

CHILD ABUSE: How can we encourage kids who are being abused to seek help?

School: James Logan Elementary School

Grades: 3, 4 and 5

Curriculum Connections: Speaking & Listening, Writing, Reading, Using Technology & Media, Health, Social Studies

Child abuse is a challenging topic. Even for adults. So it's not surprising to hear a 4th grader say it's hard to talk about it. But that's what Jasmine William's students at the Logan School did.

And they did more than just talk about it. The class expanded their knowledge by reading books and doing on-line research. Representatives from the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Child Abuse Prevention Effort (CAPE), and Lutheran Children & Family Service helped the students understand various aspects of the problem, including the range of causes and effects, as well as what's being done to address the problem. There were plenty of surprises along the way.

"My mom was surprised we were doing this --- but in a good way," said A-jah-lai.

"I taught her some of the stuff we learned," she adds, with a pleased, sweet smile. Isis was surprised to discover it sometimes seems nobody does anything to help abused children. But the students in Room 305 wanted to do their part to change that.

They worked with a writer/producer from Sprout TV to create a public service announcement to publicize the DHS hotline number for help with instances of child abuse. And they wrote and produced a play to share all they learned about the problem and the resources available in their community. They performed their play both at Logan and for students at a neighboring elementary school.

Brittany laid out their expectations: "We want the play to be good. We want people to show up. We want people to bring new books that we'll give to children [with help from Lutheran Children & Family Service]. And we want kids to tell someone if they're being abused."

The topic of child abuse hit close to home for the students. Several had a personal connection to the problem; others knew children who did.

"One of the most powerful activities the students did as part of their project," said Jasmine, "was to wear yellow wristbands imprinted with the message: 'Prevent Child Abuse.' By wearing them the students invited others to ask about their project, giving them the opportunity to express their knowledge and passion about this serious problem in their own words."

A representative from the Department of Human Services (DHS), unable to attend the play, learned about the work the students had done and was so impressed that she organized a press conference to draw local attention to their efforts.

But perhaps the most chilling outcome was the effect the PSA and play had on at least one student from a neighboring elementary school, who approached her teacher after the performance and revealed her history of abuse.

To view the PSA, click here:

http://web.me.com/needindeed/Site/Jasmine_Williams_Class_Public_Service_Announcement.html