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Local women launch company to help when “girls hurt girls”

BY [EMILY BUSSE](#) | OCTOBER 02, 2009 7:20 AM[✉ SHARE/EMAIL THIS ARTICLE](#)

When Blair Wagner’s daughter Libby was in third grade, her friends stopped talking to her. For months, Libby was treated as a “nonperson,” and Wagner said she felt helpless watching her daughter cry herself to sleep.

But it was what Libby said one night, looking up into her mother’s eyes as she tucked her in to bed, that stirred Wagner into action.

“She said, ‘Mom, I’m going to pray for God to take me away,’” Wagner said. “It was like a punch in the gut.”

Soon, Wagner got in contact with her daughter’s school counselor at Wickham Elementary, Jane Balvanz. Both women felt passionately about emotional bullying among girls from own experiences.

And it wasn’t long after they met that the two women collaborated to form the organization A Way

Through to combat the prevalence of destructive friendships from kindergarten through eighth grade — or as they call it, “when girls hurt girls.”

What began as series of seven free workshops for both parents and daughters developed into a business, and now is reaching families across the nation.

A Way Through sells books and posters online, in addition to offering free audio sessions or one-on-one phone conversations for parents.

The women held a 45-minute tele-class last month with people from 34 states and one from Austria, said Julie Perrine, the organization’s virtual assistant. The group also got an order for its products from the Grand Cayman Islands last week, she said.

“I fully expect this business to go worldwide because it’s a problem worldwide,” Perrine said. “I think that’s a really exciting thing for them, but also for all the people the information will be able to help.”

According to bullying resource website, Stop-Bullies.com, bullies persecute a girl every seven minutes at school.

A key to dealing with that harassment on parents’ end is encouraging girls to solve problems on their own, Wagner said.

“[It’s] how to coach them from the sidelines,” Wagner said. “You can’t fix the problem for them. It’s her problem, and it has to be her solution, and that’s really, really hard for the parents.”

Beth Knudson, a mother with two daughters who attended Wickham, used the workshops years ago, and said her family still has a laminated poster from A Way Through hanging in the home.

“Four of five years later, I haven’t had any problems with my daughters,” Knudson said.

Though she was uncertain of A Way Through’s role in the progress, she said the camaraderie helped.

“It was just important to understand it happens to a lot of people so they shouldn’t be so surprised or shocked,” she said.

Though Balvanz had her doubts when Wagner started toying with the idea of making their cause a business, she’s now having “a blast.”

“When you have a hand in creating good problem-solvers, that’s just a wonderful thing,” she said. “That’s what you want for any human being.”