

Knowledge now is power later

*The Women's
Center's
Bridney Chappel
has message for
students of any age*



GREGG
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Monday, as Bridney Chappel was giving her final presentation to a group of sixth-graders at North Shore Middle School in Hartland, I referred to her as the Johnny Cash of Waukesha.

"Why?" you ask. Because she has been everywhere.

As the violence prevention advocate and community education specialist for The Women's Center, a nonprofit organization whose mission

it is to provide shelter, safety and support for victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse, Chappel goes into schools to "prevent kids from needing our services in the future." She has even spoken at places like Carroll University and the University of Wisconsin-Waukesha, proving that the message she shares is relevant to students ranging from elementary school through college age.

According to an agency press release, studies show that dating relationships, some of them which become abusive over time, start in middle school at around age 12.

"If we reach kids younger, we can probably prevent them from getting into unhealthy relationships later," says Chappel. Topics of the presentations, like the ones Chappel gave to students in Hartland, include conflict resolution, boundaries, healthy vs. unhealthy relationships and bullying.

"It's a really good time to think about relationships, whether they are healthy or unhealthy," said Chappel, about the middle and high school years.

"I've always had a soft spot for kids, especially young women," said the 25-year-old Chappel. While attending UW-Milwaukee, Chappel started a mentoring program called BTBY which stands for "Be the Best You," as part of her sorority. Starting the group as a sophomore, Chappel was happy to see significant growth over the years.

Diane Ripple serves as the director of programs and services for The Women's Center. She is hopeful for a bright future for the commu-

nity education program. She believes that the program is a win-win for the community as The Women's Center provides an "area of expertise" for local schools.

"None of us can be all things to all people," said Ripple. "It's a partnership that just makes sense."

The programs also help get the message out should students ever need the services of The Women's Center. The agency, located at 502 N. East Ave. in Waukesha, provides individual counseling and support

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groups for people of any age dealing with issues of domestic violence and sexual abuse. The local nonprofit also offers a 24-hour crisis line for those who need a safe place away from their abuser or for those who need to talk about feelings regarding the above issues. That number is 262-542-3828.

For Chappel, listening and understanding are two key ingredients in the learning process. Her desire is to help students think critically, telling them "You can know what a healthy relationship is supposed to look like, but what would it look like for you?" It is not Chappel's goal to have students simply regurgitate information, but instead to act on the information they are given.

So, what kind of feedback is Ripple receiving from Chappel's presentations? "We're on the right track with getting our message to younger and younger audiences," Ripple said.

Seeing Chappel's presentations herself, Ripple said that it's fun to see students have an "aha moment."

"I really try to connect with teens on their level," said Chappel. "I am in tune with teen culture, I speak their language."

To schedule a presentation for Chappel to come to your school, call 262-547-4600. Bullying can happen to anyone at any age. Chappel encourages students to be upstanders, not bystanders, to peacefully resolve the conflict in situations of bullying.

I'll see you around!

(Gregg Wandsneider's column runs Wednesdays in The Freeman. He can be reached at gwandsne@gmail.com.)