

CAROLINA parent

Youth-led Conference Empowers Students to Prevent Violence



The National Association of Students Against Violence Everywhere, a nonprofit dedicated to decreasing the potential for violence in our schools and communities, helped empower students to create safer schools at its recent Summit in Raleigh. More than 300 people gathered for the conference in March, including SAVE participants, students, teachers, law enforcement, dropout prevention coordinators, social workers, counselors and parents. The event featured motivating workshops, peer-to-peer presentations and nationally acclaimed speakers that showcased successful practices in preventing violence and trained participants in effective ways to make their schools and communities safer.

Several North Carolina-based SAVE chapters led workshop sessions, including:

- Students from Emsley A. Laney High School in Wilmington and Highland School of Technology in Gastonia gave presentations on how they collaborate with clubs and groups in their schools to engage them in service projects, spread SAVE's message and create an overall safer environment.
- Chapel Hill High School's chapter engaged participants in their popular "Toilet Talk" activity, a fun student survey that includes an important message about social norms in regards to alcohol and drug use, safe driving, bullying and other hot topics among youth.
- Garner Magnet High School's chapter taught attendees how to coordinate anti-texting and driving events and mock crash simulations before prom, including tips on how to get the community involved.
- Jacksonville school White Oak High's chapter shared a powerful message about what it is like to be an LGBTQ teen. Their presentation included real-life examples and statistics to showcase how the bullying rate towards LGBTQ youth has been affected over time.
- Cuthbertson High School from Waxhaw gave a stirring presentation on teen dating violence, teaching students how to recognize the signs and providing them with resources to help deal with abuse in their community.

SAVE also honored its exceptional participants as part of the organization's annual awards program at the Summit, announcing two Students of the Year, two Chapters of the Year and one Advisor of the Year.

Leo Myers from White Oak High School in Jacksonville was recognized as one of the Students of the Year. Myers co-founded his SAVE chapter and has served as president for two years. He continually demonstrates outstanding commitment to SAVE ideals by mediating his peers' arguments, participating in crime prevention activities and reaching out to local elementary schools.

Cuthbertson High School in Waxhaw was named as one of the Chapters of the Year. This year, the chapter made a large impact on the nonprofit Turning Point, a local shelter for victims of domestic violence, by hosting numerous fundraisers and volunteering. Additionally, it has organized canned food drives, equality celebrations, safe driving initiatives and teen dating abuse workshops for students.

SAVE started at West Charlotte High School in Charlotte in 1989 following the tragic death of a student who was trying to break up a fight at an off-campus party. Students met first to console each other, then as an organization to promote youth safety and to work together to prevent future incidents from occurring. Since its inception, SAVE has grown from one school group to more than 2,100 chapters located in seven countries and 48 states. The organization mentors and provides resources, confidence and support to empower student leadership to help prevent school shootings, eliminate bullying and make their schools and communities safer for everyone.

Carleen Wray is executive director of the National Association of Students Against Violence Everywhere, a nonprofit with the mission to reduce violence in schools and communities. She provides counsel, strategy and resources to federal, state and local agencies, community leaders, and schools in their efforts to involve students in the prevention of school violence. For more information on SAVE or starting a SAVE chapter, visit www.nationalsave.org, or contact SAVE at (866) 343-SAVE to receive free startup materials and guidance.