

# Anti-Bullying Program Gains National, International Attention

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# “Courage to Care” in 26 NH School Districts in First Year

A revolutionary program created by UNH researchers to combat bullying in middle schools is gaining ground across New Hampshire and New England and may soon be drawing attention on the other side of the world.

Courage to Care, developed by UNH Cooperative Extension and launched in 2011, has already been adopted by 26 New Hampshire school districts and others scattered throughout New England and the Midwest. In January, South Korea’s Educational Broadcast System (EBS) is planning to come to New Hampshire to produce a video documentary about Courage to Care.

“The experience of bullying is really a worldwide issue, and the South Korean network is really interested to learn about how we’re dealing with it over here,” says Extension Associate Professor Malcolm Smith, co-director of the project.

The nine-lesson program is based on research showing that empathy and caring for others can be taught, and are effective at reducing bullying and general meanness. It also promotes teaching methods designed to engage middle schoolers in discussing respect, kindness, courage, personal power and good cyberspace citizenship. The curriculum includes “video jolts,” showing young actors from New Hampshire facing challenging situations with their peers; hands-on activities, and “Courage Books” that offer goals, inspirational quotes and practice assignments.

Middle school teachers are trained to lead the program, which they bring back to their schools, in three-day workshops at The Browne Center at UNH. The program recently announced a new leadership academy for educators, after-school professionals, and youth leaders, on Feb. 13, 14 and 15 at The Brown Center.

“In 30 years of research on youth violence and peer meanness, this is the most promising program I have ever been involved with,” Smith said. “We are definitely on the road to tackling the bullying epidemic. Our next challenge will be to develop similar programs for pre-schoolers and college students. We believe we are really on to something here.”

In August, the program’s first year success was confirmed by a survey of more than 300 middle schoolers in New Hampshire. The results, comparing students who took the nine-week course with those who did not, showed that those who completed the training were significantly less likely to bully, and more likely to show kindness and empathy and understanding of group dynamics, cliques and stereotypes.

The Courage to Care program was developed by Smith, Rick Alleva and Thom Linehan of UNH Cooperative Extension along with Jeff Frigon of the UNH Browne Center for Innovative Learning, and Patrick Shannon of the Department of Social Work.

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