A public library partnership to prevent bullying

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Does the public library have a role to play in preventing bullying in its community?

Bullying, bully prevention, schoolyard violence, and violent youth are all community concerns. As school boards, teachers, parents and police services look for new ways to prevent bullying and childhood violence there are, perhaps, few people looking to the public library to provide part of the solution.

In Ottawa, the public library has partnered with a coalition of community agencies to make available a prevention resource aimed at families and care providers of preschool aged children; research strongly suggests that efforts to prevent bullying should begin in early childhood when children normally learn to control aggression. The coalition defines bullying as “any negative actions performed repeatedly by one or more people with the intention of hurting someone else and resulting in an imbalance of power”.

The Ottawa Preschool Bullying Prevention Coalition (OPBP) formed in 2006 and has been working with a broad range of community partners to increase awareness, resources and training opportunities throughout the City of Ottawa. The goal of the Coalition is to find ways to prevent bullying behaviour by informing caregivers and parents about enhancing pro-social skill development and teaching age-appropriate social and emotional skills in the preschool years.

The working group is comprised of representatives from the following child services agencies: City of Ottawa – Public Health – Early Years Health Program, City of Ottawa – Children Services Division, Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre, Ontario Early Years Ottawa-Vanier, Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, Success By 6 Ottawa, Ottawa Public Library, Charlemagne Child Care Services and Katimavik Preschool Resource Centre.

The original focus of the group was to provide professional training to child care workers on the pro-social and emotional development of preschoolers. The Coalition began looking for ways to also engage parents in the community in learning about the benefits of starting early to prevent bullying. The partnership with the Ottawa Public Library resulted in the creation of ten information and activity kits, available to parents and their children through any public library branch. The kit also includes a list of books related to the topic of bullying prevention.
The “Sharing and Caring” kit gives parents and home care providers a tool to begin encouraging pre-schoolers to behave in socially appropriate ways and thereby reduce the chances of children being bullied or becoming bullies. *Sharing and Caring – A Preschool Approach to Bullying Prevention Library Kit* contains picture books, puppets, and an activity guide filled with ideas to help children learn how to express their feelings and how to understand the feelings of others. Coalition members wrote the guide with activities based on the picture books and puppets to demonstrate to parents how they can teach their children about being a good friend and the positive social skills that help prevent bullying behaviours.

The kits were developed to teach parents prevention techniques in fun, informative, age-appropriate ways. The manual outlines activities and tips to accompany the picture books and puppets contained in the kits. There are questions to stimulate discussion about the books, activity and colouring pages themed to each book as well as tips on storytelling and having fun with the puppets. For instance, with the book *Rainbow Fish* children are asked to use the fish puppet to practice using “kind words” like “Are you ok?” and “I’m sorry I hurt your feelings”. With the book *Chrysanthemum* children are encouraged to draw or cut out pictures of things they like about themselves and paste them on a picture of a flower. To help children learn how others are feeling, the kits include a variety of “emotion cards” and the manual outlines ways to use the emotion cards with young children.

The kits were immediately popular with parents. They have also been borrowed by childcare centres, home childcare providers and elementary teachers. The borrowers find the combination of quality picture books, puppets and activities an excellent way to teach and promote pro-social skills. The Coalition had funding to create ten kits (7 in English and 3 in French) and hopes to find further funding for more kits in the future.

The Coalition and the library have also posted the activity guide on their websites:

- [http://www.bibliottawalibrary.ca/kids/index_e.html](http://www.bibliottawalibrary.ca/kids/index_e.html)
- [http://www.ottawakids.ca/site/preschoolbullying](http://www.ottawakids.ca/site/preschoolbullying)

Many borrowers have gone on to print the manual and create their own kits for use at home and in their centres.

This unique partnership has capitalized on the strengths of many organizations and individuals to create the kits and publicize the importance of the early prevention of bullying. It has also allowed the public library to become a strong community partner in the battle to stem bullying.
Further Resources

Caring and Sharing: a preschool approach to bullying prevention  Ottawa: Ottawa Preschool Bullying Prevention Coalition, 2007

Henke, Kevin  Chrysanthemum  NY; Greenwillow, 1991

Pfister, Marcus  The rainbow fish  NY: North-South Books, 1992