

The Bear Facts

This year's spring dance, Fusion, got shut down early. Read more on pg. 2 of News.



Mental Health Awareness deserves more than a week

by Divya Williams
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47 LB students attempted suicide last year. This number was based on data collected from the 2011-2012 Fairfax County Youth Survey, which polled students in grades 8, 10 and 12. Take a moment to let that number sink in. 47 classmates. Maybe you knew some of them, or maybe you knew none of them. But either way, those kids came to this school, passed the same faces, and sat in all the same classes as countless others. Yet most people at this school could never guess the 47 students who were suffering enough to want to end their lives. And that's a shame.

The week of April 15-19 was Mental Health

Awareness Week. The walls sported awareness posters, the Morning Bru aired a video urging students to seek assistance, and an information table was provided at all lunches. But more effectively, the school went all out with inviting professional speaker, Jordan Burnham, to address both the middle and high school about his experiences with mental illness.

"I don't think people consider [mental illness] as a real problem," senior Carly Minesinger said, "which is why [Mental Health Awareness Week] was beneficial to have."

Predictably, the school went through all the motions it's expected to in addressing this topic: But some students still feel like it's just not enough.

"I feel like they did very little to educate people about mental health; they just said 'Okay, now everyone be happy,'" senior Sareena Khosla said.

Other students saw the week as beneficial and definitely worth having.

"If you're able to recognize that someone around you has a mental illness, you might be able to talk to them about it," senior Scott Bergstresser said.

An email was sent from Lakebraddocksec. Keepintouch@feps.edu on

April 5 to students and parents to notify them about the upcoming mental health, suicide awareness and depression presentation. The email contained statistics such as 26.3 percent of students have experienced depression, 245 have seriously considered suicide, and 47 have attempted

suicide. "We're all given hypothetical situations that we are supposed to react to," senior Michael Dioquino said. "When, in reality, the situation arises we aren't sure if we should act. We see about 20 other people and say to ourselves that someone else will do something."

It's that passive attitude, though, that makes certain students feel alone.

"The most important thing is never to think it's not your place," Minesinger said.

In 2008, LB was struck by a tragedy that shook the whole community. Connor Wilkinson, a classmate of the now graduating class, committed suicide.

"He was going places," Bergstresser said. "It was hard to see a kid like that with such great potential be put down so much."

Bergstresser and Dioquino were both in the same Boy Scout Troop as Wilkinson.

"I know how people are to a

kid like

Connor," Bergstresser said. "If you weren't cool, [middle school] wasn't necessarily a good time for you."

Empathy has never been known as a hallmark of adolescence.

"We were all immature at that age; it's not like he had many peers willing to help him," Dioquino said. "We weren't going through what he had to go through, so we disregarded it."

It's not necessarily that this is a selfish community, but adolescents don't always know any other approach.

"Realistically, there's no way to cure bullying," Bergstresser said. "There are so many indefinite lines between what someone might consider teasing and what someone else might consider harassment."

The thing about those lines though is that, too often, they're being danced on. If someone can't tell if their actions are going to hurt someone, those actions shouldn't be done. And if someone is feeling harassed, they shouldn't hesitate to use

the resources offered. If there is one point that the school cannot reiterate enough, it's that there is always someone ready to help.

"I feel like he didn't give

himself a chance," Bergstresser said. "I feel like everybody else didn't give him enough of a chance either."

The thing we should be trying to achieve here should not simply be getting people to know that mental illness is out there. People know. Sure, 26.3 percent of students experiencing depression represents a staggering number, but knowing that statistic doesn't change the behavior in response to mental illness.

"We need to get past this stigma that, if you have an illness, it's your fault," senior Alex Horvath said. "It's not your fault; it's an illness. It's like getting sick."

"We need to get past this stigma," senior Alex Horvath said. "It's an illness. It's like getting sick." It's hard to tell who's putting on an act sometimes," senior Isabelle Perricone said.

"I don't think people consider mental illness as a real problem," senior Carly Minesinger said. "I think it's more joking bullying than legitimate bullying here," senior Isabella Fortunato said.