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Youth Council Fights Against Bullying

Elementary, middle and high school students have joined together to combat a serious issue

By [Deborah Bostock-Kelley](#) 2:00pm

Twenty six kids, some returning and some brand new, gathered together in the upstairs conference room at the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay for their monthly Bully Busters youth council meeting. Bully Busters is a partnership between Hillsborough County and the Sheriff's Office to reduce bullying among children.

The students' mission was serious, since some students have been victims of bullying or witnessed it firsthand. The problem can be overwhelming, but these determined elementary, middle and high schools are proponents for change in the fight against bullying by using their social networks and word of mouth as catalysts.

The evening opened with meeting location host, David Braughton, president and CEO of the Crisis Center thanking them for leading the charge: "You are making a difference in the lives of a lot of people. There is no bigger contribution as that."

David was followed by Commissioner Sandy Murman, who applauded the kids for their work. "Be nice and respectful to each other," she says. "It's a simple theory."

A surprise guest, current Miss Florida Jaclyn Raulerson, made a special appearance.

"Bully Busters holds a special place in my heart," she said. "My platform is anti-bullying. I lived it, and am a survivor of it."

Carrollwood resident Amber Gervais, a 9th grader, is the current Bully Buster Youth Council President.

"When I wear my Bully Busters shirt to school, a lot of people ask what it is. I tell them you need to come and see for yourself," she says. "Everyone takes something different out of it."

Amber joined Bully Busters because her park director said they needed teenagers to get involved

"I got to the meeting and it's just such a great environment. I love the cause and that it is (bullying) actually getting noticed and people are trying to stop it," says Amber. "A bunch of people at my school wear our Bully Busters shirts once a month, and there are probably about twenty other teenagers that attend our meeting."

The reasons why members join Bully Busters are as varied as the kids themselves.

"I wanted to know how to stop the bullying," says Elliot Elias, a 3rd grader.

"I just want help the kids at the park know not to bully people and treat everyone with respect," says Enrique Marnotes, a 7th grader.

"I want to stop kids from being mean to each other," says Jackson Hernandez, a 4th grader.

"I want to be a good example for people," says first time member Oscar Lopez, a 3rd grader.

"I've been picked on and I want to stop it," says Jovanni Gonzalez, a 5th grader. "I want to prevent bullying."

"When I was younger, I was bullied because I was shorter than the rest of the people and looked different. As I got older, I realized it was a problem in schools and I have a lot of friends being bullied," says new member Ariel Owens, a 6th grader. "I'm making a video about how bullying is bad, and posting it on Facebook."

The members of Bully Busters wore a sea of baby blue shirts when they threw out beads in the Gasparilla parade, displaying "Bully Free" signs and a banner that read "Erase Bullying."

They plan to hold a rally against bullying in the near future. "Hopefully," says Amber, "We can get the whole community involved."

Bully Busters meets regularly the third Monday of each month.

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