

BULLYING IN ARIZONA: 11 WHO TOOK A STAND

By Lynn Trimble | August 2012

Caleb Laieski of Phoenix is working in the mayor's office for the City of Phoenix and making plans for college. But just a few years ago, Laieski dropped out of school during his sophomore year at Willow Canyon High School in Surprise after enduring daily episodes of bullying.

Laieski recalls being excluded from groups for being different and being gay. He was "depantsed" during P.E., called a "faggot" and nearly run over by students deliberately driving on a sidewalk where he was walking.

While riding the school bus home one day, another student hurled a stream of slurs and swear words at Laieski. "I'm gonna come and stab you," he said. Laieski believed him.

He remembers talking to a school administrator about the threat. "He told me he knew the kid and was sure something like that would never happen," recalls Laieski. "My mom just watched everything happen. She didn't want the drama of getting involved."

But Laieski's own experiences, plus the suicide of a close female friend who'd been bullied for things as trivial as wearing mismatched knee-high socks, spurred him to action.

It's easy to say you're for bullying prevention. But doing something is another matter. Some sit on the sidelines, convinced they can't make a difference. Others want to get involved but aren't sure where to start.

We've profiled 11 people in Arizona, including Laieski, who are working to prevent bullying in schools and communities. Perhaps their stories will strike a chord, helping more of us feel more empowered and better equipped to tackle a shared problem that demands shared solutions.

Bullied to Silence

AFTER 14-YEAR-OLD Merik Castro of Avondale was bullied at his school in the Litchfield Elementary School District, he did more than change schools. He offered prepared remarks during a school board meeting—calling on officials to adopt and follow new policies and procedures to protect students from bullying.

Castro and his parents, John and Shareece Castro, are among dozens of Arizonans featured in the film "Bullied to Silence," created by filmmakers Tami Pivnick and Susan Broude. Its composer/executive producer of music, Suzie Schomaker, also hails from Arizona. Shareece Castro says they'd like to see the film, first screened in Arizona in May, shown in theaters and schools across the country.

The "Bullied to Silence" cast includes additional Arizona youth who've been bullied and their families, a teacher and several students from Metropolitan Arts Institute in Phoenix, family law attorney David Horowitz and other Arizonans who recall being bullied as children, professionals with various non-profits that work on bullying prevention, peer counselors from Teen Lifeline in Phoenix, several young artists and mother whose 14-year-old daughter committed suicide after being bullied.



Filming a scene from "Bullied to Silence."

Learn more at bulliedtosilence.com.