

Healthy Concepts Inc. 501(c)(3)
An Anti-Bullying Leadership Program

The mission of Healthy Concepts Inc., 501(C)(3) is to work with the community to help children combat bullying and improve self-esteem in a safe and nurturing environment. The program is the brainchild of Lisa Melendez **and her husband Nelson**, who has been building the program since 2015.

“Bullying is an epidemic right now,” Lisa says. “My husband and I own a karate studio in Myrtle Beach and we work with kids all the time. We can see it. We ran an after-school program **for at risk-youth** in Brooklyn, and when we came to Myrtle Beach and realized the epidemic of bullying extended even to here, we knew that this was something we needed to continue.”

Statistically, **in South Carolina, over** 156,000 youth do not go to school every day for fear of bullying and harassment. There are over 40,000 latch-key kids **in SC as well**, children who come home to empty houses and have no one to talk to about their day.

“Consequently, many are dealing with mental illness or depression, and are either victims of bullying or are the bullies themselves,” Lisa says. “We began this program to make sure we got to our youth and let them know that they matter.”

As a way to learn how to support these children, Lisa and her team of volunteers who share in her passion and mission began training with NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. NAMI is a national support group for people who have family members who are diagnosed with mental illness. **They meet the 2nd Tuesday of every month at her location.**

“In this way, it’s a full circle,” she says. “We work with the kids and bring in the families to be able to offer this support. If the families are not involved, then there’s a gap. We act as the bridge between the kids and the school and kids and the parents. We are the other adults that these kids can come to for support.”

The specialty focus on anti-bullying developed organically.

“We structured the time we spent with children into what we call WRAP sessions, where we teach soft skills for coping with life’s challenges,” Lisa explains. “The W stands for wellness; R for respect; A for acceptance; and P for protection. As part of the P, we taught self-defense, anti-abduction workshops, and anti-bullying.

“And when we brought up the anti-bullying, it took off and took a life of its own. We thought it was going to be a small section of the program, but all the kids started talking about it, opening up about the things that were happening on the bus, and the things they saw—what they saw on the news; cyber bullying; **even** adults bullying one another; So we started to do more research and realized there was a huge need here.”

“Last year, Anti-Bullying made a huge impact,” Lisa adds. **We saved the life of a 10 year old boy**, who wanted to kill himself because of bullying”. Because of our support, and the support of **his friend who was one of our participants**, he’s no longer in a dangerous space mentally, and is receiving professional counseling.”

Anti-Bullying and Healthy Concepts have been gaining media exposure— they've been on WPDE, WMBF news, Channel 13. **Good morning Carolina and Carolina Live** But because of a lack of funding, they lost their space to host the program for this year.

"We are trying to secure funding so we can continue and expand," Lisa says. "All of our staff are volunteers. We have a goal of raising \$50,000 to secure a location and provide scholarships for children to attend the program." **We would love to have this program running again by the next school year - August 2020**

Donate at Lisa's Go Fund Me page: Leadership Anti-Bullying Program, and contact her if you have a space you're willing to donate, or can offer assistance in launching the fundraising aspects of her 501(c)(3).

Currently, **Lisa and her team coordinate** a family enrichment night every other month. This is a free program that the whole family can attend to learn about bullying, what it is, how to report it, how to cope with it, and how to offer support in the face of it. **It is also meant for family bonding with interactive activities.**

Healthy Concepts Inc., www.healthyconceptsmb.org; 843-668-4225.

Facebook @ Healthy Concepts. Donate now to help secure a space for 2020: Go Fund Me Page: Leadership Anti-Bullying Program.

*Family Enrichment Night, **February 21st 6:30-9pm at Shepherd of The Sea Lutheran Church in Garden City and March 20th at The Karate Studio in Myrtle Beach.***

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