



## STAHRS

### STudent Athletes for Healthy Relationships

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### Proposal to Colorado State House of Representatives School Safety Committee

Dear School Safety Committee members:

As a graduate of Columbine High School graduate ('83) with a neighbor whose son faced the Sandy Hook shooter – thank God the gun jammed – the issue has become personal to me. A friend of mine recently sought counsel with me because of the STEM school shooting. His son was a graduating senior and his wife worked there as staff. The powerlessness that arose triggered his childhood experiences with an abusive alcoholic father and created substantial distress. Our discussions helped him greatly to understand the baggage and gain a sense of self-control again thankfully.

As a Colorado DVOMB approved Domestic Violence Treatment Provider for the past 16 years, I believe that the epidemic of gun violence we are facing is connected to the same problems of interpersonal violence that drives teen dating violence, sexual assaults, bullying, substance abuse, mental health issues, and mass shootings & school shootings. My perspectives are also built on a background in chronic mental health and intellectual disabilities for a dozen years prior to graduate school. ***It's all about relationships***, and it all starts at home.

If we want to eliminate the problems we are facing, we must educate our children about the basics of human psychology...human behaviors...human interactions. The school shooting in Maryland was a DV related incident where the jilted teenager shot his former girlfriend and her new boyfriend a couple months after she broke up with him. The Everytown research recently released identified that domestic violence was associated in just over half (54%) of the mass shootings since Columbine. And the Colorado DVOMB recently disseminated findings (Ramirez et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2015; Sweeten et al., 2016) of juvenile teen dating violence which indicated that rates are identical to those of adult intimate partner abuse.

This suggests that the programming of their socialization at home is mirrored at school in their own dating experiences. Family conflicts, which typically drive teens to intimate relationships to find value, acceptance, love and solace, are extremely influential to perpetuating the same

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“The unexamined life is not worth living.” Socrates

patterns once they become adults. Most, if not all, of my male clients once said to themselves that they wouldn't be like that "Ass....! Yet, eventually their childhood programming AND fears kicked in. Most of the female clients I've worked with escaped an abusive and dangerous home too, which led them into the arms of an abusive male, typically much older. The 5-year age difference in adolescent relationships and sexual assault risk factors identified in the ACE has been all too real for the women. And we all know that bullying is an overly aggressive and self-protective response to feeling powerless in childhood – typically at home with a parent(s) or sibling(s), and too often continued and perpetuated at school.

As a 30-year mental health professional working with individuals who experienced the greatest challenges in their formative and adult years, I would say that eliminating domestic violence and bullying is THE CRITICAL FACTOR to the future. Educating our children about the negative effects within humans is crucial to reducing bullying through building compassion, empathy, inclusion and acceptance. EVERYBODY needs to feel accepted, valued, safe, etc. Maslow is right, and these issues have been problematic. Some humans will react inwardly to their negative & toxic experiences of harassment & exclusion, which looks like depression, substance abuse, and potentially suicide. Others will act externally and outwardly, like when substance abuse and delinquent behaviors are used to cover up and hide, or express, their feelings. Hanging out with the "bad crowd" was a way to find acceptance and value for many. It also tended to contribute to their first experiences of teen dating violence once insecurities surface over fears of abandonment, being insufficient, feeling broken and "unlovable," etc.

Based on my work, I created Relationships 101- Understanding who you are, your baggage, and how it effects human interactions. I haven't reinvented the wheel. The workshop / curricula is the culmination of everything that I have tried to teach my clients, and everything that they have taught me about their lives. It contains materials developed to educate clients and bring their experiences to a level of consciousness to explore and understand human behaviors and reactions. It contains materials about child development from Maslow, Bowlby & Ainsworth, positive relationship dynamics from Dr. Gottman, and brings in materials from my training in domestic violence & substance abuse counseling, victims' issues, communication and conflict resolution skills, and information on different therapeutic approaches.

Ultimately, based on my work in youth corrections and with teen offenders in outpatient treatment, these materials resonate with youth and young adults. It's "common sense made obvious." We need to teach young men and women how and why they need to respect everybody, regardless of differences and choices. Antisocial behaviors are the only thing that should be confronted- not gender identify, sexual orientation, or racial & ethnic identities. Men need to understand how and why they need to respect females. Young women need to understand why they should never settle, and why self-respect, self-confidence, & self-esteem are their most valuable relationships.

I believe that providing this basic information will allow the young men and women to move forward in life with greater consciousness and the opportunity to avoid the pitfalls placed

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before them by the parenting they received. If we want the future generations of children to experience lower ACE scores, then we must educate our current student populations to change their future paths using insight. Nearly half of my male clients “wished [they] had this in high school to be a better man, husband, and father.”

We need to create Ambassadors of Change, who will help support and empower their peers through positive role modeling, which needs to include confronting bullying as a group to disempower the aggressor and show solidarity and acceptance of those marginalized and harassed. Our children have been traumatized since the Columbine massacre and 9/11. Anxiety has been increasing as more of these mass events occur. Higher rates of anxiety over personal safety are guaranteed to lead to higher rates of mental health and substance abuse issues, which will therefore perpetuate the problems.

Lastly, I envision a future impact where we have lower divorce rates, lower rates of relationship and family violence, which should lower substance abuse issues, criminality and other antisocial behaviors. Therefore, I created STAHRs, to introduce these materials to our schools and to lower the trajectory of violence in or schools- of all forms. I hope to offer my expertise, perspectives and materials to our students, our families, and our state. As a new nonprofit organization, we are in the early stages of data collection. I’ve had the privilege to present our “Antibullying” curriculum to 125 students at Mountain Vista high school. While I recognize the need to expand some materials to entertain their age group, the materials were well received, and the feedback was excellent.

One young man said, “I know that we’ve seen and heard this before. But now, I don’t think that I can ignore it any longer.” Other students indicated that they would use the materials to have conversations with their parents to hopefully bring about changes at home. I will be a guest speaker during the fall semester at a Parker Lutheran HS psychology class and hopefully begin to build a foothold with the athletic department too.

I greatly appreciate the time you give this proposal. These materials have been time-tested, and client approved. I cannot think of higher praise than from my clients as the curricula allowed them to consciously alter their families’ futures and break their cycles of violence. When construction workers, doctors, lawyers, police officers, and gang bangers all express gratitude for their arrest, then I believe that it works.

I created STAHRs to put myself out of business! I look forward to further discussions.

Sincerely,  
*Duane F Barone*

Duane F. Barone, MA  
Executive Director & Founder of STAHRs  
Owner & Clinical Director of Caledonia Counseling

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