



AMH Goes Back to School Through BJC Outreach Program

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ALTON, IL -- It's never too early to teach area students a few things about healthy living. Through the help of a \$35,000 annual grant from the Alton Memorial Health Services Foundation, Alton Memorial Hospital is able to offer health education programs from BJC School Outreach and Youth Development for several schools in the hospital's service area.

"Each program is designed to address Illinois Learning Standards and target a particular grade level," says Diana Wilhold, director of the BJC School Outreach and Youth Development Department. "There are programs in many schools and communities that reach a lot of youth. Unfortunately, many of these programs do not have a formalized method of evaluating the effectiveness of what is being taught. Our programs include pre-post assessment and we have found that there is a 40 percent to 57 percent improvement in knowledge, attitude and behavior change for the various programs."

The Buddies program encourages students to pair up and forgive each other. Buddies at Delhi Elementary School in the Jersey School District are fourth-graders Jada Porter and Kayla Delp.

Erica Oliver, a BJC educator with the School Outreach & Development program, leads a session at Delhi Elementary School under the watchful eye of fourth-grader Danielle Lambert

Programs address the six high-risk health behaviors identified by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and a comprehensive health career exploration program. The health topics are tobacco, substance abuse, nutrition, physical activity, sexual behaviors and safety-violence prevention. BJC health educators, who represent AMH at any Illinois school they visit, will spend 45 minutes to an hour per session in each classroom of the requested grade level in one school building.

“Programs are usually four sessions in length, although our nutrition program is six sessions,” Wilhold says.

The Jersey School District was added to area schools during the past school year, with fourth and fifth grade students participating in the Buddies program. That program dealt with the problem of bullying. Erica Oliver was the BJC educator leading the sessions in four separate classrooms at Delhi and Fieldon elementary schools.

“Everything about the program was just awesome,” said Mary Schell, the principal of both schools. “The feedback from both teachers and students has been great. Not that we had a big problem with bullying before, but you can still see the culture change. Students are complimenting each other and it’s obvious the program has had an impact. And the kids really connected with Erica right away. She is excellent at being able to reach them even if she’s only with them for a relatively short time.”

Oliver taught the students that there are five types of bullying – verbal, gender, physical, emotional and cyber.

“We teach them it’s important to include others in activities and to interact with people other than their closest friends,” Oliver said. “One of the big things is for them to see the power of being a witness. Most people at the scene of a bullying incident are witnesses, so they can do a lot to help curb the problem by speaking up.”

The intent of the program as a whole is to support the Madison County Health Department’s goals of targeting cardiology, sexuality and addiction issues. Power of Choice (the substance abuse program) and Heart 2 Heart (which discusses teen sexuality, positive dating and STIs/HIV) are taught in the upper grade levels.

“What we do is integrated into each school’s goals for educating the students,” Wilhold says. “And we tailor our programs to the need of each school.”

In addition to the Jersey schools, the School Outreach program is in the Alton, Bethalto, Roxana, East Alton and Wood River-Hartford districts, plus Marquette Catholic High School in Alton, Zion Lutheran School in Bethalto and St. Ambrose School in Godfrey.

“The school administrators have been happy with the services we offer as each program meet their educational needs and provides health information that is needed for a lifetime,” Wilhold says.

Wilhold said that the program is used in 61 school districts in Missouri and Illinois, with up to 60,000 students being reached each year.