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Students learn it is Safe2Tell

A hotline allows kids to give authorities information on crimes anonymously. The conviction of a teen pictured with guns on his website is touted as an example of its success.

By Ann Schrader
Denver Post Staff Writer

Colorado students can put a stop to crime in their schools and communities, law-enforcement officials say, through a program that eliminates retaliation, peer pressure and embarrassment.

The CrimeStoppers-style program, Safe2Tell, offers "a truly anonymous way to communicate to do the right thing," said program director Susan Payne.

"They can give us the information to stop bad things from happening," Payne said.

A hotline - 1-877-542-7233 - is answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week by a communications specialist with the Colorado State Patrol.

There is no caller ID, a name isn't required and each tip is investigated by law enforcement or school officials. A code number is assigned, and Payne said each tip is tracked and monitored. Information about the program also is available at www.safe2tell.org.

"I see it as a vehicle to nip problems in the bud before they get out of control," said Scott Storey, district attorney in Jefferson County, which recently began promoting the program.

Storey said people need to hear the success stories such as the recent conviction of an Evergreen teen pictured with guns on his My- Space.com website, which came from a Safe2Tell tip.

Since the program was set up in the fall of 2004, about 180 tips have come from 52 Colorado cities and towns in 31 counties.

Payne said 16 percent of the hotline tips involved weapons, 46 percent were related to bullying and 15 percent involved drug or alcohol abuse.

She is most encouraged by Safe2Tell's 16 successful interventions for teens who were cutting themselves or threatening suicide.

A parent said at a recent Safe2Tell presentation at Chatfield High School that she was concerned about whether the program will endure.



Ed Lucero, a senior program officer for the Colorado Trust, talks with his son, Santiago, 9, about the boy's experiences after watching a Safe2Tell presentation at Chatfield High School earlier this month. Last week, the Colorado Trust approved allocating \$375,000 to keep the program going. (Post / Bill Ross)

Since the Columbine tragedy, "there have been a number of programs - some of them very good - and they have disappeared," said Zoe Myer. Because Safe2Tell is funded by a grant, the money could dry up, she said.

Safe2Tell partners are the Colorado Trust, Colorado attorney general's office, the University of Colorado's Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, and the Colorado departments of public safety, corrections and education. Last week, the Colorado Trust approved allocating \$375,000 to keep the program going.

Myer also is concerned that "kids are reluctant to snitch" on each other.

Payne said it's been her experience as a school-resource officer in Colorado Springs that students feel trapped in a "code of silence" that prevents them from coming forward.

Safe2Tell's anonymity helps them break through, Payne said, which two 15-year-old freshmen at Chatfield - Amber Martz and Kaci Borrego - believe will happen.

"It will get used," Martz said of the hotline.

Caroline Perez, 17, was impressed by a multi-media presentation, "Inside Out," that was shown at the Safe2Tell kickoff at Chatfield.

Perez recalled scenes showing a woman badly scarred in an accident caused by a drunken driver.

She said: "It was pretty intense."

Staff writer Ann Schrader can be reached at 303-278-3217 or aschrader@denverpost.com.