and bullying. In the last five years, the issue of bullying has become a particular focus for attention - new policies and programs have been introduced by governments at all levels, research activity has accelerated, public campaigns have been launched, a great number of new web sites and special resources have been created and promoted, and media coverage has been continuous and extensive.

## SETTING THE CONTEXT

### **What is Bullying?**

*(references: "Bullying and Victimization", National Crime Prevention Centre, 1997; "Bullying In Schools", Ron Banks, ERIC, 2000; School-Wide Prevention of Bullying, U.S. Department of Education, 2001)*

Myths about bullying abound. It is not uncommon to hear that bullying is just a "normal" part of childhood, that children who bully suffer from low self-esteem, that the victims really ought to figure out how to stand up for themselves. Children and adults frequently accuse victims of bringing bullying on themselves-either by provoking the bullies or making themselves look weak and defenseless.

The first step in untangling the myths about bullying is to define exactly what bullying is and how it differs from "normal" childhood conflicts. Perhaps the most important distinctions have to do with duration, power and intent to harm. (Pepler and Craig, 2001). **Bullying, unlike isolated conflicts between individuals, occurs when one individual or a group targets another individual repeatedly over time, using physical, verbal, or psychological aggression to dominate the victim.** The repeated incidents function to create and enforce an imbalance of power between bully and victim.

Bullies acquire power over their victims in many ways: by physical size and strength, by status within the peer group, by knowing the victim's weaknesses, or by recruiting support from other children. Among middle and high school students, bullying behaviour more frequently involves teasing and social exclusion, but may also include physical violence, threats, thefts, sexual and racial harassment, public humiliation and the destruction of the targeted student's property. Bullying behaviour in elementary grades is more likely than in older grades to involve physical aggression, but is characterized by teasing, intimidation, and social exclusion as well. (Appendix D for Types of Bullying Behaviours, B.C. Ministry of Education, 2000)

Bullying is the most common form of violence in our society. It is what drives the culture of violence, permitting the most powerful to dominate the less powerful.

Bullying starts out young, and it starts out small ...a push during kindergarten recess or some under-the-breath name-calling when first graders are lining up in the hallway. Its forms change with age throughout the lifespan: playground bullying, sexual harassment, gang attacks, date violence, assault, marital violence, child abuse, workplace harassment, and elder abuse. (Appendix E for Developmental Continuum of Bullying prepared by Pepler and Craig, 2000).

Bullying can also be seen as one step in a continuum of violence which begins with repeated disrespectful behavior, moves to bullying, pushing and fighting, and escalates with rape, hate

crimes and the use of weapons. (Appendix F for Violence Continuum Chart prepared by Ministry of Education, Government of British Columbia, 2000).

### **Extent of the Problem**

*(References- "Bullying in Schools", Ron Banks, ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 1997; "Bullying and Victimization", National Crime Prevention Centre of Canada, 1997)*

Various reports and studies in Canada and abroad over the past decade have consistently established that approximately 10-15% of children attending school are either bullied regularly or are initiators of bullying behaviour. (Olweus, 1993; Pepler et al, 1997; Craig et al, 1998). Research using the National Longitudinal Study for Children and Youth found that a significant proportion of school-aged children in Canada are either bullies (14 percent) or victims (5 percent). Data from the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Scandinavian countries, Ireland and England, are quite similar to those reported in Canadian studies.

In a 2001 survey, considered to be the first attempt to measure the problem in Ontario, the Toronto - based Centre for Addiction and Mental Health reported that while overall violence among youth is declining, twenty - five per cent Ontario students (225,000) in grades 7-12 had been bullied in the 2001 school year, while one in ten had seriously considered committing suicide. This apparent increase is consistent with recent U.S. studies which estimate that up to 30 percent of American children are regularly involved in bullying, either as bullies, victims or both, with a reported 15 percent being "severely traumatized or distressed" by encounters with bullies and 8 percent victimized in the past week. (National Resource Centre for Safe Schools, 2001),

Researchers' observations of children on playground and in classrooms confirm that it occurs frequently: once every seven minutes on the playground and once every twenty-five minutes in the class. (Craig and Pepler, 1997). Despite these numbers, bullying behaviour is rarely detected by teachers. Overwhelmingly, the research reflects a significant gap between educators' perceptions and actual incidents of bullying in schools.

Direct bullying seems to increase through the elementary years, peak in middle school/junior high school years, and decline through the high school years. However, while direct physical assault seems to decrease with age, verbal abuse is reported to remain fairly constant. School size, racial composition, and school setting (rural, urban, suburban) do not seem to be distinguishing factors in predicting the occurrence of bullying. Boys engage in bullying behaviour and are victims of bullies more frequently than girls. Boys report more physical forms of bullying; girls tend to bully in indirect ways, such as gossiping and excluding. (Craig and Pepler, 1997).

### **Characteristics of Bullies, Victims, and the Bystanders**

*(References: "Bullying in Schools", ERIC, Ron Banks, 2000; "Bullying and Victimization", National Crime Prevention Council, 1997)*

Some children are at more risk of becoming bullies and victims than others, although this is in no way predetermined. It depends on a combination of individual, family, peer, and school

experiences. Among the characteristics of children at greatest risk of bullying and victimization, researchers have identified the following:

#### *Those Who Bully*

- tend to be hyperactive, disruptive, and impulsive (Olweus, 1987, Pepler and Craig, 2000)
- are generally aggressive toward their peers, teachers, parents, and others. They tend to be assertive and easily provoked.
- contrary to popular belief, aggressive males who bully are not anxious and insecure under a tough exterior and they do not suffer from poor self esteem. Typically, males who bully have an aggressive personality combined with physical strength. (Olweus, 1993)
- have little empathy for their victims and show little or no remorse (Olweus, 1987)
- as yet, no empirical evidence to support a link between bullying and socioeconomic status or ethnicity.
- may come from families where there is lack of attention and warmth toward the child, poor supervision, use of physical and verbal aggression (Olweus, 1993)
- often they have been bullied themselves by adults.
- will continue bullying providing there are no consequences, the victim does not complain and the peer group silently colludes.

#### *Those Who Are Victims*

- show higher levels of insecurity, anxiety, depression, loneliness, physical and mental symptoms and low self- esteem
- male students who are bullied demonstrate anxious personality patterns and physical weakness. (Olweus, 1987)
- may have poor social skills; are socially isolated
- rarely defend themselves or retaliate when confronted by students who bully them.
- boys and girls are equally likely to report being victimized. (Pepler et al, 1997)
- tend to be close to their parents who may be described as over-protective
- tend to be physically weaker than their peers. Research has not supported the popular belief that victims have unusual physical traits (such as weight, dress, etc.) Generally, students who bully do not do so on the basis of race. (Craig and Pepler, 1997)
- the same children are often bullied year after year.
- may take drastic action if the problem persists. (vengeance in the form of fighting back, extreme violent acts, or suicide)

#### *Those Who Observe Bullying/ Peers/ The "Silent Majority"*

- bullying usually involves more than the bully and the victim; peers are present in 85 per cent of bullying episodes in classrooms and playgrounds. (Craig and Pepler, 1997).
- peers are drawn into bullying by arousal and excitement of aggression; they are the audience for the theater of bullying
- provide the positive attention, imitation, deference and lack of opposition which reinforce the bully's dominance

- although 80-90 per cent of students indicate that watching bullying makes them feel uncomfortable (Pepler et al, 1997), observations indicate that peers assume many roles: co-bullies, supports, audience, and interveners.
- peers tend to give positive attention to the bully, rather than the victim; there is a risk for peers who align with the victim - they may become the next victim.

### **Consequences of Bullying**

*(References: Making a Difference in Bullying, D. Pepler and W. Craig, 2000; Bullying at School-What We Know and What We Can Do, D. Olweus, 1993; Recognizing and Preventing Bullying, National Resource Centre for Safe Schools, 1999.)*

Bullying is pervasive and potentially terribly harmful for bullies, victims, schools and communities. The consequences of bullying are far-reaching, ranging from lower attendance and student achievement to increased violence and juvenile crime. And not only does it harm both its intended victims and the perpetrators, it affects the climate of schools, morale of teachers, and indirectly, the ability of all students to learn to the best of their abilities.

#### *For Those Who Bully*

Studies have shown that those involved in prolonged and serious bullying of others experience a wide range of mental health, academic and social problems if they do not receive support. Several longitudinal studies conducted over two decades have recognized bullying behaviour in elementary school as a precursor of violent behaviour, and show significant links between this behaviour and criminal activity in adult life. Recent Canadian studies point to the connection between bullying and sexual harassment and violence in later years. (Craig and Pepler, 1997)

#### *For The Victims*

Victims often fear school and consider it an unhappy and unsafe place. Drop out rates and absenteeism are higher among victimized students. Repeated bullying leads to anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression - problems, that studies have concluded, endure for years. One need look no further than the flood of letters to the editor or the calls to the radio or television hosts in response to a feature program or news item on bullying, to understand the lasting effects and pain carried into adulthood by those who were bullied as children. (Olweus, 1991; Pepler and Craig, 2000; see Appendix G for examples of recent news items and letters from victims).

#### *For The School Community*

The impact of bullying extends well beyond the bully and the victim, to the peer group, school and community. Those who are not directly involved, but who regularly witness bullying at school, suffer from a less secure learning environment, the fear that the bully may target them next, and the knowledge that teachers and other adults are either unable or unwilling to control bullies' behaviour. Student surveys reveal that only a small percentage of students seem to believe that adults will help, observing that adult intervention is infrequent and ineffective and that telling adults will only bring more harassment. Parents are often unaware of the bullying problem. Students report that teachers seldom or never talk with their classes about bullying. (Charach, Pepler, Ziegler, 1995).

The use of power and aggression are at the heart of the complex and interrelated issues of violence, bullying and victimization. Perhaps the most troubling are the lessons learned by all who become involved - that those with power can be aggressive - and that being aggressive may enhance status. Pepler and Craig summarize the issue in the following way:

- lack of intervention implies that bullying is acceptable and can be performed without consequences.
- bullies learn that power and aggression lead to dominance and status
- peers learn to align with the dominant individual for protection and status
- victims learn helplessness, submissiveness and negative means of gaining attention from peers

The concern shared by policymakers, parents, educators, and researchers is that these lessons transfer to more serious forms of violence that continue to combine power and aggression in adolescence and on into adulthood.

### **Roles of Family, Schools, Peers, and Wider Community**

Bullying is a problem that occurs in the social environment as a whole. It is a community issue in which multiple stakeholders share the problem just as we share the welfare of all children.

#### *What Role Does the Family Play?*

Children's behaviour patterns are first established at home. Children involved in bullying may have negative attitudes, poor social skills and emotional difficulties which begin at home. These problems may be transferred to school and peer situations, where they may be reinforced. Care needs to be taken by parents so that they do not model verbal and physical aggression in the home. It is important that parents create a home environment that discourages bullying behaviour and supports children who are victimized. We know from studies that parents are generally unaware of the extent of bullying and victimization problems, and may inadvertently encourage bullying by accepting as part of normal growing up and leaving children to solve their own problems. (Olweus, 1993; Pepler and Craig, 2001)

#### *What is the Role of Peers?*

Peers play a central role in bullying, and as noted earlier, research has demonstrated both positive and negative aspects of their involvement. Peers can be a positive and critical influence in stopping bullying, as they are almost always present, and occasionally intervene, whereas adults seldom witness and intervene in bullying. (Pepler and Craig, 2001).

#### *What Role Does the School Play?*

(References: Olweus, 1997; Craig and Pepler, 1997 and 2001; Banks, ERIC/Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 1997; Lumsden, ERIC/Counseling and Support Services, 2002; Helping Kids Adjust- A Tri-Ministry Project, Canadian Centre for Children at Risk, McMaster University)

Schools are vitally important in shaping children's development. Since most bullying occurs in the school environment, how schools respond to such interactions, affects the school climate. In classrooms or schools with high levels of bullying problems, students tend to feel less safe and are less satisfied with school life. This implies that for many students, particularly the victims, the classroom is no longer a place of concentrated work and learning.

Research has demonstrated that the social context and the level of supervision at school play a major role in both the frequency and severity of bullying. While teachers and administrators do not have control over individual and family factors which produce children who are inclined to bully, bullying problems can be greatly reduced in severity by appropriate supervision, intervention and climate within the school. Yet, studies over time have shown that school staff, like parents, are generally unaware of the extent of bullying and victimization.

#### *What is the Role of the Wider Community?*

Bullying problems may reflect cultural and societal tolerance of aggression. Many of these attitudes are conveyed through the popular media, including television, movies, music and video games. The consistent message in media representations of violence is that aggression is an effective strategy to secure power and solve social problems. While not all children will be similarly influenced by images of power and aggression, we know that those who are predisposed, are more likely to act out and model the aggressive behaviours they view in the wider community. ([Helping Kids Adjust- A Tri-Ministry Project](#) and "School Violence", an interview with Dr. Dan Offord, (1994), Canadian Centre for Children at Risk, McMaster University)

## **BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION: WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS?**

Our review of the literature and research supports the main conclusion of this report: that there is a solid body of knowledge about the causes and dynamics of bullying, and that this knowledge has been translated into an array of intervention programs with well-documented effectiveness to reduce and prevent bullying, as well as other forms of violent behaviour among children and youth. What follows is a brief synopsis of the major findings about bullying prevention programs that work.

### **Overview**

The complex nature of bullying demands comprehensive approaches. Multiple, rather than single isolated factors, place children at risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of violence. Bullying is a community issue and as such is best dealt with by schools in collaboration with parents, police, business leaders, elected officials, and young people themselves. And to be effective, interventions must address multiple risk factors in a variety of settings. Simplistic, quick fix methodologies and piecemeal approaches have rarely been successful, particularly in the long term.

While some schools have made valiant attempts to introduce a focus on prevention of bullying, regrettably, as Child and Youth Friendly Ottawa point out in their recent report, Bullying.....Going to School Scared, "the majority of the current anti-bullying programs tend to be reactive, in-school and formula driven. They are often presented in isolation from other strategies in a school assembly with little or no follow up in the classroom or community. This approach, not particularly effective, and indeed sometimes damaging, appears to be the result of limited training resources for teachers, and a reluctance of the community to assume greater responsibility."

Bullying is a problem that can best be addressed - not by government and not by legislated "zero tolerance" or "safe schools" policies - but by people, especially parents, children and youth, working together with schools, teachers, and principals.

There is clear, unambiguous evidence that school action can dramatically reduce the incidence of bullying. Current research strongly suggests that adopting a comprehensive, proactive and preventive approach to reducing bullying can change students' attitudes and behaviours, reduce other anti-social behaviours and increase both teacher's and peers' willingness to intervene. To address the patterns, indicators and causal links, action must be taken on many levels, with strategies involving not only the victims and the bullies, but also within the school, within the peer group (classroom and playground), with parents, and with the larger community.

### **A Systemic Approach to Bullying**

Building on their own extensive research, and that of others in the field, Pepler and Craig have identified a set of principles and a comprehensive framework for a systemic approach to bullying. (Appendix G). After two decades of trying and evaluating various approaches, a strong consensus has emerged among the leading researchers in the related fields of safe schools, youth violence prevention and bullying about the underlying principles for effective intervention. They include:

- bullying and victimization do not occur in isolation. Therefore, interventions with the bully and/or victim are necessary but not sufficient.
- effective interventions must move beyond the bully and victims to include: peers, school, community and society.
- need to recognize the roles and responsibilities of bullies, victims, peers, teachers, counsellor, principal, and community.
- to address the problem effectively, change is required at all of these levels of the system
- a focus on prevention of bullying needs to be introduced in kindergarten and continued throughout elementary, middle and high schools
- adults in the school need to model the attitudes and behaviour expected of students
- leadership to address bullying is essential for change.

### **School-Wide Efforts to Address Bullying**

*References: British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1999; Child and Youth Friendly Ottawa, 2001; National Crime Prevention Council, 1997; Pepler and Craig, 2000; Olweus, , 1997; London Family Court Clinin, 1996;Hamilton Fish Institute, 1999; United States Department of Education, 1998; United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2000; Northwest Regional*

*Educational Laboratory, 2001; University of Colorado, Centre for Prevention of Violence, 2002; Hoover and Oliver, 1996).*

Until recent years, the problem of bullying has been addressed primarily through efforts to raise the self-esteem of victims and to confront the bully. While this helps, it clearly is not enough. Without question, the most effective means of addressing bullying is through comprehensive school-wide programs. Although teachers, counselors, and parents may be able to deal with individual cases as they come up, it's unlikely they will have a significant impact on the incidence of bullying in the schools. The reasons for this are evident once we consider all of the factors that characterize and give rise to bullying behaviour. For one thing, bullying often goes undetected by both teachers and parents. In addition, many teacher, parents, and administrators fail to understand the dynamics of bullying. But perhaps the most important reason for developing a school-wide bullying prevention program is to engage and empower the "silent majority" - the large percentage of children who regularly witness bullying at school, but don't know what they can do to help.

School-wide bullying prevention programs can take many forms, and indeed need to be tailored to reflect the unique differences among individual schools and communities. Some educators advocate a separate curriculum that promotes social skills, anger management and conflict resolution, particularly for elementary school children. Other theorists, however, believe that the overall school environment should promote a pro-social approach, instead of just a separate program. Whether a school plans to adopt a specific bullying prevention program, implements a bullying prevention curriculum, develops an anti-bullying task force, or integrates anti-bullying efforts into established safe schools or violence prevention programs, a number of common practices or steps have been identified consistently in the research. These include:

- assessment of the school's needs and goals - survey students, teachers and parents to provide baseline data about the occurrence of bullying. Schools and communities need to identify and measure the extent of bullying behaviour.
- development of a whole school policy to define the rights, roles and responsibilities of all members of the school community. Policy needs to include a commitment to address bullying, a clear definition, and processes to prevent and intervene.
- provide information and training for teachers, administrators, counsellors, and other school staff. Quality training and opportunities for discussion are essential if all staff are to support anti-bullying policies and programs.
- involve parents - if possible, get parents involved in program planning and implementation. Share survey results, offer information and training, encourage them to contact teachers and administrators if bullying is suspected or observed.

- engage students in all aspects of bullying prevention, with strategies and interventions at multiple levels- in the classroom, in the playground and throughout the school. Peers are central to the problem-and the solution.
- integrate anti-bullying themes and activities into curriculum - curricula should include definitions of bullying, discussions of how bullying affects everyone, ways students can help one another, and assertiveness training.
- identify resources for bullies, victims and families.
- provide increased supervision and monitoring in areas where bullying tends to occur. Identify the "hot spots" where bullying is more likely to take place and ensure adequate adult supervision.

### **Recommended Programs for Prevention and Reduction of Bullying**

*(References: Hamilton Fish National Institute on School and Community Violence, Annual Report on School Safety, 1998; Making a Difference in Bullying, Pepler and Craig, 2000; Schoolwide Prevention of Bullying, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001; Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2000; Bullying and Victimization, National Crime Prevention Council, 1997; Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Blueprints for Violence Prevention, University of Colorado Centre for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 2002)*

In this section, we introduce several examples of programs that are well -designed, have been evaluated, and can be implemented in combinations to form a comprehensive approach to the prevention of bullying, and more generally, the promotion of school safety. While reviewing the programs, it is important to keep in mind that problems generally do not occur in isolation. A key component of increasing school safety and reducing bullying is selecting programs that can be combined and customized as part of an effective comprehensive plan for addressing local school requirements.

As noted earlier, specific program and strategy selections should be based on a thorough assessment of each school needs and the involvement of all teachers, parents, students and other community stakeholders. *(Note: expanded descriptions, evaluation reports and contact information for each of the programs mentioned below, have been compiled in a separate document and are available for review)*

Among the Programs that have been developed and introduced in Canada, the following should be noted:

- **Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities** - this award-winning program was originally created by the Vancouver School Board, and has now been adapted for application in all schools in British Columbia. It helps schools develop a school-wide awareness, prevention and intervention plan to increase safety and reduce the incidence of bullying behaviour. Contact: B.C. Safe Schools Centre.

- **Focus on Bullying- A Prevention Program for Secondary School Communities-** recently developed secondary school edition of the elementary school program (see above), introduced in all secondary schools in British Columbia in 2002. Contact: B.C. Safe Schools Centre.
- **A School Based Anti-Violence Program/ASAP** - developed in 1996, initially for schools in London, Ontario, ASAP provides manuals and a video outlining steps for reducing bullying based on the principles outlined by researchers Olewus and Pepler. Complementing the ASAP program, lesson plans for violence prevention have been developed by the Board of Education in London. Contact: London Family Court Clinic.
- **Student-Mediated Conflict Resolution Program** - Dr. Charles Cunningham, Director of Hamilton Health Sciences' Community Parent Education Program, in collaboration with Lesley Cunningham and Vince Martorelli from the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, developed a student-mediated conflict resolution program for use particularly in low surveillance recess periods in elementary schools, kindergarten to grade 5. Focused particularly on reducing and preventing school playground aggression, and using mediation teams of grade 5 students, the model has been shown to reduce physically aggressive playground behaviour by 50 to 65 per cent. A relatively low cost intervention, this peer mediation model can be adapted for implementation in middle and high schools. Contact: Dr. C. Cunningham, Director Community Parent Education Program, Hamilton Health Sciences.
- **Thames Valley District School Board/TVDSB Violence Prevention Program-**following the amalgamation of three school boards serving the London, Ontario area in 1998, TVDSB introduced a comprehensive Violence Prevention Program to support the Board's Safe Schools Policy. Building on the initial work of the Middlesex School Board over a ten year period and the London Family Court Clinic's ASAP (see above) , the Violence Prevention Program is a priority initiative of the Board, supported by a fulltime Learning Coordinator for Violence Prevention, a Safe Schools Steering Committee, and an array of community partnerships. The Program includes special curricula for Jr. Kindergarten-Grade 12, resource materials, drama, training and information materials for teachers and parents, customization of a number of recommended bullying and violence prevention programs (including peer mentoring, Second Steps, etc.), and systems for monitoring and addressing bullying across all schools. TVSB is also involved in a number of research initiatives to develop and test various approaches and models for bullying and violence prevention.
- **Making A Difference in Bullying** - this is not a specific program model, but rather a compilation of intervention strategies for a comprehensive school and community-wide approach for preventing and reducing bullying. Based on their own extensive research in the field and the evaluations of a number of school-based bullying prevention programs, Pepler and Craig have developed a framework together with recommended interventions for a systematic approach to bullying, all of which are presented in the

document, Making a Difference in Bullying. (2000). Contact, Debra Pepler, York University and Wendy Craig, Queen's University.

- **No More Bullies** - is the theme of a national anti-bullying campaign launched by the Canada Safety Council last fall. The campaign included national school distribution of a combination pamphlet and poster on bullying, an anti-bullying web-site, phone access to Kids Help counsellors, and the promotion of the National Film Board's film, Bully Dance, which tells the story of a school bully and victim through animation.

The Hamilton Fish National Institute on School and Community Violence, with support from the U.S. Department of Justice, completed a rigorous review of a number of programs designed to promote school safety and reduce violence. Among the programs reviewed, there are several that focus on the prevention of bullying and aggressive behaviour. The following group of programs are recommended as being particularly well- designed and effective (See Appendix for more detailed descriptions):

- **Bully Proofing Your School** for elementary and middle schools is a promising comprehensive approach which focuses on shifting power away from bullies, not punishing them. Components include staff involvement, a student curriculum using role playing and class discussions, interaction with parents, and special interventions with victims and bullies. Contact: Clara Garrity, Colorado.
- **Transition Intervention Program/TIP** for grades 1-6 is a promising comprehensive model for eliminating problem behaviour and enhancing students' academic and social success in school. Components include a 9 week classroom curriculum, parenting information sessions, tracking and support for students re-entering classes and support and training for teachers. Contact Sandy Schowe, University of Utah.
- **PeaceBuilders** for kindergarten to grade 5, is an excellent model for students of mixed ethnicity that has been used in urban and suburban schools. This program focuses on changing the characteristics of the school setting that trigger aggressive, hostile behaviour and to increase the availability of pro-social models. Initial outcomes over a two-year period resulted in increased teacher-rated social competence and student reported pro-social behaviour. Fewer effects were seen for student's aggressive behaviour. Contact: Jane Guilbon, Arizona.
- **Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum** was developed to reduce aggression and increase pro-social behaviour for students in pre kindergarten -middle schools. This is a well-developed curriculum designed to insert skills-based training into existing curricula and encourage the transfer of skills to behaviour at school and home. While this program appears promising for elementary schools, it has had disappointing results when implemented in middle schools. Contact: Committee for Children, Seattle Washington.

- **Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies/PATHS** for kindergarten to grade 5 is another well - researched model designed to promote emotional competence. Cognitive problem-solving skills are also taught. The main objective is for students to learn new skills and to apply those to daily life. Four clinical trails over 15 years have demonstrated improvements in social and emotional competencies and reductions in aggression and other risk factors. Contact: Developmental Research and Programs, Pennsylvania State University.

In 1996, the Centre for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado designed and launched a national initiative in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Juvenile Justice, to identify and replicate violence prevention programs that are effective and recommended by Known as Blueprints for Violence Prevention, the initiative reviewed over 500 programs from which 11 prevention and intervention programs were identified that met the strict scientific standard of program effectiveness, together with an additional 19 programs which were seen as promising. In addition to a number of the programs already identified by the Hamilton Fish Institute (see above) , the following have been identified as particularly effective:

- **Bullying Prevention Program** is a well-researched and demonstrated model for universal intervention to reduce and prevent bullying. Developed by researcher, Dr. Dan Olweus, and refined in collaboration with Susan Limber, the program targets students from kindergarten-grade 8. School staff have the main responsibility for the introduction and implementation of the program. Core components of the program are implemented at the school, class and individual levels, and include the administration of surveys to assess the nature and prevalence of bullying, establishment of a Bullying Prevention Committee, and the involvement of teachers, parents and students in all aspects of the program. Multiple replications of the program in Norway, England, Germany and United States have demonstrated a reduction in bully-victim problems by 50 per cent within two years following the introduction of the program. Contact: D. Olweus, University of Bergen and S. Limber University of Colorado.
- **Steps to Respect: A Bullying Prevention Program** is a well-researched model for a school-wide approach to help foster a safe, caring, respectful school environment. Lesson plans for grades 3-6, resource materials for language arts and social skills development, and a staff training model are included as part of the program. Contact: Committee for Children, Seattle, Washington.
- **School Transitional Environmental Program/STEP** is a promising model for children in grades 7-12 at greatest risk for behavioural problems. STEP's success is achieved through redefining the role of homeroom teachers and restructuring schools' physical settings. Together, these changes increase students' beliefs that school is stable, well-organized and cohesive. Contact Committee for Children, Seattle, Washington.
- **Families and Schools Together/FAST Track Program** is a promising comprehensive and long-term program that aims to prevent chronic and severe problems for high risk

children ages 3-14. Interventions focus on the school, home, and individual, aiming to increase communication and bonds between these three, enhance children's social and cognitive skills, improve peer relationships and ultimately decrease disruptive behaviour. Utilizes the PATHS curriculum. Contact: Contact Lynn McDonald, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

- **Good Behaviour Game** has shown positive effects in teacher reports of shy and aggressive behaviours in first grade students. Long-term evaluations show sustained decreases in aggression. .Contact: Sheppard Kellam, Maryland.
- **I Can Problem Solve** for nursery school and kindergarten students, this promising program significantly reduced both impulsive and inhibited classroom behaviour, demonstrating sustained improvements in classroom behaviour and problem solving three to four years after the end of the program. Contact Myrna Shure, MCP-Hahemann University, Pennsylvania.
- **The Incredible Years Series** demonstrated positive results in multiple trials in reducing peer aggression in the classroom and increasing positive relationships with teachers, parents and peers. Contact; Carolyn Webster-Stratton, University of Washington.
- **Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers/LIFT** - in short term evaluations, LIFT has decreased children's physical aggression on the playground and increased social skills. Three years after the program, participants had fewer increases in attention deficit disorder related behaviours. Contact John Reid, Oregon Learning Centre.

The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services published a comprehensive community-oriented sourcebook (2000), "Best Practices in Youth Violence Prevention", that describes strategies for successfully implementing proven or promising interventions to prevent youth violence. It is the first of its kind to look at the effectiveness of practices in four areas: parents and families, home visiting, social and conflict resolution skills, and mentoring. While the focus is on children and youth at high risk of violent behaviours, a number of the many successful interventions reviewed in the source book, have been shown to be effective in dealing with bullying, including one additional recommended program to those already noted above:

- **Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders: Thinking and Acting to Prevent Violence** is a curriculum intervention for middle school high-risk children that focuses not only on the aggressors, but also on the roles of victims and bystanders. Developed and evaluated in three stages, the curriculum and related interventions resulted in increase in resolution of conflicts without violence, withdrawal of bystander acceptance, and improvement of self-rated behaviour. Contact: Slaby, National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington.

## FOCUS ON BULLYING IN HAMILTON: WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?

Within the Hamilton community, there is evidence of increasing attention being given to the issue of bullying in schools, and more generally, to school violence. What follows is a brief description of the efforts being made by a number of Hamilton's public institutions and community organizations. This is in no way meant to be a comprehensive inventory, but simply an overview of the range of initiatives and approaches, together with examples of a number of specific programs which have been introduced to reduce and prevent bullying. We begin with two provincial initiatives that are having some influence on developments locally.

### **Ontario Safe School Policy**

The Ontario Government passed the Safe Schools Act in June, 2000, giving authority to a new provincial Code of Conduct which aims "to promote respect, responsibility and authority in Ontario schools". The Act outlines terms for denial of access, suspension and expulsion of students, requires school boards to develop their own codes of conduct, and makes it mandatory for school boards to provide supports to help suspended students and to ensure that expelled students attend "strict discipline schooling or equivalent programs". Accompanying the Act is a new province-wide model requiring all local police and school boards to develop consistent protocols, outlining how schools must work with police to prevent and respond to school-related crime and violence.

Both of Hamilton's school boards are proceeding with implementation of the various required elements specified in the Safe Schools Act. While school officials support the stated purpose of legislation and the value of locally-developed Codes of Conduct, at the same time they observe that the legislation's singular focus on reactive and punitive actions, needs to be balanced by positive strategies that contribute to building a harmonious, safe and supportive learning environment for all within the school community. And they recognize that achieving the balance will be particularly difficult given that no financial and no additional supports or resources have been provided to local boards for implementation of the Safe Schools Act.

A number of other provincial governments have also introduced Safe Schools policies in the past few years. Those of British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan are particularly noteworthy because of the comprehensive frameworks they have developed to support educators and local communities in their efforts, providing an array of resources, consultants, curricula, and related training for schools, teachers, parents and students. Information about bullying, together with recommended resources and supports, have been highlighted and included as an integral component within the Safe Schools policies and programs in these provinces. The comprehensive violence-prevention and character-education programs these provinces have adopted emphasize a positive approach encouraging school practices that model and reinforce socially responsible and respectful behaviours.

With financial support from the National Strategy for Crime Prevention, the Canadian Association of Principals/CAP in 2000 developed an inventory of resources and research for safe

and healthy schools, which serves as a vital resource for educators and others across Canada. The resulting report, Zero Tolerance Policies in Context: A Preliminary Investigation to Identify Actions to Improve School Discipline and School Safety, summarizes the research and best practices, and has been used extensively by school boards and individual schools across Canada in developing their school discipline policies and programs. In addition, CAP has continued to work with the National Centre for Crime Prevention, to develop a national consensus and network on safe schools.

### **Ontario Curriculum**

The Ministry of Education's new curriculum guidelines for both elementary schools, kindergarten - grade 6, and for the middle grades 7-8, include a focus on age-related social skills development, peer relationships, conflict resolution, etc. These and other related topics are integrated into the school curriculum with the expectation that they will be introduced and reinforced with age-appropriate learning materials throughout students' education.

### **Hamilton -Wentworth Catholic District School Board/HWCDSB**

Within HWCDSB, Des Brennan, Manager of Social Work Services, has lead responsibility for the Board's implementation of the requirements of the Safe School's Act and for liaison with the Hamilton Police Services. He notes that HWCDSB has not developed a system-wide focus or a reporting system for bullying, nor does the Board recommended a particular approach for schools to follow in the reduction and prevention of bullying. However, there are a number of Board and individual school initiatives underway which help to address the issue. These include:

- the Board has recently involved teachers, parents and students in the development of a "Harassment and Information Guide for Students" which was introduced in fall 2001. The guide defines harassment (bullying is included as one form of harassment), describes the roles of students and staff, and outlines a three-step resolution protocol which the guide suggests be followed in the event of such incidents. Although still too early to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the guide, it is hoped that it will be an educational tool to help students identify harassment and to advise them of their roles and responsibilities.
- each school is required to have "School Code of Conduct".
- the Board has a close working relationship with Hamilton Police Services. As part of their "Supporting Safe Communities Through Crime Prevention Education Program" police officers are frequently invited to give presentations on bullying to individual schools and classes in response to requests by principals and/or teachers.
- the Social Work Department staff and the Behaviour Resource Teachers are often called upon to make presentations to classes and to assist individual teachers on such topics as "problem relationships" and "building self-esteem" which may indirectly deal with bullying and victimization.

- some individual schools have introduced a focus on bullying prevention, often in response to particular situations or identified problems within the school. There are a number of conflict resolution and character development initiatives being tried in various schools and classrooms. It is believed that some of the approximately 15 elementary schools which originally were involved 5-6 years ago in piloting the "Student Mediated Conflict Resolution Program" developed by Cunningham, Cunningham and Martorelli (see below) may be continuing with this program. Some schools have organized special workshops on bullying prevention for teachers, often arranging with external consultants who have developed a particular approach in dealing with bullying, to be the resource and to lead the presentation.
- Families and Schools Together Program (FAST) has been introduced as a special demonstration project with groups of students and their families in six schools in the Hamilton's north end.
- over the past 10 years, many schools have arranged for the Child Abuse Council's play, " Touching " to be performed.
- in recent years, several schools have invited staff and volunteers from the women's shelters in the Hamilton area to meet with individual school classes to talk about the issue of family violence.

#### **Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board/HWDSB**

Superintendent Jim Wibberley has recently assumed overall responsibility for development and implementation of the Board's policies and procedures for the Safe Schools Act, working closely with Malcolm Powell, Manager of HWDSB 's Social Work Department. Superintendent Wibberly observes that bullying is a " growing problem" within the HWDSB and notes a particular concern with the incidence among young women. He advises that he intends to make the issue a particular focus beginning fall 2002, and is interested in examining various options for the prevention of bullying which the Board might adopt and/or promote.

As with the Catholic Board, HWDSB has not developed a comprehensive, system-wide approach for dealing with bullying in schools; records for tracking bullying are not being maintained, nor does the Board recommended a particular approach or set of strategies to principals and teachers. However, there are a number of initiatives either being planned or already in place which focus on the prevention of bullying. These include:

- a Safe Schools Committee has been established to assist in developing policies and procedures to meet the requirements of the Safe Schools Act. Each school has developed a School Code of Conduct and beginning 2002-03, all schools will be expected to prepare an annual "School Improvement Plan", identifying issues and strategies for improvement each year.

- as part of the long-established relationship with Hamilton Police Services, police officers have been invited regularly to meet with groups of students, individual classes and schools, to talk about violence prevention.
- in recent years and in response to specific concerns or incidents, some schools and individual teachers have implemented a variety of measures and programs to deal with bullying and violence prevention. A record of these initiatives or their effectiveness has not been completed; however, the following are examples of a few which are known to have been introduced by a number of schools:
  - Bullyproofing Your School: program and resource materials developed 1994-97 by three University of Colorado researchers
  - Bullysmart: program and resource materials developed by former B.C. educator, Ettie Catto
  - Bully B'Ware- a book, video and posters developed by three B.C. educators and published by Bully B'ware Productions.
  - Safety World's Bullying Prevention Program: a new pilot program with posters and print materials being developed by Victor Publishing for elementary and middle schools.
  - ASAP: bullying prevention program developed by the London Ontario Child and Family Court.
  - Response by Schools to Violence Prevention/R.S.V.P: a school-based violence prevention program developed by the Community Child Abuse Council of Canada.
  - Peacemakers- a mediation and conflict resolution program developed for grades 4-8 by staff of family services agency, New York State.
  - Steps to Respect: the bully prevention program developed by the Committee for Children, Seattle.
  - Student-Mediated Conflict Resolution Program" developed by Dr. Charles and Lesley Cunningham. First introduced in 1996, it is thought that approximately 40 per cent of the elementary and middle schools may be using this program at the present time.
- Community Child Abuse Council of Canada's play, "Touching" (see below) has been performed for thousands of elementary students over the past 10 years.
- staff from the Board's Social Work Department are frequently called upon to meet with individual classes and groups of students and teachers to talk about bullying and violence prevention; staff also provide counseling in individual situations.
- staff, students and parents of three elementary schools- Tapleystown, Bellaclava and King George- have been working with a team of Public Health nurses, Police Services and other community partners to develop and implement The Bullying Prevention Project(see below) as a special three-year initiative in their schools. Tapleystown School originally introduced a school-wide approach to reducing bullying in 1998. The Bullying Prevention Project builds upon this initial experience.

- Gibson School's PTA/Elementary School Council has prepared a news bulletin for parents, "Bullying: How to Stop It", which is posted on their school's web site.
- Bennetto Middle School established an Anti Violence Group in 2000. Composed of grade 6 and 7 students, and with the support of a number of community agencies, the group met weekly to discuss aggressive behaviour and violence prevention. Over a 3-month period, the group identified the forms of violence in their school and wrote a play on the topic, sharing all information with the total school community.
- in response to a series of serious bullying incidents involving Ryerson School students in June 2001, a group of concerned parents organized a community meeting attended by more than 300 people representing a number of schools in the area. Subsequently, an Anti-Bullying Committee was formed, a survey among teachers conducted, information materials developed and distributed to parents, teachers and students, and follow up educational sessions organized. Within Ryerson School, a number of other special initiatives have been introduced to encourage a more positive, supportive environment, including the introduction of a "Lunch Bunch" noontime program for girls.

### **Hamilton Police Services**

As part of the increased focus on community safety, the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Solicitor General have introduced new protocols between local school boards and police services. In our community, there is a long-standing relationship and history of co-operation between the two school boards and the Hamilton Police Service and representatives meet regularly to share information and plan joint activities.

Sgt. Nancy Goodes is the Youth Services Co-Ordinator and she notes the need for a community-wide focus on bullying as one of the important components of the Hamilton Police Service's overall strategic approach to youth crime in the City. The Youth Services Division has identified prevention as a strategy for all risk levels of youth, and this reflected in the emphasis on community partnerships and the roles of the police officers that include:

- divisional youth officers who administer extra-judicial measures and collaborate with external youth serving agencies.
- school liasion officers who provide resource support and presentations to middle and high schools
- community services officers who deliver school based personal safety programs for senior kindergarten to grade 5 students.

### **Community Child Abuse Council of Canada**

Established in Hamilton in 1976, the Community Child Abuse Council of Canada works in collaboration with local school boards, police, health professionals and numerous other community agencies to provide a range of education, advocacy and counseling services focused on the prevention and elimination of child abuse in the Hamilton area. The Council views the prevention of violence among children and youth an integral part of their mission, and therefore, has played

an active role in examining and responding to bullying. Over the years, the Council has addressed this issue in a number of ways:

- organized a public forum, "Understanding the Root Causes of Bullying" held in 2000, featuring Dr. Debra Pepler, Canadian researcher on bullying and violence among children. More than 300 professionals and members of the public attended.
- sponsored a "No Bullying Poster Contest" in 2001 in conjunction with the annual charity motorcycle ride for child abuse prevention. The theme was "Stand Up. Speak Out. Be Heard".
- commissioned and arranges for the annual touring of the play, "Touching", to local schools. Seen by over 200,000 children from Hamilton schools grades 1-6 over the past ten years, the play addresses personal safety topics such as bullying, pushy and overly friendly adults and unpredictable, uncomfortable situations in which children may find themselves. A cost-recovery fee of \$600 has to be charged to schools for each performance of the play; this has been identified as a significant barrier by schools in the past few years.
- the Council has just received a grant from an international agency to support the development and writing of a second play on conflict resolution for youth in middle schools, grades 7-8. Work on this production is expected to begin early in 2003.
- partners with four local women's shelters to provide counselling and support services for children who have witnessed abuse.
- Response by Schools to Violence Prevention (R.S.V.P.) is a holistic school-based violence prevention program developed by the Council a number of years ago. The four manuals that were designed for use in elementary, middle and high schools, provide a foundation for addressing the root causes of violence and a base for social skills teaching. Unfortunately, R.S.V.P. is now considered outdated and of limited use, given the recent introduction of the new provincial curricula .

### **Social and Public Health Services, City of Hamilton**

Over the past year, a team of Public Health nurses from the Youth and Mental Health Branch of the City's Social and Health Services Department, have developed The Bullying Prevention Project in collaboration with principals and administrators from the two local school boards and representatives from Hamilton Police Services, the Community Child Abuse Council, and Chedoke Child and Family Centre. Three local elementary schools have made a commitment to participate as pilot sites in this two year intensive initiative which will involve all the principals, teachers, parents, and students from kindergarten to grade 8.

Based on the work of leading international researchers, Dan Olweus, Debra Pepler and Ken Rigby,, the Project is implementing a comprehensive, whole-school strategy for reducing and preventing bullying. The goal of the Project is to "support schools in developing anti-bullying initiatives

specifically tailored to their needs using best practices defined in current research". The Project involves a number of components: leadership by the principals, in-service workshops for all teachers; administration of a survey to provide baseline information; establishment of a school coordinating committee; regular information provided to all parents; development of a "whole school policy"; multiple interventions at the three levels - school, classroom and individual; the introduction of complementary programs such as Second Step and Peer Mediation; and the integration of bullying prevention information into curricula.

For the duration of the pilot, additional time is being allocated by Social and Public Health Services to allow a Public Health Nurse to be assigned the equivalent of 2.5 days per week to each of the participating schools. Additionally, the Child and Family Centre has agreed to provide timely access to specialized counseling for individual students and families. One of the objectives of the Project is to refine the model so that it can be replicated and adopted in part or whole by many other schools throughout Hamilton. The pilot team recognizes that the level of resources and costs associated with the initial development and implementation of the model over the next two years will not be sustainable in the longer term.

### **News Reports and Editorials**

*"School Bullying Requires a New Assault at All Levels"* challenged the lead editorial in the Hamilton Spectator, May 9, 2002. The editorial concludes: *"What's most frustrating is how bullying continues to defy efforts to stop the problem in its tracks. Hamilton and area public and Catholic school boards, bolstered by the Safe Schools Act, have suspended more students for bullying, threatening and assaulting classmates in recent years. They have also integrated numerous anti-bullying programs into the curriculum. Still, bullying continues to rear its ugly head far too frequently. The search for better solutions must be intensified at every level."*

Over the past several months, The Hamilton Spectator has maintained a steady focus on the issue of bullying within the Hamilton community and across Canada. More than 60 news articles, three editorials and numerous letters to the editor have been devoted to the subject since January 2002. (Appendix H for selection of the local coverage).

National television news specials, call -in radio programs, regular feature coverage in newspapers across Canada, together with "No More Bullies", the Canada-wide public awareness campaign launched by the Canada Safety Council over the past year - all reflect growing concern about the issue. These efforts are drawing the attention of the public, educators and health professionals to the serious consequences for our young people, schools and the wider community if bullying is left unchecked.

The depth and frequency of media reporting is playing an important role in raising public awareness and underscoring the responsibility that the total community shares in the search for effective solutions. Beyond this, the public focus on the issue is encouraging children and youth targeted by bullying to speak out and to refuse to be victims.

Locally, there have been two remarkable instances in which young people made their very personal pain a public issue. Michael Spragg, a Grade 6 student in Ancaster, wrote a brave and moving letter to the Spectator about what it was like to be constantly bullied. Printed on the front page of the paper on May 4, 2002, the letter prompted an extraordinary response from other young people and adults who had been bullied as children. And in early June, two Burlington high school students, David and Katherine Knight, filed a suit against the Halton District School Board, some of their employees and three of David's alleged tormenters. While this is the first lawsuit of its kind in Ontario, a precedent was set this past April when a British Columbia student was awarded compensation by a school board which was held responsible for the verbal and physical bullying he experienced while attending high school.

### **PREVENTION OF BULLYING AMONG HAMILTON'S CHILDREN AND YOUTH:** **WHAT WE NEED TO DO**

*"Imagine waking up and thinking to yourself: ' Today's the day I stand up for myself and not allow myself to be bullied...then you go outside and hear the name-calling...after several years you have no more hope...the hope you once had when you felt strong has long since faded away. Imagine this happening to a sixth-grader. Well it does to me. It happens every day in school. Day in and day out. If you ever came to my school, you'd probably find me somewhere in the boys change room, crying....I've wished forever to have a friend, someone who will like me for who I am and not maybe for who I used to be...This happens every day but not just to me. So help stop bullying, and make it everyone's problem, not just yours." Michael Spragg, grade 6, Ancaster; printed in the Hamilton Spectator, May 4, 2002.*

In this final section, responding to the challenge issued by Michael Spragg and echoed in The Hamilton Spectator's May 9, 2002 editorial, we pursue the search for better solutions for the prevention of bullying in our community.

Everyone who cares about children cares about protecting them from violence. As one of the most pervasive and pernicious forms of aggression in the continuum of violence, bullying deserves the attention of our whole community. Reducing and preventing bullying in Hamilton will require a community-wide and prolonged effort, involving policymakers, administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members.

We have learned that the complex nature of bullying and victimization demands a comprehensive approach with a focus on schools, given that this is where the great majority of bullying takes place. The research has also demonstrated, without question, that the most effective means of addressing bullying is through sustained, school-wide strategies, which adhere to a set of broad principles, are grounded in evaluation and best practice, and customized to meet the particular needs of individual school communities.

This is an opportune time for a concentrated focus on the problem of bullying in Hamilton. The Boards of Education are poised to introduce new policies and protocols as required by the Province's Safe Schools legislation. Senior administrators recognize that schools are facing a growing problem with bullying. There are well established collaborative relationships among the Boards, Hamilton Police Services and a number of community agencies which have worked together in recent years on several joint initiatives focussed on the prevention of violence among children and youth. Many teachers and principals have been stepping up their search for information and effective solutions in response to some particularly difficult situations. Groups of parents have been meeting, and in some cases taking the initiative to help solve the problem of bullying in their local schools. Valuable experience has been gained by individual schools and teachers over the years in implementing a number of different bullying prevention program models. And most recently, with the support of the City's Social and Public Health Services, three local schools are piloting and evaluating The Bullying Prevention Program, a comprehensive model based on the findings and best practices recommended in current research.

Building on this base of experience and growing interest in our community, and drawing on the recommended principles and practice outlined earlier in this paper, the following steps for developing a comprehensive plan for the prevention of violence and bullying in Hamilton are put forward for consideration and discussion:

### **Comprehensive Strategy for Safe Schools**

In conjunction with the Safe Schools Policy being developed by each school board, develop a comprehensive approach for fostering and maintaining positive and safe learning environments within all schools. Elements of a comprehensive approach might include: (*reference: Thames Valley District School Board Safe Schools Policy, approved February, 2002*)

- Board policy stating leadership and strong commitment to supporting a comprehensive strategy for fostering and maintaining positive learning environments and safe schools
- School plans to ensure positive learning environments
- Programs to support safe and positive learning environments and the development of appropriate attitudes and competencies
- Support services to assist schools in maintaining safe, positive, learning environments.

### **Whole School Policy**

- Ensure that every school has developed and adopted a Code of Conduct, consistent with the board's system strategy, which incorporates the principles and key elements of a "whole school policy", including the commitment to address bullying, a definition, and processes to prevent and intervene. The school's Code of Conduct should be a balanced, thoughtfully written policy that isn't over-responsive, and communicates clearly to all members of the school community the types of behaviour expected.

### **Community Partnerships:**

- Ensure that parents and other community stakeholders are involved in the process of developing safe school environments, recognizing that the implementation of a system-

wide strategy for safe schools needs to be an ongoing and collaborative process involving all partners.

- Recognize that preventing and dealing with bullying and other forms of violent behaviour must be based on cooperative community partnerships. To that end, it is important to have students, parents/guardians, school staff, and the community stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of the system-wide strategy for safe schools at both the system and school levels.

### **School-Wide Education and Training**

- Provide opportunities for all school employees to acquire the knowledge, skills and values necessary to develop and maintain positive and safe learning environments.
- Incorporate a focus on teaching social competence- positive interpersonal skills, anger management, nonviolent communication, and conflict resolution - into all aspects of curriculum from junior kindergarten to the end of secondary school. It is understood that introducing this training early and reinforcing it throughout the school years will maximize its effects.

### **School-Wide Bullying Prevention Programs**

- Recommend and make available tools, techniques and resources for the prevention of bullying and victimization that each school community can employ to create a positive and secure learning environment.
- Given all the evidence accumulated over the past two decades, bullying prevention programs or interventions based on a "whole school" approach are highly recommended.
- There are a number of innovative approaches and program models that have been evaluated and demonstrate reliable results. A schoolwide bullying prevention program should build a climate in which children feel cared for and respected, with consistent rules and policies, and where adults model appropriate behaviour. When sorting through various options, it is important to note that those programs known to be effective share a number of key elements including the following:
  - Leadership by the principal
  - Support an involvement of all staff
  - Development of school/community partnerships
  - Based on needs assessment/school survey
  - Adoption of a Code of Conduct, in which all stakeholders have participated in developing, and which defines the types of behaviour expected and the consequences which will be applied consistently in the event of unacceptable behaviour.
  - Development and implementation of comprehensive, systemic bullying prevention plan, based on the principles outlined earlier in this paper.

- Provide training and resources for staff, parents and students.
  - Selection of specific strategies and program models from those which are known to be effective and which match the goals of the individual school. Note that it may be a combination of programs or approaches, rather than a single program, that may be most suitable for any given school.
  - Ongoing process for monitoring the results; sharing the outcomes; making adjustments.
- The most effective bullying prevention programs are ongoing throughout the school year and are integrated into curriculum, the school's discipline policies and other violence prevention efforts at school.
  - It will take considerable time to bring about both attitudinal and behavioural changes among staff, students, and parents in the school community. A sustained and conscious effort is required to change the overall climate of a school. In order to accomplish this, the entire school community must be engaged, committed and involved.

### **Risk Identification, Counseling and Support for Students**

Students bring their emotional needs to school with them. While schools are making great efforts to provide the necessary counseling services, they have been limited particularly by the severe resource constraints of recent years. Expansion of these services is necessary to identify troubled students and assist them before their problems become severe. The adoption of a comprehensive strategy for violence and bullying prevention will involve the following supports for individual students and their families:

- Early and ongoing identification of students at risk of violence and the establishment of appropriate forms of prevention and intervention will allow child, family and school an opportunity to prevent violence at its earliest stage. The literature review conducted for this paper identified a number of intervention strategies involving families, schools and community partners, which have proven to be effective over time in reducing the risk of violent and aggressive behaviour.
- Social work and counselling with families of students at risk helps to create the supports for school success that are possibly lacking, stimulates effective parenting and discipline, and provides referral to other community resources that can assist the family.
- Counsellors and psychologists who coordinate with parents, teachers, administrators, police, and juvenile justice officials and other community organizations, build bridges of support and communication that address the comprehensive needs of individual students, whether perpetrators or victims.

## CONCLUSIONS

Bullying can be found in every school and in every community in countries around the world. It is all too often the way young people interact in our society. When bullying is ignored or downplayed, children will suffer ongoing torment and harassment. It can cause lifelong damage to the victims and the bullies. A community's failure to deal with bullying in schools, in particular, endangers the safety of all students and teachers by allowing a hostile environment to interfere with learning.

Stopping bullying is everyone's responsibility. Creating a positive and peaceful environment that protects children and youth from bullying is a long process requiring the commitment and involvement of educators, policymakers, police, parents, community organizations, and students. Taking bullying behaviour seriously is an important first step in working toward safe schools and communities.

The problems of bullying and victimization are extremely complex. Consequently, interventions for these problems are also complex and should extend to all of those involved: bullies, victims, peers, school staff, parents and the wider community. There is clear, unambiguous evidence that community action can dramatically reduce the incidence of bullying. Through training, collaboration, and carefully designed programs, we can - and we must - find solutions. We must heed the cries for help from our children and young. Working together, we can stop bullying in Hamilton.