



## Cuthbertson ‘saves’ domestic violence victims through school-wide chapter

Posted by Courtney Schultz on April 17, 2015 in Education

WAXHAW – Students in Cuthbertson High School’s Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) chapter took a stand against domestic violence in Union County in 2014 and have earned the nonprofit’s coveted “Chapter of the Year” award.

The National Association of SAVE is a nonprofit dedicated to decreasing the potential for violence in schools and communities. It began in 1989 at West Charlotte High School as a result of a student shooting and has grown to approximately 2,100 chapters across the elementary, middle, high school and collegiate levels.

“It’s about how students can make a difference,” SAVE Executive Director Carleen Wray said. Wray said over the years the organization has found that youth want to be a part of the solution youth violence.

Many schools will see the difference in “school climate,” Wray added, because all students can be included in the school’s efforts to alleviate violence and increase safety regardless of the students’ ethnic groups or socioeconomic backgrounds.

Leah Ross, Cuthbertson’s SAVE adviser, said that’s what makes the school’s group special – it reaches all students and encompasses students of all achievement levels.

“It’s a comfortable place that all students can come to work toward something positive,” said Mitchell Wesoly, senior and chapter president.

Ross has served as the chapter’s adviser since its inception at the end of 2010. Former student Jessica Weber felt inspired to start a chapter after hearing from a rape victim advocate who worked for United Family Services.

“(Weber) said she hadn’t experienced (domestic violence) herself, but felt that no one deserves to go through that,” Ross said.

What began with about nine of Weber’s friends has grown to nearly 100 students – about one of every 14 students at Cuthbertson.

Ross has been proud to serve as the adviser and see the students’ passion for the causes they represent. Cuthbertson’s SAVE chapter is mostly student-run, with Ross overseeing their efforts.

“I think one of the most appealing things about SAVE to the school is it kind of encompasses a lot of different ideas (such as) anti-violence, bullying and covers different things, so every student can relate to different aspects of it,” Karsen McGee, senior and chapter secretary, said.

Karsen said the group works with Turning Point, a domestic violence shelter in Union County, because the work extends to the community beyond the school.

Cuthbertson’s SAVE chapter has worked with Turning Point since its inception.

This year, the SAVE chapter sponsored the Turning Point Domestic Violence Shelter Fashion Show with White Horse Black Market and the Waxhaw Police Department. The event took place at Cuthbertson High School, where SAVE chapter members worked behind the scenes and modeled.

The group also participated in various other events that led to them earning the chapter of year distinction, including raising money for a local homeless shelter, hosting blood drives, running International Peace Day activities, holding a supply drive for a SAVE chapter in Sierra Leone, collecting toys for area children, hosting an anti-bullying week and more.

"I don't want to say (I was) shocked (that they won the award) because I think we deserved it as a chapter, but it was a proud moment," said Mitchell.

Ross said the group members knew they worked hard to earn the award, but knew of other chapters that worked just as hard, such as the chapter in Sierra Leone that plans to extend SAVE chapters to all public schools in the country, all in the midst of an Ebola outbreak.

"With all the things that other chapters are doing, the fact that they thought we were special enough and we stood out enough was really an honor to all of us," Ross said.

Cuthbertson's SAVE chapter has not missed a beat to bask in the glory as they plan to host Safe Driving Awareness Week at the school, May 11 to 15, which will include a mock car crash and safe driving presentations. Twenty-eight SAVE members will also wear black shirts and remain silent for a day to represent the 28 people in the United States who die each day from drunk driving.

"It's this really visible idea that it could be anyone of us at any time (who die as a result of drunk driving)," Ross said. "We need to make sure our voices are heard in making the right choices."

Some adolescents from today's generations might feel they can't make a difference because of a lack of resources or their age, but SAVE members feel they can anyone can make a difference.

"Anyone can make a difference if they're willing to take the risk of maybe not succeeding to the full extent, but as long as you're willing to try, something good is going to come out of it," Karsen said.

Mitchell said it only takes one person to make a difference and he feels the person who made a difference for Cuthbertson is Ross, who served as the catalyst for the group.

"Once we get the big idea, we can all make our contributions through smaller ideas and then it works out," he said.