

Communities

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Noxon students gain valuable life lesson

by Shana Neesvig

No doubt about it... growing up is hard. It seems as generations progress, so does the level of difficulty associated with surviving those younger years.

Noxon School District understands that social pressures are real and can be detrimental to the well-being of students. Last Wednesday, John Williams, founder of "Life that Counts," visited the school to lead a discussion guiding students with the organization's mission statement, "Help students make better decisions for healthy outcomes."

"John is here to talk about personal choices and how to make the most of your life," Noxon principal Rhonda Horner stated, opening the assembly. She was quickly followed by Williams, who exuberates energy and the utmost positivity while drawing in the attention of apprehensive students.

He quickly gained the scholars attention and trust as he asked questions about living in the area. He asked about hunting, making a spectacle of the fact that many students have harvested big game right in their back yard. Being from Alabama, this apparently was something new to



ENCOURAGING STUDENTS – John Williams shares his struggles and triumphs with Noxon High School students during an assembly last week at the school.

Ledger photo Shana Neesvig

Williams.

It did not take long for Williams to lead the discussion to the heart of the visit, delivering a powerful, important and strong message.

"Have any of you chosen not to be in a relationship with someone, not because you had a bad interaction with them, but because you didn't think they looked the right way?" Williams inquired. "Maybe

it's the way they dress, walk, carry themselves, or maybe you think they think bad thoughts about you."

Multiple hands went into the air. Students looked around, slightly embarrassed of their admittance, but found comfort in knowing they were not alone.

Williams exposed that stereotyping and constructing assumptions about people is detrimental

to developing healthy relationships at any age. After revealing that his childhood was full of bullying, humiliation, being outcasted, alcoholism and violence, you could tell each audience member had realized he was no different than any of them. He officially gained their trust.

Students were asked to participate in an activity where they were asked tough questions. These ranged from places where one has travelled to practicing self-harm, to access and use of drugs and alcohol to violence. Adults were asked to close their eyes, so students could respond to questions without feeling like they were being spied on. When asked some of the deepest, most intense questions, pupils responded truthfully, many tears were shed as repressed feelings surfaced.

The point of the exercise was for students to realize that everyone has secrets and things going on that no one else is aware of and that everyone deserves the opportunity to be talked to, to be supported, to feel like they matter.

Perhaps, just perhaps... "If we just give people a chance, an opportunity, could the world change?" Williams asked the students and staff.

Williams shared many

instances in his life where he felt lost. In elementary school he was humiliated when he wrote a love letter to a girl he adored, only for the letter to be found and shared with the entire class. He had lost his friends over this. The girl he wrote the letter to, she was so embarrassed she moved away, never to be heard from again.

He shared the story of his middle school friend Freddie, who befriended Williams because he understood the hurt Williams was going through. Freddie was severely burned in a house fire as an infant, his entire side was malformed and as a result, he was the victim of agonizing bullying.

One day, Freddie came to school to end the lives of those who were making him miserable. Fortunately, Williams stood by Freddie and supported him. As a result, Freddie never carried out his plan.

"I wonder if 17 kids would still be alive in Florida if someone would have taken a moment to be by the gunman's side and tell him they were there for him," Williams stated, emphasizing that he is not blaming the victims.

"Let me be clear, it is never the victim's fault. But is it possible that the constructs we build in our heads about others are all wrong?" he asked.

The melancholy atmosphere was strong, it was intense, it was supported by an underlying feeling of love and acceptance. One teacher commented that watching the students, who they spend so much time with and feel close to, reveal themselves and pour out their buried secrets and feelings was hard to witness.

There were very few, if any dry eyes. Williams' message came through loud and clear. There was a new respect felt between every human present. A deep-rooted feeling that all were connected.

"Love wins over hate every time," Williams repeated twice. "Forgiveness wins over hate every time," he added, before repeating them both one last time.

For more information on Williams and his program visit lifethatcounts.org.



Sanders County Picnic

Sunday, Sept. 16 - 2 p.m.
Power Park, Thompson Falls

FSPW is hosting a Sanders County Picnic at Power Park in Thompson Falls, MT. FREE brats, burgers and beverages! Bring a chair, a dish to share, and your own plates and utensils (we'll have extra if you forget). Grilling begins at 2 p.m.

Invite your friends and family! All are welcome.

RSVP to ray@scotchmanpeaks.org.

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MEALS FOR BACKPACKS - 2018

The Town Pump Charitable Foundation is providing **\$400,000**

for qualified Montana charitable organizations and schools to support backpack feeding programs for hungry Montana children. Backpack feeding programs provide nutritious and easy to prepare meals for weekends and holidays when children are not in school.

Grant amounts will range from \$5,000 to \$10,000. Go to www.townpump.com/mealsforbackpacks/ to complete the online application. Applications should be post-marked no later than September 30, 2018. Grants will be awarded and checks presented during the month of October.

Please send the completed application to: **Town Pump Charitable Foundation Meals for Backpacks Program**
PO Box 6000 | Butte, MT 59702

For questions regarding eligibility requirements please contact the foundation by email at karenk@townpump.com or by calling Karen Kelly at 406-497-6801.



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