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Raise the bar for bully prevention

Local attorney serving as President of Long Island CAPS organization

by Michelle Centamore

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Patrick McCormick practices law during the day but he's standing up to bullying around the clock as President of the Board of Directors of CAPS (Child Abuse Prevention Services). The Kings Park resident is a partner at Campolo, Middleton & McCormick, LLP in Bohemia. Then there's the 24-7 job he took on several years ago

when he discovered that he could help keep his children and their peers safe.

"As a parent of three young girls, I wanted to become educated and involved. Once I was introduced to the [CAPS] volunteers and rally became aware of their mission and I realized how prevalent these issues were, it was almost easy to get involved because it was so worthwhile and so important," said Mr. McCormick, now president.

Child Abuse Prevention Services is a Long Island nonprofit dedicated to the prevention of bullying, child abuse and neglect and the promotion of Internet safety. CAPS utilizes volunteers to work directly with children and youth in New York's Nassau and Suffolk elementary, middle and high schools, providing prevention through education programs at no cost to schools or students. The organization also has a CAPSHELPLINE or CAPSBULLYHELPLINE where children, parents and caregivers, as well as educators may call for guidance and support. Through education, intervention and services, CAPS work to fulfill its mission: Working Together to Keep Every Child Safe from Harm.

Like most boards, the responsibility of CAPS' board of directors is to help the organization grown fiscally and assist in managing the business end of it, for example, assuring that he budget and programs are properly funded and the people needed to facilitate its programs are in place. "It is a very hands-on board, very active and very caring," Mr. McCormick said.

As school and cyber-bullying are becoming more rampant, organizations such as CAPS are critical in providing not only support and intervention but prevention as well, according to Mr. McCormick. "Right now, bullying is most prevalent. Kids feel very alone when these things happen," said Mr. McCormick. "It is very important to help them realize that they are *not* alone and there is a place for them to get help."

CAPS programs serve to educate students, families and educators on how to recognize bullying and make them aware of the detrimental effects it can have on individuals. CAPS offers preventative and reactive solutions to assist students, as well as educators, in putting a stop to bullying.

There are different kinds of bullying, explained Mr. McCormick. There is the obvious, easier to recognize "face-to-face" bullying and then there is the bullying that is done on a more subtle, discreet level, often by girls, according to Mr. McCormick. And then there is "cyber-bullying" or bullying done through the Internet or texting.

The ability of the Internet – Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, and group texts – to crush a child or teen is extremely powerful. "A quick video posted on Youtube can cause tremendous, almost instant harm," said Mr. McCormick. "Everyone knows about it."

"It is not always easy to get through to a child and education is by far the biggest part of the CAPS mission. The volunteers are able to spark and interactive conversation and keep students engaged. They are also able to get the teachers involved and leave a follow-up curriculum," said McCormick.

To Mr. McCormick, being a CAPS volunteer is the ultimate in providing a special, much-needed service to the community's youth. Utilizing his professional experience, he is able to help assure that CAPS continues to operate and comply with the various rules that apply to a nonprofit, he explained. He also assists in organizing and chairing board meetings and acts as a voice for CAPS, helping to introduce new fundraising initiatives, such as the upcoming 5K run/walk on October 6 at Sunken Meadow Park that will serve to raise awareness and funds for CAPS programs.

The success of CAPS is dependent on the efforts of both volunteers and board members, Mr. McCormick said. All CAPS representative are very active – and passionate- about bringing their unique experiences to help CAPS continue to achieve success, all because they believe that while indeed there is the power to hurt through bullying, there is also – equally - the power to heal and prevent harm – through active participation in an organization such as CAPS.

“Staff and volunteers of all ages are willing to give so much,” said Mr. McCormick. “It is awe-inspiring. I am amazed at the dedication and willingness to do what they do.. I am inspired to do it too... they tug on your heartstrings – these stories of bullying. It is not easy, but everyone pulls together. Everyone knows what the goal is and is always rolling in the same direction. No one ever loses sight of the goal, which is to help children.”

CAPS is currently seeking volunteers to assist in furthering its mission. The organization is located in Roslyn and is open Monday through Friday, 9am to 4pm. For more information, call 516-621-0552 or visit www.capsli.org.