

Charleston

'Bully' movie

WINGS for kids recently hosted a special screening of the documentary "Bully."

The screening sold out. It was truly heartening to see streams of teachers, principals, parents, teens and 'tweens arrive to view a movie that is deeply wrenching and disturbing.

Asked why they came, they told us they recognize that bullying is a problem. But they often do not know what to do about it. Collectively, we can all take the next step, which is to turn awareness into action.

At WINGS for kids, we help children learn how to recognize their emotions, and how to empathize with others. We teach healthy forms of expression, responsible decision-making, and social awareness.

Empowered by these lessons, kids are less likely to bully.

For too long, adults have rationalized bullying behavior as "kids being kids." Even recognizing this behavior, many adults and peers often wonder how to help. They fear that intervening may make things worse.

Let me be clear: If you witness bullying, intervene. If you suspect a young person is being bullied, intervene. And don't look only for physical bruises; bullying includes isolation, cyber threats, physical and mental abuse, gossip, name-calling and much more.

In fact, bullying is distinguished from other behavior by three criteria: aggressive behavior or intention to harm; behavior carried out repeatedly and over time; and the relationship between bully and victim is characterized as an imbalance of power.

Bullies thrive in the absence of resistance.

They win when the rest of us look the other way. Bullies flourish when they are allowed to "overpower" their victims.

Bullies tend to recede when the victim suddenly acquires champions and enforcers. Best of all, bullies can be rehabilitated.

The U.S. government offers numerous insights on how to identify and prevent bullying at www.stopbullying.com. At WINGS, we help 400-plus Charleston County elementary kids become champions for a bully-free world.

And our hope is that with Sunday's event, and our continued work in the community, we can help kids who would otherwise be on the receiving end of the bullies' abuse.

We invite everyone to see "Bully," to learn about this subject and to help make this terrible form of abuse a thing of the past.

Bridget Laird

CEO, WINGS for kids