

Project Change Reaction

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Help break the chain

Tammi Burns has always wanted to make a difference. A survivor of domestic abuse, Burns, the owner of "Break the Chain Apparel" in Stayton, has started a project designed to give middle school and high school students a "noninvasive way to bring about change."

Salem's Stephens Middle School is the first to participate in "Project Change Reaction." The project's first step was to survey 60 kids ages 12 and 13, and ask what is the most prevalent problem they face every day. They selected verbal abuse and are now designing artwork for T-shirts that use the theme: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but sometimes words are worse."

The student with the winning design will work with Break the Chain artists to develop the final T-shirt design. Students from the school will then have the opportunity to sell these T-shirts as a school fundraiser.

"Project Change Reaction is all about empowering our youth to combat the serious issues they face," Burns said. "It gives youth the chance to speak out against abuse and addiction."

Burns said that Regis High School in Stayton would begin Project Change Reaction this month around the theme of teenage drinking.

"These schools are the first links in the change," Burns said. "Another cool thing about this project is that the students will be graded on it as part of the curriculum."

Students from Stephens Middle School were inspired to write to Gov. Ted Kulongoski about the issue of verbal abuse and how "Project Change Reaction" affected them.

Bringing abuse, addiction and other social issues to public awareness is nothing new for Burns. Inspired by the tragic shooting death of Eric Gordon in 1994, Burns, the manager of a small boutique at the time, teamed up with a victim's advocate and started producing T-shirts with "No Violence" on them. According to the group's Web site, "No Violence" became very large very fast and was available for sale in 37 states. The makers of "No Fear" products sued "No Violence" for trademark infringement and the company disbanded in 1996.

But that loss didn't stop Burns. Her passion is obvious in Break the Chain Apparel's mission statement, which states in part, "[We are] ordinary people making positive changes in the lives of others by creating clothing with a voice that inspires social changes while using apparel as tools to help fund social programs. We feel that we can inspire change by developing messages that look edgy, and make people want to wear them. It is a very simple idea to use people as billboards. You can be involved simply by wearing a T-shirt. The person reading it may be the one needing the message or know someone that needs it."

The company is searching for business sponsorships for Project Change Reaction. The businesses that join the cause will be involved in selecting the winning design, and all aspects of the publicity this project will bring.

Break the Chain Apparel donates to a different nonprofit each month. For more information, visit www.breakthechainapparel.com or call Burns at (503) 859-5555.