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ADRES : Mustafa Kemal Mah. 3001. Cad. 3092. Sok. No : 9  
ATAŞEHİR/İSTANBUL

Telefon : 0216 315 78 88

Web : [necatibeyilkokuluatasehir.meb.k12.tr](http://necatibeyilkokuluatasehir.meb.k12.tr) e-posta :

[727397@meb.k12.tr](mailto:727397@meb.k12.tr)

**ERASMUS+ STRATEGIC SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP 2016-1-TR01-KA219-033889\_1**

**“BULLYING FREE MINDS” PROJECT**

**2016-2018**

## **Peer Advocacy Report for SEN Students**

**by Tülay Tiryakioğlu and Güllüzar Karayığit - Ataşehir Necatibey İlkokulu/ Turkey**

### **What is bullying?**

The term “bullying” was described by Olweus (1993): "A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself." Bullying is a conscious, willful, deliberate and hostile behaviour by a person or a group of people which intends to harm others without feeling empathy, compassion or shame. The project aims to cope with bullying through education, empathy and awareness as stated in application form.

### **Peer Advocacy**

It is a fact that students with SEN are bullying at a rate of 2 to 3 times more than their peers. Most of our specific bullying surveys (physical, verbal, cyber, social exclusion and early school leaving) show that bullying happens to almost 35% of students with SEN.

Many students with SEN have few or no friends, and it makes it easier for someone to bully another student who is all alone or who does not have someone looking out for them.

Peer advocate is a student who looks out for other students who are being bullied or who are isolated from other students and helps them out by making sure that they are included and protected from harm.

Most students do not like to see bullying, but they may not know what to do when it happens. We aimed to use peer advocacy (speaking out on the behalf of others) that empowers students to protect those targeted by bullying.

The method was successful for these two reasons:

- Students are more likely to see what is happening with their peers, and peer influence is powerful than adults.
- A student is telling someone to stop bullying has much more impact than an adult giving that the same advice.

### **Bullies, Victims, Bystanders**

There are three groups of children who get involved in instances of bullying: persecutors (bullies), victims and children who are sometimes victimized and sometimes victimize. Besides, there are the rest of the children, the bystanders.

### **Objectives of the “Bullying Free Minds Project” Peer Advocacy Program**

We aim:

- to give an opportunity and to support students with advocative skills and efforts to make a difference, that everyone in the school can benefit from the courage and kindness of these students.
- to improve peer relationships in the schools by sociable and enjoyable way.
- to observe student engagement which is also important because bullying can be covert, is not always recognized by adults, and often occurs outside the periphery of adult view with only the students themselves as witnesses.

- to give the students the opportunity to make a difference for another student.
- to spend time with students who are bullied
- to try to get students who are bullied away from the situation
- to listen to students who are bullied
- to tell the student that no one deserves to be bullied

### **Method (Participants and Settings)**

We worked with school counsellor, Tülay Tiryakioğlu, to choose the most suitable students with SEN to include them in peer advocacy program. We chose three students with SEN (Zeliha from 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Yunus Emre from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and Berat from 2<sup>nd</sup> grade) as a pilot program. School counsellor and class teacher studied together to write into their Individualized Education Program (IEP) that there would be two to three students who would be educated, supported, and encouraged to take action if they saw Zeliha, Yunus Emre and Berat being bullied. These students, who were already chosen students' allies, would be given information about their disability and taught how to identify bullying as well as what they could (safely) do to intervene in a bullying situation. If they had questions or concerns, the students could turn to a school counsellor and/or school project member who would mentor the initiative. With the support of the school, the model quickly fell into place and the outcome quickly exceeded anyone's expectations. The student advocates appreciated having the opportunity to make a difference for another student. We also noticed that Zeliha's, Yunus Emre's and Berat's self-esteem blossomed; with supportive friends, they started making eye contact with other students, initiated high fives, and expanded their circle of social inclusion.

### **Steps of the Program:**

- Our school counsellor prepared both an individualized education plan and individualized teaching plan for the students with SEN in the circumstance of the program.
- School counsellor and class teachers chose the most suitable students to be peer advocates who should have already been their friends.
- School counsellor gave them short training how to behave and act if they witnessed the bullying event. The training is simple: If you know that someone is being teased, hurt, or harmed in any manner, you can:

- ✓ Get them away from the situation.
  - ✓ Ask the person bullying to leave them alone (only if it feels safe to say something)
  - ✓ Let them know that everyone deserves to be safe.
  - ✓ Help them talk with adult.
  - ✓ Report it to an adult.
- We prepared a pledge to help bullied students with the chosen peer advocates. By this pledge they promised their friends that they can talk to them and they will listen, that they will stand up for them, and that they are not alone. Take the following actions to carry out their promise to advocate for bullied students.



- We created opportunities for students to work together, such as assignments and activities that require sharing and collaboration. For example we prepared a poster **"I am not alone, I have you!"** that students may create an art work, a poem or an essay to share their thoughts and ideas.



### Results of the Peer Advocacy Program:

Students who have been peer advocates said, “when I saw bullying happen, I...”

- took action, instead of just doing nothing
- told them to stop being so mean
- told someone saying “that’s so retarded” hurts people with SEN and is not acceptable
- stepped in and told them to stop
- privately told the person bullying that what they did wasn’t cool
- told our school counsellor, who helped me know what to do the next time
- stood up for myself when it was me who was bullied

### A Survey to Get Students’ Feedback:

1. Student responses from a pilot program for the first year (2017-2018 educational year) report with 18 included students -3 bullied students and 15 peer advocates- reporting:
  - **Would you recommend that other schools adopt peer advocacy programs?**  
Yes 100%      No 0%
  - **Do you feel your involvement made a difference?**

Yes 100%      No 0%

- **Did this experience increase your understanding of others with disabilities?**

Yes 100%      No 0%

2. Excerpts from open-ended question,

**“What do you want other kids to know about this experience?”**

- *“It is fun, but sometimes hard.”*
- *“It makes you feel really good to help your friends.”*
- *“To understand about your friends who have disabilities and how they and other kids who do not have disabilities view it and how it makes them feel.”*
- *“There are so much more efforts they (students with disabilities) have to give than others and their families are very helpful.”*
- *“It is really weird and inspiring. I noticed that I can make a difference. This has changed the way I think about things.”*
- *“That just because you have a disability does not mean you are different. You are the same as everyone else.”*
- *“Peer advocates should spread other schools.”*

### **Conclusion:**

We organized a celebratory closure event to have everyone together with a special foods and drinks, which are prepared by parents of both bullied students and advocates.

We also mentioned our successful methods and results in our presentation in the project’s final dissemination activity, round table meeting and opening ceremony of ceramic workshop with the participation of Ataşehir County Major Zafer Karamemetoğlu, National Education Director of Ataşehir Ertuğrul Bilican, Ataşehir Political Party Codirectors Adnan Baş, Hakkı Altınkaynak, Director of Civic Social Associations H. İbrahim Çakmak, Namık Sürmen, Şengül SÜRMEN; Manager in Halkbank Tuna Arıcı, , Ataşehir Director of County National Education Association İsmail Dağ, Ataşehir Youth Services Sports Manager Seyfi Güneysu, Manager of Ataşehir Ensar Association , Ataşehir Headman of Mustafa Kemal Neighborhood Ali Rıza Saraçoğlu, school directors, parents, teachers and our students.





We decided to continue to apply the peer advocacy program in the future by expanding the circle in the light of the pilot program during the project period. If any other schools want to use our program thanks to our dissemination activities, we will give them a help.