

'Bullyproof' Provides Alternatives to Violence

BY JEANNIE JOHNSON
Journal Staff Writer

Long-term residents in Santa Fe's Youth Development Program freely admit lousy choices landed them behind bars.

"Monique" is a case in point. The 19-year-old mother of two said she made a string of lousy choices starting with drug dealing as a sixth-grader.

"This eighth-grader came up to me and asked me if I wanted to sell (drugs) to the elementary kids," she said. "I said, 'Sure.' He gave me a quarter-pound of pot and told me to give him the money at the end of the week. It wasn't that hard to sell it 'cuz all the kids knew me."

Drug selling soon became small-time — Monique dropped her drug trade and took up gun dealing and doing drugs.

Gun sales sometimes brought in between \$1,000 and \$2,000 a day. They also brought drive-by shootings that nearly killed her and her child. They brought a murder committed by an "associate" during a gun deal.

The irony of the entire situation was no one would have guessed Monique dealt in the deadly world of illegal gun sales.

"I had two personalities," she said. "I played basketball in high school. Some college in Tennessee wanted me to go there on a full scholarship. I chose to sell drugs and guns over that 'cuz I was making a lot of money."

Now that she's been sentenced to the Youth Development Program, Monique said she's trying to learn how to make better decisions.

She's getting help from Santa Fe's Future WAVE program. Future WAVE — Working for Alternatives to Violence through Entertainment — brought its "Bullyproof" program to the Youth Development Program in November to teach the residents new ways of thinking through storytelling, song, theater and art.

Bob Kanegis and Liz Mangual spend one day a week at the detention center sharing stories and encouraging the residents to talk about their stories of violence and different ways to approach violent situations. They use the 10 shields of the Bullyproof program and the animals whose images are on these shields.

Each shield is based on an animal character whose name corresponds with a letter in "Bullyproof." For

He started drinking and doing drugs as well as committing crimes to pay for his addiction. The drinking and drugs kept him from thinking about the pain of his life at home.

"I had many attempts at suicide, but God must have had a reason to keep me alive," he said.

Now, with the help of Kanegis and Mangual, Toby is returning to stories to get his life back on track.



TEACHING YOUTH TO MAKE BETTER CHOICES:
Left, Bob Kanegis and Liz Mangual of Future WAVE brought the "Bullyproof" program to the Santa Fe Youth Development program. The program focuses on alternatives to violence.

example, the character Brave Bust-out Bear teaches residents to be brave enough to bust out from the fighting trap — how to find alternatives to dealing with conflict besides swinging fists.

For "J.C.," a 20-year-old from El Paso, it has taken a stay in the Santa Fe Youth Development Program to bust out of the fighting trap. He said he was mad at the world and caught up in a web of gangs, drugs, alcohol and violence.

"I was in this gang, and there was always this pack of people wanting to fight another pack of people," J.C. said. "It's all about proving who's tougher. During my past couple weeks here, I've been looking back and seeing how pointless the fighting is. People die. People get hurt. It goes on and on and never stops."

Understanding Unicorn, another Bullyproof character, helps them understand what makes a bully tick.

"Red Cloud," a 20-year-old from Arizona, said he understands how people can be pushed into being bullies.

"I wasn't really a bully," he said. "I was more the class clown. I talked a lot, and my mouth got me in trouble. If I was pushed, I could be violent, but the first thing I want is to be friends with everyone. But if

people want to be violent with me, I can go to that level also."

Picturing Porpoise asks the residents to picture their own happy ending. Nineteen-year-old "C" said he hopes his life has a happier ending than in the past nine years.

His mother and father were dead by the time he was 10. His grandmother raised him, but he spent all his time out "doing his own thing." That led to drugs, violence and time in the detention center.

"Bob (Kanegis) told us a story recently about how life is a journey," he said. "It made a lot of sense as far as how we got through life to get to our destination. I can see how it relates to other people, too. People are going through their own problems, and there are other people going through the same struggles as I am."

"D" added that "The stories they're telling make me look into myself and who I am. They show me how to make decisions better. I think when I'm faced with a situation again, I'll think back to the stories they told and will handle it better."

"Toby" was raised on the stories of the Navajo people, but they couldn't stop him from fitting the skids when his family started falling apart. His brother died in a car accident. His parents divorced.

"I've been working on my vocabulary and writing short stories," he said. "That's what I like to work on. Stories give more meaning to life situations."

As for Monique, she's taking what she's learning with the help of the Bullyproof program to create a new life for herself and her two daughters. She wants to pursue a career in the high-tech industry and to put her life of guns and violence behind her forever.

"They're teaching me how to con-

trol my anger," she said. "They're teaching me deterrents to criminal thinking. Before I start thinking of doing a crime, I think about the consequence. I never did that before. I just wanted the money, and I didn't think of the consequences."

"I don't want my girls to turn out like me. I ran with some crazy people. I've seen too much. I should have been out buying ice cream cones rather than hanging out with mafia dudes. The hardest thing is going to be getting reintegrated into society, but I think this program will help me do it."