

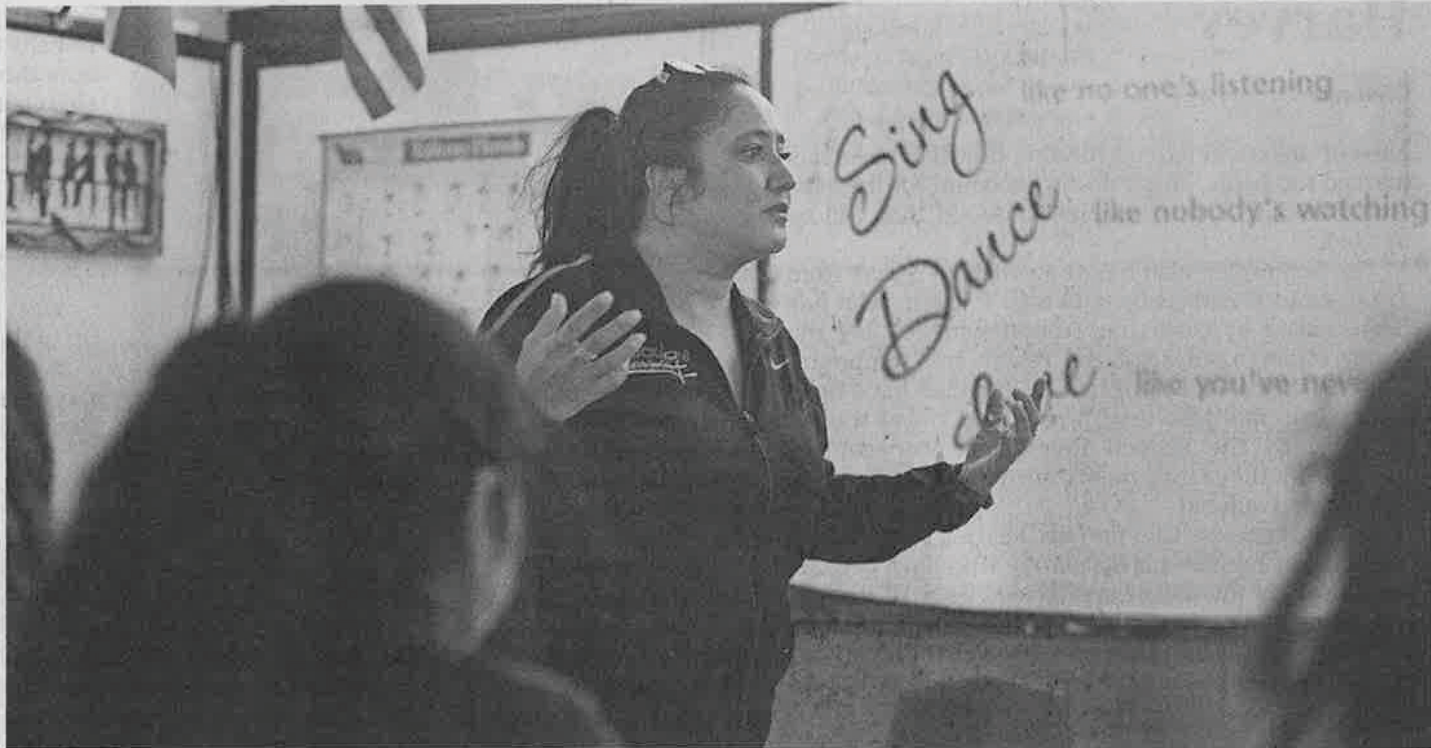
Caller Times

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Lucid Love founder Veronica Cabada speaks to students Tuesday at Cullen Middle School about her son's death and the effect bullying had on him. Cabada founded the Lucid Love organization in memory of her son. CASEY JACKSON/CALLER-TIMES

Mother of bullying victim gives presentation to local students

Cabada's son died of an overdose in May 2013

Alexandria Rodriguez
Corpus Christi Caller Times
USA TODAY NETWORK - TEXAS

When Veronica Cabada saw a middle school student begin to cry during her presentation on bullying, she knew she had touched the hearts of her audience.

The student was one of about 25 girls that filled a Cullen Middle School classroom to listen to a presentation by Cabada, founder of Lucid Love, and Sal Montelongo, its director.

After Cabada's son Sebastian, who was a victim of bullying, died of a drug overdose in May 2013 she began visiting schools to tell students about her and her son's experience.

The middle school girls focused their attention to the front of the classroom while Cabada talked about Sebastian, who left behind his parents, a girlfriend and his unborn daughter.

"He was a skater, he was an athlete, a swimmer," Cabada said. "He was like you."

Montelongo and Cabada share their experiences with bullying in hopes that it will make students speak up about being bullied. They also had a message for those who hurt others.

"It's better to be friends than to hate each other," Montelongo said. "It takes too much energy to hate."

Although Cabada's son was assaulted by his bullies, she still chooses to see the good in all people and avoids the word "bully."

Cabada and Montelongo will continue to speak to students in schools in Corpus Christi in hopes they can save at least one student from taking their life.

Judge Jose Benavides, who is pas-

HOW TO SPOT BULLYING

Students who are being bullied may exhibit these warning signs.

- Injuries they can't explain
- Lost or destroyed items, including clothing or electronics
- Frequent headaches, stomach aches or complaints of feeling sick
- Faking illness
- Changes in eating, including binge eating or skipping meals
- Difficulty sleeping, frequent nightmares
- Loss of interest in school and declining grades
- Avoiding social situations, sudden loss of friends
- Decreased self-esteem, feeling helpless
- Running away from home, harming themselves or talking about suicide

Source: Stopbullying.gov

sionate about ending bullying, helped bring Lucid Love to Corpus Christi.

Benavides knew the only way to address the problem was to bring the issue of bullying to the attention of children and schools.

"I told the schools to educate the kids about bullying. We came upon a person that has a program called Lucid Love," Benavides said. "I saw the presentation and said 'We need to do this.'"

The judge then began contacting superintendents at Calallen, Tuloso-Midway, West Oso and Corpus Christi independent school districts.

Armin Lopez, a juvenile case manager for juvenile truancy in Nueces

County, quickly jumped in the efforts to raise awareness about bullying.

Lopez began efforts to get Lucid Love to travel and give their presentation to schools in Corpus Christi. But he had to find the money to bring them to the area.

"I thought I could use my budget, but it wasn't going to be feasible," Lopez said.

Denise Hutchinson-Bell, program director and instructor for the GED program at the Flour Bluff Community Outreach Center, helped Lopez apply for funds through community grants and helped secure a grant from H-E-B, he said.

Del Mar College and South Coastal Area Health Education Center also donated money, which helped keep Lucid Love in Corpus Christi longer, Lopez said.

Through donations Lucid Love will present to 16 schools in Corpus Christi and three in Robstown.

"I really decided that what I wanted to do is make sure the presentation is to middle school students and make sure these kids understand these kids that bully use their power, (use) embarrassing information," Benavides said. "We want these kids to know (bullying) is not tolerated."

Cabada and Montelongo also will give a free, public presentation aimed at parents Saturday at the Flour Bluff Community Outreach Center. Cabada said the presentation will be geared toward helping parents learn to be a support system for their children, whether or not they are bullied.

"I'm really happy to have her here. To get awareness and understanding," Lopez said. "We don't want (what happened to her) to happen to other parents."