

radKIDS Program Prepares Children to Escape Danger

By Maria Lindsay

WEST AKRON — Young children can fight back when faced with some dangerous situations if they learn a few simple techniques designed to make them safer at school, at home, in the street and on the Internet.

Those techniques and more were taught to 10 Akron Public Schools children ages 5 to 8 during a five-week after-school pilot program at the Judith A. Resnik Community Learning Center, courtesy of the radKIDS (Resist Aggression Defensively) program.

radKIDS is a national safety education program for children ages 5 to 12 that teaches them how to proactively identify and defensively respond to a variety of situations, including bullying, abduction and inappropriate touching.

The program was brought to the area through Guardians Against Sex Predators (GASP).

“This program gives children options and choices that help them gain confidence in dangerous situations,” said certified radKIDS instructor Don Hollowell, who taught the class with fellow instructor Tanya Coughlin. “It gives them an edge.”

Hollowell explained when children face danger, cognitive abilities can fail and fear and panic can set in to paralyze them, but the radKIDS program explains what to do in various dangerous situations, demonstrates the necessary actions, and then has kids practice those techniques through drills.

“Our objective is to provide children with an immediate or automatic response that can be learned through repetition to compensate for the fear,” added Hollowell.

Through the two-hour classes, children learned how to use skills such as yelling, striking out and running away in the face of danger. Instructors used padded blocks and a dummy to help children practice the new skills.

Hollowell stressed the program focuses on education about personal safety, not self-defense.

“The objective for children is to escape and evade,” he explained.

While small children cannot be expected to knock down a man, they can surprise and distract him enough to get away, added Hollowell.



Charvis Ware, 6, practices radKIDS skills on a dummy with instructor Don Hollowell.



Olyvia Raber, 6, fights back when Hollowell, posing as a stranger and suited up in padded gear, grabs her. Coughlin gives advice during the demonstration to help her know what to do.



The pilot class of radKIDS included 10 Akron Public Schools children ages 5 to 12, who are shown together after the graduation ceremony with instructors Tanya Coughlin on the left and Don Hollowell on the right, and in the center, from left, GASP President Fran Doll and GASP Executive Director Debbie Reiss.

Photos: Maria Lindsay

The last class of the five-week program concluded May 24 with a graduation ceremony attended by families.

“I think this is a good program,” said Ruth Hill, grandmother of 8-year-old Ja’Naya Williams, a second-grader at Case Elementary School. “I learned a lot myself.”

Larry Raber, father of 6-year-old triplets Jonathan, Olyvia and Lydia Raber, said the program raised awareness of safety issues for his children and himself.

“Children were taught to recognize danger,” added Jason Ware, father of 6-year-old Charvis Ware, who also was in the class.

In addition to participating in radKIDS or a similar program, Hollowell suggested parents teach children about bad behavior that may come from anyone, not just strangers, and how to say no to an adult without being rude, as well as discuss “what if” scenarios, such as what to do in a house fire and how to respond to someone who tells them there is a family emergency and wants them to get into a car.

Hollowell stated that since its inception, there have been 63 verified cases of children who have avoided abduction by using information and techniques taught in the radKids program.

“The pilot program worked beautifully and was very successful,” said GASP President Fran Doll. “The shock factor of kids responding with screaming and fighting throws predators into a spin.”

Doll said GASP hopes to partner with local agencies, and a planning committee is now working to determine how to bring the program to other young children. Doll added that Akron City Council has been asked to fund the \$10,000 to \$15,000 needed to train local physical education teachers and others to teach radKIDS skills.

“We are very much in the beginning stages of this,” she said. “The community is interested and we are trying to make it work.”

For details, visit www.radkids.org. Information on GASP is available at www.gasp123.org.