

Choosing

SELF

By KRISTY GRAY
News-Record Writer

Just this year, Bridgette Fogle, a ninth-grader at Twin Spruce Junior High School, saw her friend singled out at school.

Her friend had turned in fellow students for acts of vandalism. When the word got out, she was labeled a "nark." Kids threw food at her in the lunchroom and harassed her for a week afterward. She stayed home from school one day to escape the scrutiny of her peers, Fogle said.

Fogle and other friends stuck with her and helped her through the abuse. But it's not always easy to do what's right, Fogle admits.

"It's hard. You feel intimidated by the way they are," Fogle said of stepping in and confronting bullies.

"But I wouldn't want to be in that position. If you're in that position, you just want to quit."

Classmate Cameron Mock agreed.

"It's really hard. You want to have friends and all, and if you go against the grain, you're afraid of being singled out," Mock said.

Leon Quan understands those challenges.

As the keynote speaker of this week's Life Choices Symposium, he wants kids to "find moments of clarity so they can find themselves," he said.

In other words, find that positive, powerful something that identifies you, and you won't need to follow the crowd to feel worthwhile. You'll forge your own path.

For one student it may be academics. For another it may be music. For still others it might be athletics, art, rodeo, construction, sky-diving, writing stories or basket-weaving. Students might find their clarity in volunteering, their family or in their friends.

Anti-harassment coalition's upcoming Life Choices Symposium teaches students that to fight harassment, they must empower themselves

A CHALLENGE TO STUDENTS

Leon Quan, 33, of Phoenix is a motivational speaker who works with students around the country teaching respect, tolerance and decision making. His presentations challenge students to realize the power they hold to influence the world around them. He is also a youth pastor. His first book, "One Second to Think: 20/20 Mindsight for Your Critical Moments of Brilliance," is due out this summer.

He will speak at several schools and community events this week as part of the Campbell County Anti-Harassment Coalition's Life Choices Symposium.

Find his schedule on Page B4.



LEON QUAN

For Fogle it's soccer, basketball, National Honors Society and an occasional karaoke session at Easter Seals. For Mock, it's all things sports. He's also a top student.

Quan knows, first hand, what can happen when a kid doesn't have a strong sense of identity or worth.

In 1991, Quan's older brother was involved in a gang-related murder of a pregnant woman. He's served 14 years of his life sentence in prison.

Growing up, the Quans were a pretty typical family. Their father owned his own business. They didn't live in the projects.

But his brother had bought into an identity that was not his own. By nature, gangs are about conforming to a group mentality.

"When they buy into that identity, they buy into that attitude. They think they don't have to have a conscience because they are so young," Quan said. "I really try to identify those messages my brother internalized and made his own."

Pay attention to some of the themes bombarding youth in today's popular culture, he said. The teenage market is worth billions and advertisers aggressively pursue that profit.

"They need to break away from being sold their identity. A motivated, self-aware teenager is one who will ultimately shape their campus and community," Quan said.

Today, Quan's brother can see the horrible consequences of his actions. But he will always look back from prison.

"I think he definitely feels remorse. He deeply affected a lot of people's lives. He sees the impact he's

See CHALLENGE on Page B4

Page B4 The News-Record, Gillette, Wyoming, Sunday, March 13, 2005

LIVING

Challenge: Teens are at risk

Continued from Page 1

had on us. He has a deep sense of regret," Quan said.

Quan uses these experiences in his presentations, but they don't define his message. With humor and real-life insight, he challenges students to realize the power they have to influence the world around them.

The Life Choices Symposium is a project of Campbell County Anti-Harassment Coalition. It's the coalition's second such event to raise awareness of bullying.

It's a matter of changing perceptions, said coalition member Barbara Parry. Some people think bullying is a case of kids being kids. Some parents may have gone through it themselves and consider it a rite of passage into adulthood.

"There was a long time where folks felt that treating minorities differently was an OK thing to do. It took a long time to change that," she said. Similarly, changing attitudes about bullying will take a period of reeducation, she said.

The Life Choice Symposium

goes beyond harassment. This year, high school sophomores will attend four break-out sessions covering several challenges facing teenagers today — teen pregnancy, harassment, drugs and drinking and, from Quan, learning to find their passions.

"Our teenagers are at such risk of all kinds of things. This just gives them support to make healthy decisions or choices," Parry said.

Fogle and Mock, the Twin Spruce ninth-graders, have seen bullying in their school. They can recognize it for what it is and know of the horrible consequences it can bring.

Even with resumes with long lists of activities, good grades and supportive friends, it's not always easy to do the right thing — even when they know what it is.

But they try to think about how they would feel if they didn't look right, didn't act right or choose to do the good thing even if it was the unpopular thing. They'd like somebody to step in for them.

"It's about doing what's right when no one else wants to," Mock said.

CHECK IT OUT WEDNESDAY

■ Leon Quan will speak to fifth- and sixth-grade students at Conestoga and Pronghorn Elementary schools. He'll also speak at Sage Valley Junior High that afternoon.

■ Wednesday evening, he'll speak to church youth groups at Presentation Hall at the Gillette Campus.

THURSDAY

■ Quan is the kick-off speaker for Life Choices Symposium Day geared to high school sophomores. He's also one of four presenters for the break-out sessions.

■ Ricki and Butch Barbe will speak about bullying and harassment in one session. The couple helped form the coalition after the death of their son. There also will be sessions on drug and alcohol use and on teenage pregnancy.

■ Quan will speak at 7 p.m. at the Gillette Campus Presentation Hall. This event is open to the public and is geared toward parents.

FRIDAY

■ Quan will speak to students at Twin Spruce Junior High School.

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