

LAHS Students Learn to Fight Abuse

Guest speaker Robert Diaz helps students raise awareness in domestic violence.



By Claire Chang

Students gave their undivided attention to speaker Robert Diaz as he addressed domestic violence through a powerful presentation inside Los Amigos High School Little Theater last week. Diaz, a community educational speaker of Human Options, told personal stories, causing students to gasp, sit on the edge of their seats in silence and anticipation, and even got them to laugh as he cracked a few jokes throughout the hour. At the end, students left the theater, impacted and with a better sense of what domestic violence means.

LAHS Human Relations Club leader David Villanueva was inspired to make a community change after the assembly. And even after hearing Diaz speak several times already, Villanueva said that the message never gets old. "It's really empowering," he said. "The examples and information he gives helps me learn something new each time."

Abuse appears in various forms – physical, verbal, emotional, sexual and financial – with some having more apparent characteristics than others. One out of three Orange County students are or have been involved in a violent relationship, said Diaz. People ages 14 through 22 are most likely to suffer from dating abuse, and in an effort to lower those statistics, Diaz reached out to LAHS teens by sharing "Jason's Story."

Jason, a high school senior basketball star, and Kelly, a high school junior, had dated for a year and a half. During the beginning of the relationship, the two were inseparable, always holding hands at school and finding it hard to part in between classes. A few weeks later, Jason began to implement rules in Kelly's life. First, he was restricting her phone use, then denying her the ability to hang out with friends and pretty soon, Kelly was isolated from her friends as she spent all her time with Jason.

Soon, Jason began to degrade Kelly, calling her names, criticizing her taste in clothes and shoving her when he got angry. But all seemed to have been forgotten when Jason would apologize and shower Kelly with gifts. To avoid more fights, Kelly forgave him and the relationship continued on.

Jason and Kelly's relationship happened eight years ago to people Diaz knew from high school. And unfortunately, after the first time Kelly forgave Jason, the abuse continued. Diaz introduced the three phases that forms the Cycle of Violence: Tension Building, when one is in need of power and control; Explosion, when abuse occurs; and the Honeymoon Period, when the abuser apologizes and promises never to hurt his or her significant other again.

But often times, the abuse continues and Diaz emphasized the need to break the cycle when paralleling the way Jason's father treated his mother to the way Jason treated Kelly. "There shouldn't be excuses for the past," said Diaz. "But we have to understand that violence and abuse are learned traits."

Abuse does not discriminate and it occurs to anyone, at anytime, in anywhere. Teenagers to stay cautious, stay alert for signs of abuse and deal with the issue right away. If violence is occurring to a loved one, do not try to resolve the problem by seeking personal revenge. Not only may that plan backfire, the ongoing abusive situations can take turn for the worse. Instead, seek help by reaching out to a mentor, Diaz said.