

# Reformed street hustlers tell cautionary tales for students at alternative school

BY LAYLA GARMS  
THE CHRONICLE

Southside Rides' Chris Washington, Charles Goldsmith and Rahaeim Johnson shared the pitfalls of a life on the streets with a captive audience Oct. 12 at Main Street Academy.

Main Street (formerly Griffith Academy), is an alternative school for middle and high school students who have been suspended or expelled from their home schools because of disciplinary issues. The men are all ex-offenders who have chosen a positive path in life with the help of Southside, which fuses auto body repair training and mentoring for men and women in need of a second chance.

"All this stuff y'all (have) been through, I did it a long time ago, but when you get behind those bars, there's always somebody bigger and tougher than you," said David Moore, who spent years in prison on drug charges before founding Southside Rides. "We touch the streets like that, on a positive (level). That's how we do it."



Edwards

Moore and his "soldiers" as he refers to them, visited the school to speak out against bullying.

"I used to be in y'all's shoes when I was your age," Washington told the group. "I used to be bullied, and I used to

be bully."

Washington said being bullied by his older sister and other family members created a rage within him that contributed to his descent down the wrong path, but the School of Hard Knocks taught him that bullying can lead to death.

"I went to prison; that's a whole different ballgame. I've seen bullies get killed," he told the students. "Seeing somebody get killed just by words changed my whole outlook on life."

Washington spoke about a student who attended high school with him who committed suicide because she was being bullied. He urged the youth not to get involved with bullying on any level.

"Y'all know what it is to be a bully," he said. "In life, it's always consequences, it don't matter whether it's good or bad. I want y'all to think about that today, forever. Think about your choices and thoughts. Respect and common courtesy will get you a long way."

Goldsmith told the students that he too had been bullied by an older sibling, which caused him to lash out at others in anger. He said bullying hurts both the victim and the aggressor.

"That stuff (that happened) coming up brought a lot of harm on me," he confessed. "I've done assaulted people and put them in the hospital, and I got arrested for it. I had to pay for that."

Goldsmith credits Southside with helping him to calm



Photos by Layla Garms

Charles Goldsmith, Rahaeim Johnson and Chris Smith share their experiences.

down and focus on his career and the positive aspects of his life, but he said it was a long time coming. He implored the students not to make the same mistakes he did.

"Just think about the things that you do before you do them, because there are consequences," he said. "I know. I've been there and I wish I'd had somebody to tell me these types of things. If I'd had somebody to talk to me and tell me what I'm telling y'all now, I wouldn't have done half the stuff I've done."

Johnson knows firsthand what it's like to be in the Main Street students' shoes. Four years ago, he landed there himself, after being kicked out of his home school for fighting. Johnson, now a junior at the Winston-Salem Street School, told his peers that there's nothing cool about being a bully.

"Bullying, it don't get you nowhere," he said. "It don't get you educated. It don't get you no girl. It don't get you nowhere."

The three men's talk served as the culmination of a week of activities that Teacher's Assistant Lucretia Edwards staged in commemoration of National Anti-Bullying Month, observed each October.

"Last year, we just commemorated it by wearing orange to bring awareness, and we did an anti-bullying walk," explained Spencer Hardy, who has served as Main Street's principal since it took up residence at the old Carter Vocational site on South Main Street two years ago. "This year, we wanted to do a little bit more, bring our students in a bit more."

The students took time out each day during their TRP (Totally Responsible Person) period, which is generally dedicated to personal growth and development, to watch

"Cyber Bully" a movie about Internet bullying, and talk about what they witnessed in the film, and in real life, explained Edwards, who coordinated the program.

"The kids was very excited. They was very into it," Edwards said of the film. "I ask them the question, 'What would you have done differently?'"

Edwards said she was searching for a way to address bullying on a deeper level this month, and felt that cyber bullying was an issue that the students could relate to. She said she was hopeful that the experience would illustrate how serious bullying can be, even if it never escalates to the point of physical violence.

"People say, 'Sticks and stones will break my bones but words can never hurt me.' Words do hurt," she remarked. "...These kids, they think that being hard is what's in, but it's not about being hard. It's about being safe and feeling safe."

Bullying is a concern at any school, but Hardy said the students at Main Street often have had more experience with the issue than those at traditional schools.

"We're an alternative school, so our students can sometimes be on both sides of that ledger," he remarked. "Hopefully, by having these discussions, we'll change behaviors and change outlooks."

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