

Mom takes action over her frustration in bullying of son

By APRIL ROBINSON, SPECIAL TO SUN MEDIA

Michelle Pierce Hamilton's son had been bullied for some time before she realized it was a problem.

The Grade 7 pupil at London's Jack Chambers elementary school was being excluded from playing with other kids in his class.

But as often happens, once Hamilton reported the problem, it only got worse.

"It made him a bigger target," she said.

It's a situation Barbara Coloroso, a high-profile bullying specialist and author who lives in Colorado, knows well.

Coloroso is speaking tonight at Lucas secondary school. She wants to help parents understand how they can break the cycle of violence that bullying creates.

"Bullying is a learned behaviour," Coloroso said yesterday. "You have to be taught to put someone outside your circle of caring."

And we all play a role, she said. That's why she'll spend the morning conducting a workshop with more than 400 school administrators, staff and teachers.

This afternoon she'll speak to about 570 grade 6, 7 and 8 pupils.

Hamilton kick-started the North London Parent Team to bring Coloroso to London after she felt she was going in circles with the school and other parents, trying to find a solution to her son's bullying problem.

"As a parent, it's an incredibly powerless feeling when you think your child is being bullied and you can't do anything about it," she said.

"Rather than being argumentative and blaming (the teachers), we thought, 'Let's help them be successful.' "

For Hamilton, having Coloroso speak is about having the community work together to find a solution.

"We recognize very much it's a community problem," she said.

And it's no coincidence the author's most recent book is on genocide. Coloroso said the connection between harsh words and larger world problems is quite strong.

"It's a short walk from bullying to hate crimes to genocide," she said. "If we really want to tackle the big problems in the world, then we've got to look locally at what we're doing to either create a culture of 'mean' or enhance a culture of deep caring."

IF YOU GO

Who: Barbara Coloroso: Beyond Bullying: Our Community in Action

When: Tonight, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Where: Lucas secondary school

Address: 656 Tennent Ave., London

Price: \$15 at the door