

SEATTLE & THE NORTHWEST

Bring out the best in all of us

Terrie Ward counsels girls at the King County Youth Detention Center, most of whom have been sexually abused. Of the 52 virtues she is trying to teach the girls, Wards says, trust is the toughest.

But they are learning it, she says, through a program called the Virtues Project. Proponents say it is a simple yet effective way to draw out the best behavior in people by constantly reminding them of positive qualities they already possess.

Ward recalls a 13-year-old-girl who had been sexually molested since age 3 by her mother's boyfriends - "passed around constantly by men in her mother's house. I thought, how will she ever heal from all the damage to her psyche and body?" Ward said.

The girl came into the chaplain's office one day, "agitated and afraid she was going to beat up another girl," Ward said. "I said to her, 'Remember the virtues' and asked her to draw a flower. She put her face in the middle of the flower, and wrote down the virtues she had - 'loyalty, honesty, kindness, love, responsibility, thankfulness and creativity' - in the petals. Then she wrote the virtues she was working on: 'trust, trustworthiness, flexibility, joyfulness, humor' and said 'The flower is me, and it's still growing.'"

"I was depressed by her story, yet there she was, telling me there's hope for her," Ward said. "Any time I've used the virtues, it has always worked."

What distinguishes the Virtues Project, proponents say, is that it provides a non-threatening vocabulary and strategies for discussing and practicing virtues held in high regard by various cultures and religions throughout history.

Ward said the Virtues Project has helped an estimated 1,000 kids over the last two years in the chaplaincy program. Like many people involved with the project, Ward strongly believes it should be expanded.

"The virtues aren't new words, but we are using them intentionally to develop qualities of the spirit. It's a matter of calling forth the qualities of the heart these kids already have."

A virtuous reality

Educators finding new ways to promote values and character

BY DEBERACARLTON HARRELL

P-I REPORTER

A benign epidemic, one that is spreading nationally and in Washington, is making the age-old word "virtue" politically correct.

Everyone, it seems, has an opinion these days, even if not everyone can agree on definitions. Most concur, however, that when it comes to virtue, more is better.

It is not just devastating headlines of the Oklahoma City bombing, kids carrying guns, and other evidence of "evil" that is driving a nationwide character education movement, say teachers, parents, social workers, lawmakers and religious leaders. It is the sense that too many people no longer know right from wrong.

"There is increasing feeling that too many people are technological wizards, but morally illiterate," said Linda Kavelin Popov, a psychotherapist and co-founder of the Virtues Project. Popov recently spoke in Seattle at an appearance co-sponsored by the Church Council of Greater Seattle and the United Nations Association. "The good news is there really is a recognizing craving for virtue now in our society," Popov said.

As Randy Dorn, former Democratic state representative from Olympia and former chairman of the House K-12 Education Committee, put it: "There is a growing movement for character education, in this state and the country. People are saying they want higher moral standards and many of the so-called virtues are things people agree on."

Although the initial push toward values education nationally and in this state started in church groups with religion-based teachings and in suburban schools with such curriculum emphasis as "random acts of kindness," character education is spreading.

In Washington state, such basic virtues as honesty, caring, trust, tolerance, self-discipline, respect, kindness, creativity, compassion and justice are being taught in a growing number of parenting classes, schools, day care centers, businesses, substance abuse programs and even prisons, through a Canadian-based approach called the Virtues Project.

The program is based on 52 virtues common to seven major religions. Yet while a focus on "spirituality" is used in church groups, the proj-

ect is also being adapted and "secularized" for some PTAs, schools and businesses by substituting, for example, the word "conscience" for "God." I feel the reason the Virtue Project is succeeding so well is that it is filling a void," said Marian Bock, coordinator for the Church Council of Greater Seattle.

Even the Legislature, after years of divisive rhetoric over how and where to teach values and still maintain constitutional separation of church and state, passed a character education clause last year to the school-reform Basic Education Act of 1993. The little-publicized law lists "honesty, integrity, trust, respect for self and others, responsibility for personal actions, self-discipline, a positive work ethic, positive behavior and family as the basis for society" as among "certain basic values and character traits essential to individual liberty, fulfillment and happiness."

John Thorp, director of school enhancement programs for Seattle Public Schools, said there is a heightened recognition of the need to instill in students tolerance, conflict resolution and decision-making. "I think values education is critical; it's a huge issue," Thorp said. "Keeping church and state separate is a big hurdle, but I think there's more division than there needs to be. If things keep trending, toward more violence and more lack of respect...more self-centeredness, we're going to get to the point where we either come together and talk about these things or head down the road of revolution and a breaking apart of the culture."

Bob Drov Dahl, a professor of religion at Seattle Pacific University who teaches a values and ethics class in the school of education, said the difficulty lies in how to teach and define what each virtue really means. "We think of a virtue as a constant, but in fact, it's not; it's open to interpretation," Drov Dahl said. "What does it mean to be courageous? So how do you teach courage? The great shift of the last two decades has been the shattering of a false dichotomy in education that assumed you could teach facts and information without having to negotiate the values arena of life."

VIRTUES PROJECT
INTERNATIONAL

Condensed from Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Washington
May 30, 1995