

Bullying Hurts

By Ariel Overstreet

On Saturdays “Starvin’ Marvin” Nash takes on bulls in the arena at the Cowtown Rodeo in Woodstown, New Jersey, during the week he takes on bullying in schools and communities all across America.

Nash, a 50-something-year-old rodeo clown, from Cheyenne, Wyo., knows that while bulls have caused him pain and injuries in the arena, bullies do more damage to kids in playgrounds and hallways everyday.

Nash first learned that he had a unique opportunity to hold kids’ attention in a classroom setting when he attended a career day at his kids’ Texas elementary school nearly 20 years ago.

He went dressed in his colorful rodeo clown outfit and one of the teachers noticed that Nash was able to capture the kids’ attention better than anybody. She encouraged him to work with kids—advice Nash took. He tried a series of anti-drug programs that didn’t really take hold. Then he met a schoolteacher from Cherry Hill, New Jersey and told her about his past programs and ideas. She said that the biggest problem that needed to be addressed was bullying.

Nash, with the help of his wife Darlene, created “Bullying Hurts,” a program that instructs high school students in groups such as Future Farmers of America or Student Council how to teach elementary students about identifying and dealing with bullying behavior.

Nash sees a direct connection between the Western and rodeo culture he grew up in and his program.

“Mentoring and looking up to older kids are true Western values,” he said. “The one-room school house kind of approach to education or resolving problems.”

Interestingly, Bullying Hurts has taken hold all across the country, even in places where ranching and rodeo aren’t common.

One of Nash’s and the Bullying Hurts program’s biggest supporters is Sheriff Carolyn “Bunny” Welsh of Chester County, Pennsylvania. She’s the only woman sheriff in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania and one of only 33 female sheriffs in the nation. Rodeo is not something she was familiar with before meeting Nash.



Marvin Nash at the Cowtown Rodeo in New Jersey (photo by Jim Overstreet)

Sheriff Welsh learned about Bullying Hurts from a friend who regularly attended the Cowtown Rodeo and had talked to Nash about the program.

“At the Chester County Sheriff’s Office we do a lot of community outreach,” Sheriff Welsh said. “I thought Bullying Hurts was so unique and something that was really needed. I just very enthusiastically said that we would like to pilot it in some of our schools.”

Sheriff Welsh invited the local police department to join in the program as well. The deputies and officers, in uniform, were present for all of the training and made themselves available to answer any questions.

More than just a community outreach program, the law enforcement officers’ involvement in Bullying Hurts had the added benefit of boosting public relations.

“Sheriff Welsh had a lot of foresight in seeing the power of using the rodeo clown to overcome the sometimes negative reputation of law enforcement,” Nash said. “She has very successfully used this program as a positive image builder.”

Sheriff Welsh looks at it as simply building another alliance.



Sheriff Carolyn "Bunny" Welsh, Chester County, Pennsylvania (Photo courtesy of Chester County Sheriff's Office)

"When those kids see someone in uniform, they need to know that person is friendly, approachable, and someone they can trust," she said. "When the deputies are in the schools and they are walking around, talking with the kids—they even stay and have lunch with the kids sometimes—it gives them an interaction with the children that they wouldn't otherwise have."

The deputies discovered that the more they hung around, the more the high school kids began to open up to them. The law enforcement officers soon became a third tier of mentorship in the program. The officers mentored the high school kids and the high school kids, in turn, mentored the elementary kids.

The mentoring foundation is the most unique aspect of the program to Sheriff Welsh.

"It's such a win/win," she said. "The high school kids mentor the young kids, and the young kids really look up to the older kids. It gives the older kids a sense of pride in helping these younger children."

Sheriff Welsh especially likes that Bullying Hurts covers the three areas of bullying.

"It's not just the bully to address and the victim, but the third and most important, which is often the majority of kids—the bystander," she said. "That child doesn't know what to do. He or she might think in their minds, 'Gee, I'm glad I'm not being bullied,' but they don't want to stand by and they don't know what to do. This program addresses all three groups and helps them to address the issue."

Bullying Hurts also fits right in with Sheriff Welsh's belief that bullying prevention is crime prevention.

"I think bullying prevention can address the anger issues, the unresolved aggression and hostility, and in the long run you are either preventing a crime of aggression or crimes of victimization," Sheriff Welsh said. "I think if you address the aggressive behavior when they are younger, absolutely, preventing bullying is preventing crime."

Bullying Hurts has worked with Sheriff's and local police departments in Texas, Arizona, Wyoming and Pennsylvania. Nash would like to get more Sheriff's Offices across the United States involved with the program.

"It's different than a lot of the programs that Sheriff's and law enforcement officers have been involved with, where they are the implementers of the program," Nash said. "In this case they help the high school kids implement the program. It's a teaching the teacher kind of thing. It comes from an entirely different direction."

Sheriff Welsh would recommend the program to any other Sheriff's office or police department in the country.

"I think it is wonderful community outreach," she said. "I think it is a wonderful way to address a lot of the issues locally, to reach out to the youth. It's just a really unique and very worthwhile program."

For more information: Bullying Hurts, P.O. Box 2109, Cheyenne, WY 82003, (307) 254-0603, www.bullyinghurts.com, bullyinghurts@aol.com.

