

Courage is Change

Superior residents hope to go national with non-profit

By Mollie Foster

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She wanted to breakaway from the relationship, but he wouldn't have it. He was angry, outraged and he wouldn't let her leave his sight. He kidnapped her, dragging her out of his car and took her to his home and begged her not to break-up. He assaulted her and broke her rib, all without yelling, screaming, but simply saying, "I love you."

It has been a year since Superior resident Liz Oster experienced this abuse from her ex-boyfriend. It was not the first time the man assaulted his partner in a relationship, a statistic that Oster said is staggeringly higher than most would think.

Oster wants to change the statistic.

With the help of her friend, Brandy Mello, Oster envisioned a non-profit called Courage is Change, to help youth nationwide understand healthy relationships.

Oster credits her domestic violence experience as an eye-opener to the issue and said she wants to help others.

"I thought it happened to me for a greater reason," Oster said. "There's too many holes in our (legal) system, we're trying really hard to make a difference, but we're not even touching the surface of the problem. We're putting Band-Aids on them."

Oster said talking about personal experiences could be helpful as part of the healing process.

"If people start talking, they're not alone," Oster said. "Feeling depressed and suicidal, every teenager feels like that at some point. They think they're the only one that feels that way, but they're not."

Over the next year, Oster and Mello will work to create a textbook, workbook and film to submit to area schools, with the hope of eventually reaching curriculums nationwide. They plan to cover taboo issues in society, domestic violence, sexuality, suicide and health, among other issues.

"Everything that's uncomfortable for people to talk about," Oster said. "Kids have such a limited experience with relationships; they go by what they see in their home and in their friendships. It shows what they'll tolerate or think is OK as they enter into their relationships."

Oster hopes to weave the program into the social studies/civics curriculum in schools because she said the issue is a societal problem.

Mello, a former teacher and writer, currently working on children's books, said she's passionate about the topic and excited to help her friend and colleague with the non-profit.

Currently the two are conducting research about existing programs and deciding what will go into their curriculum. Mello said she welcomes other organizations and programs to collaborate with Courage is Change.

"It's very exciting," Mello said. "To touch on an issue that I think is important and not really discussed a lot. We want to solve different problems and teach middle school and high school students to respect each other and to be aware of differences in each other so differences don't cause problems."

Oster said current curriculums teach anti-bullying classes, but they don't cover the whole issue.

"We want to find out where they fall short and tie them together," Oster said. "That's what I hope Courage is Change will be. Filling the voids and perhaps stopping the cycle of violence."

Oster said their goals are to make a difference and educate children on a level they're not being taught. Friends, TV and sometimes their parental relationships are not the way Oster said youth should learn about relationships.

“It's something I was supposed to do,” Oster said. “Sometimes, those things just happen and you pay attention to the signs and know more is supposed to happen as a result.”