

Anti-Bullying Symposium Resonates with Local Educators

By Jodi Werner Greenwald

On January 15 and 16, the 2nd annual Joined In Education program once again featured nationally recognized speakers, an evening of receptions, and a day-long symposium, and was sponsored by the Charlotte Jewish Day School, the Charlotte Jewish Preschool, and the Jewish Preschool on Sardis.

Lee Hirsch, director of the stirring documentary *Bully* and creator of the national anti-bullying movements "The Bully Project" and "1 Million Kids" addressed a riveted crowd of parents, students, and educators on January 15 at the Knight Theatre. CMS Superintendent Heath Morrison and Anne Tompkins, the U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina, made heartfelt introductions.

The following morning, 225 educators, principals, non-profit workers, government agency representatives, parents, and more – nearly double the participants as last year – attended a day-long symposium on bullying prevention and response. The diverse crowd included representatives from public, private, and parochial schools, as well as from JIE's sponsoring schools and organizations.

"This is where we really rolled up our sleeves and some of the heavy lifting got started," said JIE Coordinator Gale Osborne.

Powerhouse educator and consultant Barbara Coloroso head-



Film creator Lee Hirsch.

lined the day. She spoke (quickly!) for a combined four hours, giving two keynote addresses – "Creating an Environment of Caring at Home and at School" and "Change in the Classroom" – and leading two workshops, "When is Bullying Really Bullying, or is This Just Normal Kid Behavior?" and "The Preschool Dilemma – at Home and at School."

Sharon Walker, the Career Development Coordinator at Providence High School, attended the symposium and said: "Barbara Coloroso was just a fabulous speaker. She has a somewhat different approach to the issue of bully prevention that I have not heard in the same way before. I think I could have listened to her all day."

Jonathan Mullen, a 3rd Grade Teacher at Myers Park Traditional, agrees: "She knows her stuff, and it was very clear, very practical, applicable, and entertaining. The time just flew."

Even though the symposium

was a full day long – it went from 9:30 AM to 6 PM - many educators noted on an audience survey that they wished they could have had additional time to learn more.

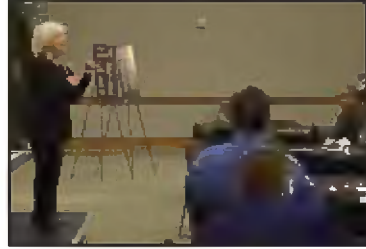
The schedule also included Caltha Crowe discussing bully-proofing the classroom, Michelle Icard speaking on middle school issues, Dr. Sean Knuth addressing cyber-bullying, and Bassie Shemtov tackling high school topics.

"I was very impressed with the entire program," said Michael Rinehart, a science teacher and the 7th Grade Coordinator at Charlotte Country Day School. "This is the second [JIE] conference I have attended, and I always come away impressed with their commitment to educating teachers and parents. The organizers and volunteers also did a fabulous job of making the participants feel welcome and comfortable throughout the day."

Even lunch was productive. Participants could choose to sit at tables earmarked for discussion with a moderator on a bullying topic. Walker, for example, dis-



Lively discussions took places over lunch.



Speaker Barbara Coloroso.

cussed "Asperger's, Geeks, and Outsiders – How to Bring Them In" with Dr. Frank Gaskill.

Walker is the Anti-Bullying staff person for Providence High School and the faculty advisor for the Gay Straight Alliance, which she says initiates many of the Bully Prevention efforts. Walker said Providence High School paid for her to attend the JIE symposium because, "We are always looking for new ideas."

With such proactive and open-minded professionals like Walker, Mullen, and Rinehart in attendance at JIE this year, there's real potential for incidents of bullying in Charlotte to decrease and for those who do find themselves being bullied to more easily find allies to turn to.

Mullen shares one anecdote: A boy in his class had lately begun shutting down. His grades were slipping, and he was acting out of character. After JIE, Mullen took the boy for a walk during recess and found out that he was being bullied.

"Having had the workshop,

I felt I had tools I wouldn't have had," Mullen says. "I told him, 'I'm sorry that happened to you. I can imagine how horrible that feels. I'm here for you. We're going to confront the bully together. It might get a little worse before it gets better, but it will get better.'"

Mullen says he saw immediate results in the child, because the child no longer felt isolated. He now had an ally.

Osborne says as many as 55,000 students could be impacted by this year's JIE program, if you take into account the participants' far-reaching professional roles.

This year's Joined In Education program was a starting point for bullying discussions and activism here in Charlotte. Organizers have already begun discussing future screenings of the film *Bully* for teens and adults.

For handouts from the symposium, additional resources and a full list of JIE sponsors, see: www.joinedineducation.org. ☆

Jodi Werner Greenwald is PTO President at the Charlotte Jewish Preschool.



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