

Bullying expert speaks at PES

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PETERBOROUGH — A nationally-recognized counselor and educator spoke to Peterborough parents and teachers about bullying at Peterborough Elementary School Friday night.

Kim Payne of Hadley, Mass., works with communities around the country on a social inclusion approach to bullying. He is the author of *The Social Inclusion Approach, Overcoming Bullying and Teasing*.

“Bullying is something that has been going on for years, and years and years,” said PES Assistant Principal Meredith Sumner, adding the topic has gained momentum in the last five to 10 years because communities have been willing to talk about it.

Sumner said PES follows a district policy on bullying that was adopted about five years ago and that Payne’s talk on Friday just reaffirmed what the school is already doing. “It was just a good opportunity for people to get additional information,” she said.

Primarily organized by Peterborough parent Pam McNally, the roughly two hour workshop focused on social inclusion and aimed to provide parents and community members the tools they need to deal with bullying at home and in the classroom.

Payne defines social inclusion as, “Expressing disapproval while not seeking to give punishment and apportion blame but rather dealing with the matter openly, not judgmentally but firmly.”

He says social inclusion creates an open environment where kids can talk without fear of retribution and where bullies lose prominence.

The workshop discussed teasing and the difference between acceptable teasing and unacceptable teasing and Payne talked to parents and teachers about how to make teasing guidelines children understand.

Payne looked at trauma and how it affects students’ ability to learn.

He talked about problem-solving meetings and how to get students involved in stopping bullying. The workshop stressed a community approach to bullying, bringing together teachers, parents and students.

He told the Ledger, the thrust of his talk was, “We absolutely can be active in helping children work with conflict.” He said conflict is important in a child’s life as long as it doesn’t become a habit.

Payne said he thought the workshop was well-received. “There was a lot of ... active listening,” he said.

McNally wanted to bring Payne to Peterborough after she heard him speak at a private school in Wilton. She said bullying became a personal campaign for her after her son started kindergarten last year.

She took her idea to Sumner who got approval from the School Board.

While the district agreed to host Payne, it couldn’t commit to fund the program. That’s when McNally started going around to local businesses to drum up money and support.

Between Payne’s fee, a hotel room and advertising and printing costs, the seminar cost about \$800. In two weeks, McNally got donations from Peterborough Kiwanis Club, Hobbs Jewelers, European Esthetics, James Thomas salon, Copies ‘n’ More, Toadstool Bookshops and Belletete’s hardware store. Twelve Pine donated refreshments.

McNally said she didn’t want to bring Payne to PES because she thinks Peterborough has a big problem with bullies, but because by taking proactive measures, Peterborough can be part of the solution. “You don’t wait until you have a heart attack and then change your life,” she said, adding that every child is affected, whether the child is a bully or a victim.

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