

# Drama Takes Down Violence

Safehome of Johnson County promotes awareness for teen violence with award-winning production.

words KELLI WHITE

“It is happening. It is around us. It is right here in this room.”

These are the opening lines of “The Outrage,” an interactive theater performance addressing teen dating violence and sexual assault. A once unspeakable problem is being addressed in a peer-to-peer dramatic atmosphere, building awareness and calling for prevention.

Now people are talking about the problem, and the best part is people are listening.

Allison Basinger, education and prevention coordinator at Safehome, a facility of offering shelter, counseling and prevention education, wrote “The Outrage” for victims of domestic abuse. The play’s mission is to show audience members that not only is teen violence happening, it is literally with them wherever they go.

“When students go out in a group, someone in that group has been affected by violence,” says Basinger. “When they come see “The Outrage” someone sitting near them has experienced abuse.”

Basinger kept these statistics in mind when writing the play. She wanted to actively demonstrate just how common teen violence is and do something to help break the cycle of abuse.

Because one in five high school students can report being physically or sexually abused, each audience member receives a card labeled one, two, three, four or five. Each person holding a card with a number five on it is asked to stand up.

Furthermore, one in three teens reports having a friend who has been physically abused. To illustrate that sobering fact,

actors from the play walk through the audience counting out every third person.

“This interaction with the audience makes the statistics come alive and shows just how prevalent abuse really is,” says Basinger.

According to a 2007 study, 54 percent of parents never talk to their kids about violence, but everywhere kids go, violence is around them. Violent acts are reported on the news, demonstrated on television and in movies and video games. Basinger contends we have the power to stop the cycle.

“The first step is realizing that no community is safe from teen violence,” says Basinger. “Abuse doesn’t start out abusive. It’s the little things like name calling that create an atmosphere that is wrongly accepted and this acceptance escalates into unhealthy relationships.”



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**GOODYEAR**

## EDUCATION

A former teacher at Shawnee Mission South High School, Basinger wrote “The Outrage” when she was teaching and her students were the first performers. The production began with eight students that formed a troupe and since its inception in 2007 dozens more have joined the performance. Now there are 30 performers and even more requests from students wanting to become involved. More volunteers are needed, however, to organize and oversee the troupes, so there is currently a cap on the number of actors.

The play is now being performed at 13 area middle and high schools as well as at some youth and community groups. Basinger’s goal is to have “The Outrage” perform in every Johnson County middle and high school. Other schools across the state have bought rights to the play and five other communities in Kansas have since implemented the play into their school programs.

In the spring of this year, the Safe States Alliance, a national non-profit organization of community leaders working to prevent violence, awarded “The Outrage” with national recognition. It earned “Innovative Initiative of the Year” and according to Basinger was deemed as having the greatest potential to substantially decrease violence.

While she appreciates the national award, Basinger’s greatest joy is seeing how “The Outrage” has affected its participants. Blue Valley Northwest and Olathe Northwest students volunteer their time and energy to a cause that has become close to their hearts.

Ashu Agarwal, junior at Blue Valley Northwest, says, “Once I started [performing in “The Outrage”] I was hooked. It’s a great feeling seeing such a strong response from the program. I will continue to be a part of it whenever they need me.” Agarwal, like many student performers in “The Outrage,” had no acting experience prior to joining the play, but once teachers told him about it, he wanted to be involved.

Other members have been acting in school activities since elementary school. One such performer, Rachel Hoffmann, is a senior at Blue Valley Northwest and joined “The Outrage” in hopes of helping people live healthier lives.

“I want to prevent as much abuse as I can, and with knowledge comes power,” says Hoffman. “Being a part of this production has completely opened my eyes. People don’t notice when others are abusive. So many think an abusive act is just a joke until we know better and “The Outrage” clarifies for its audience just what constitutes abusive behavior; thus, progressing toward breaking the cycle of violence.”

One of last month’s top news stories was one reported from the FBI. The story states, “Violent crime rate is down for the third year in a row.” Perhaps this national statistic is due in part to people like Allison Basinger and the staff at Safehome, to the students who dedicate their time to performances like “The Outrage” and to an overall awareness of the prevalence of violence in our communities and the baby steps each person can take to stop its spread. ❖

*For more information on Safehome and “The Outrage,” visit [www.safehome-ks.org](http://www.safehome-ks.org).*

