

Stop the bullying

Student's experience triggers anti-bullying strategy

BY CAROLYN RITTER
LIFESTYLE EDITOR

Jackie Baldwin of St. Germain has seen the detrimental effects bullying in school and on the school bus had on her son, a recent graduate of Northland Pines High School.

She also has seen how anti-bullying strategies implemented by school district staff significantly improved the situation for her son.

While still a young child, her son had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) which affected his interactions with others.

"My son had many challenges over the years caused by his ADHD. From a very early age, he was hyperactive, irritable and did not interact well with other children. His preschool staff said that he talked incessantly and did not want to be part of the group," said Baldwin.

During first grade, her son started in a special education program in Northland Pines School District which required him to attend another district school as the local grade school did not offer a program for him.

His peer relations and grades were poor due to his inability to concentrate, stay on task and complete assignments.

"This led to a very low self-esteem and at times, he just wanted to be dead. We found a wonderful child psychiatrist and fine-tuned his medications.



Jackie Baldwin worked with staff at Northland Pines High School to implement an anti-bullying program after her son's detrimental experiences as a bullying victim. --Staff Photo By CAROLYN RITTER

& Early Childhood Mental Health Association, bullying involves harassment and violence and should not be considered just a part of growing up.

Ahlers reported that bullying interferes with learning in school and children feel less safe when there are high levels of bullying.

When Baldwin's son began middle school, he was mainstreamed into regular classes with only a support period consisting of social skills and guided study in special education.

bus in the morning or did not want to go to school because of what happened on the way home. It was preventing him from being successful in school," said Baldwin.

As he moved to high school, the bullying continued and it made his freshman year very difficult, which was reflected in his grades which ranged from Bs to Ds.

"There were many incidents of bullying during the year, most of which he reported to the staff. He felt that the perpetrators

successfully completed my freshman year as being the most-picked-on kid in school."

Those words galvanized her to action and she e-mailed Linda Kunelius, then district administrator, as well as the school psychologist, principal and all others who had contact with her son.

"I told them something had to change and if they needed help with anti-bullying material, I would be glad to assist them," said Baldwin who is a senior family advocate for Wisconsin Family Ties, a nonprofit peer support agency for families of children with disabilities.

"I also requested that the district administrator stop at our home before the start of the next year to listen to my son's description of the things that happened to him."

Kunelius did stop to see them and stressed that every time there was an incident, he needed to tell an adult or the school could not help him.

Kunelius also obtained videos and books about bullying for the school staff and had a meeting with the principal and special education instructor.

"Two weeks into his sophomore year, some students were teasing him and he went right to his special education teacher. She had the school liaison police officer involved and was incredibly firm with the students, outlining severe consequences," said Baldwin.

Following that incident the

which helped immensely. However, by that time, he was 'marked' by his classmates and either not chosen to be on teams or picked on and harassed," Baldwin explained.

According to Therese Ahlers, director of the Wisconsin Infant

He encountered problems with bullying not only in school, but also on the bus. Since seventh grade, he was unable to ride the school bus because of harassment.

"He either had a bad day because of what happened on the

were not being punished," shared Baldwin, who also considered hospitalization for him after hearing remarks about killing himself.

When Baldwin picked him up from school the last day of his freshman year he said "I suc-

Following that incident, the harassment seemed to stop. He gradually began to feel better about going to school and his grades improved. His final sophomore report card reflected As in every subject, including al-

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gebra which he barely passed his freshman year.

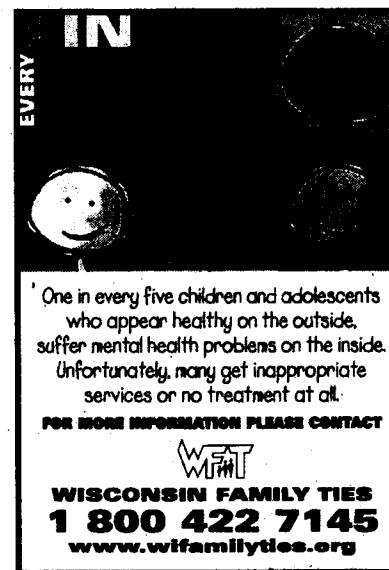
Throughout the following years, Baldwin kept in very close contact with school personnel monitoring changes in behavior, homework completion and class participation.

Responses from his teachers reflected he was a student who was doing well, a pleasure to have in class and was not a discipline problem. He continued to succeed in high school, and is now attending college with scholarships.

In part because of Baldwin's actions, Northland Pines School District began an anti-bullying program which included staff training to raise awareness and procedures for handling incidents.

"I firmly believe that my son's success is mostly due to the elimination of bullying," said Baldwin. "His self-esteem is much improved and he is confident and determined to do the best he can. All children deserve this success. It takes hard work from school personnel and a change in attitude. It is not okay to humiliate, make fun of or be cruel to others in any way, shape or form."

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration Center for Mental Health Services (SAMHSA) has many free publi-



EVERY IN

One in every five children and adolescents who appear healthy on the outside, suffer mental health problems on the inside. Unfortunately, many get inappropriate services or no treatment at all.

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cations on children's mental health, including "Make Time to Listen, Take Time to Talk — About Bullying."

Baldwin now serves as chairwoman of the Children & Youth Mental Health Committee and as a member of the Governor's Council on Mental Health, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill and Wisconsin Council on Children & Families.

For more information about anti-bullying strategies, contact Baldwin at (715) 542-3535, jackiebaldwin@verizon.net or write to her at P.O. Box 268, St. Germain, WI 54558.

Next week an article will highlight what area schools are doing to prevent incidences of bullying.