

UNION PARISH: TOGETHER WE CAN BE BULLY FREE

On February 9, 2016 Union General Hospital's Community Program, "Union Parish: Together We Can Be Bully Free" was recognized at the national Hospital Charitable Services Awards. The awards were presented at a dinner in Atlanta, Georgia for representatives from hospital community programs nationwide.

This year's **FOUR** "Programs of Promise" were selected from a pool of 101 nominees. Each nominee had to demonstrate excellence in the following five criteria areas: community impact, innovation, collaboration, transferability and best practice. The Hospital Charitable Services Awards is a national program sponsored by Jackson Healthcare.

Jackson Healthcare instituted the Hospital Charitable Services Awards in 2010 to identify high-impact community health programs and have them share their stories and offer them as models for other communities to replicate.

Union General Hospital's "Union Parish: Together We Can Be Bully Free" community program was chosen for this prestigious award for its contribution to the healthcare system in Union Parish and for its efforts in improving the quality of rural healthcare through educational outreach efforts.

Union General Hospital in Farmerville Louisiana conducted a Community Health Needs Assessment in 2011 and another one in 2015 in order to meet the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) guidelines published in Notice 2011-52 on July 7, 2011. This Notice Addresses the community health needs assessment (CHNA) requirements included in Section 9007 of the Affordable Care Act. CHNA requirements went effective for tax years beginning after March 23, 2012.

The CHNA requirements apply to every hospital organization that has been recognized (or seeks recognition) under Code Section 501(c) (3).

Information gathered from community meetings, stakeholder interviews, discussions with the hospital leadership team, as well as the review of demographic and health status and hospital utilization data was used to determine the priority health needs of the population. Early Education in Schools was among the priorities identified by CHNA Hospital Steering Committee (CHSC).

In 2012 a team of professionals from Union General Hospital, came together with their experience and backgrounds to offer, “Union Parish: Together We can Be Bully Free” to the Community of Union Parish in collaboration with Crime Stoppers, Union Parish Sheriff’s Office and Union Parish School District. The program began in the fall of 2013.

There is a strong link between bullying and suicide, as suggested by recent bullying-related suicides in the US and other countries. Parents, teachers, and students learn the dangers of bullying and help students who may be at risk of committing suicide. In recent years, a series of bullying-related suicides in the US and across the globe have drawn attention to the connection between bullying and suicide. Though too many adults still see bullying as “just part of being a kid,” it is a serious problem that leads to many negative effects for victims, including suicide. Many people may not realize that there is also a link between being a bully and committing suicide.

Bully-related suicide can be connected to any type of bullying, including physical bullying, emotional bullying, cyberbullying, and sexting, or circulating suggestive or nude photos or messages about a person.

Schools have more serious problems with bullying and suicide related to bullying. This may be due to an excessive problem with bullying at the school as well as after school. It could also be related to the tendency of students who are exposed to suicide to consider suicide themselves.

Union General Hospital, Crime Stoppers and the Union Parish Sheriff’s Office meet with the students three times a year. The program kick-off was in October 2013.

Over 500 students were served during the first year increasing the numbers to over 600 the second year.

The children in Union Parish are being taught through this program how to recognize, report, and react to bullying. Bullying can be dangerous especially when uncontrolled and can go on for a long period of time before it is reported or a consequence is noted. It is very important that the children are aware bullying is a crime and we as educators, law enforcement, and health care workers want to protect and improve these young lives. It is the goal of the program to educate, identify, and to control bullying whether it is physical, mental, or cyber bullying.

Bullying experiences are becoming increasingly common inside and outside the classroom and have devastating consequences. Traditional and cyber bullying threatens a children's need for self-esteem, sense of belonging, sense of control, and meaningful existence. Bullying also leads to long lasting negative results affecting goals, ambitions, life choices, and feelings of self-worth.

We truly feel that this is only the beginning, and with the involvement of organizations like the Hospital Charitable Service Awards we know we will reach our goals and meet the expectations of the program.