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Miramonte writer hopes bystanders step in to stop sexual assault

By Jennifer Wake



Miramonte alumna Kate Nerone

Photo provided

When Kate Nerone wrote an article for the Miramonte Mirador about what consent means and what constitutes sexual assault, she never thought it would receive the reaction it did. Classmates began to reach out to Nerone, wanting to share their stories. Soon after, she published an opinion piece in the Mirador, describing several alleged assaults of those who approached her – and she became a champion of something called bystander intervention.

“Once I started talking to people, some of the statistics, you know, came alive,” Nerone said. “I had a discussion with one of my close guy friends who said the article shattered his opinion of Lamorinda; he finally got a glimpse of what was happening [here].”

“I was surprised at the reaction [to the article],” added Nerone, who said she received a hug from Miramonte Principal Julie Parks when she saw Parks on campus after publishing the piece. “She was really supportive. I was expecting a lot of hate and backlash [from students], but a lot of feedback was really supportive, thanking me and saying ‘finally.’”

Approximately 1.8 million adolescents in the United States have been the victims of sexual assault, according to the “National Survey of Adolescents,” conducted in 1998 by the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center in South Carolina. The U.S. Department of Justice National Sex Offender Public Website reports that teens 16 to 19 years of age were three and a half times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault, and approximately one in five female high school students report being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner.

Nerone believes bystander intervention can make a difference. “I’ve been in situations like that, in social settings where you know something ‘isn’t right.’ I think it’s important to learn how to read the signals,”

she says. “This is not just a guys versus girls issue. Everyone could use more education.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identified three programs that have been shown to be effective in preventing sexual violence perpetration: Safe Dates, which focuses on changing adolescent dating gender-role norms and improve peer helping and conflict-resolution skills; Shifting Boundaries, which focuses on increasing knowledge and awareness of sexual abuse and harassment and promotes nonviolent behaviors and intentions in bystanders; and RealConsent, which is a bystander-based model that focuses on increasing pro-social intervening behaviors, including knowledge and skills for safely intervening. RealConsent consists of “six 30-minute web-based, interactive modules that include didactic activities and episodes of a serial drama to model sexual communication, consent, and positive bystander behaviors,” according to the CDC. Additional programs including Green Dot, a bystander-based prevention program, are identified as “promising.”

A recent four-year study at Kentucky high schools involved Green Dot-trained educators who conducted schoolwide presentations and recruited student popular opinion leaders to receive bystander intervention training. Nearly 90,000 students completed surveys, which showed that between 2014 to 2016, Green Dot implementation at those high schools significantly decreased not only sexual violence perpetration but also other forms of interpersonal violence perpetration and victimization.

While Nerone thinks it’s good to bring students together to open a discussion about sexual harassment and assault, she believes getting bystanders involved and able to speak up when they see something they know is wrong, or to simply ask more questions, will have a stronger impact.

“People don’t want to meddle in sex or hooking up in general, but I think I’d rather be uncomfortable than think something would happen,” Nerone said. “I want this to permeate social gatherings so people start talking about it and do something.”

The Acalanes Union High School District has a strong policy against sexual harassment and assault, with disciplinary action including possible expulsion, but it requires that victims report the alleged assault. According to the DOJ, only 30 percent of sexual assaults are reported.

As the new school year begins and Nerone heads off to college, she hopes that all Lamorinda students will take more responsibility and look out for each other.

“One of my sister’s slogans is ‘Not everyone will be a victim, but everyone will be a bystander.’”

To learn more about ways to combat sexual assault, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/prevention.html>.

To read Nerone’s Mirador article, visit <https://mhsmirador.com/opinion/2017/06/05/it-happens-here-sexual-assault/>.

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Grazing goats sighted on Moraga hillside

These grass-munching goats were spotted grazing on the hillside near the Rheem Valley Shopping Center Aug. 12, ridding the area of dry brush, which is a potential fire hazard.



Photo Sora O'Doherty

Correction:

The Lamorinda Weekly’s Aug. 9 story “Snoopy hosts hi-octane hockey seniors” stated that Mark Sertich, member of Charles “Sparky” Schulz’s original team the Santa Rosa Diamond Icers, was 92 years old. He is 96.