



**BY ANDREA F. HARKINS**  
**IMAGES BY RICHARD BROOKS**  
**& JESSIKA ROBERTSON**



# A GLOBAL PLAN TO TAKE A STAND AGAINST **BULLYING**

WHEN RENOWNED INDUSTRY EXPERT DAVE KOVAR REVAMPED HIS EXISTING ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAM, HIS GOAL WAS TO OFFER A UNIFIED APPROACH FOR MARTIAL ARTS SCHOOL OWNERS TO TEACH IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. WHAT HE ACHIEVED IS EVEN MORE SIGNIFICANT: A ROCK-SOLID, TURNKEY CONCEPT THAT'S GAINING MOMENTUM ACROSS FIVE CONTINENTS. AND, IT'S FREE!

**B**

ack in the mid-1960s, Dave Kovar witnessed a flying side kick that impressed him so much he began his lifelong journey as a martial artist. In 1972, he began practicing martial arts. Then, a

few short years later, about six months out of high school in 1978, he opened his first school. Today he has nine schools, 2,300 active students and hundreds of teachers under his tutelage.

Just as impressive is Kovar's connection to his community. Sacramento boasts a population of more than 470,000 and is the capital of California, where the average yearly income peaks in the upper-\$50,000 range. Since 1986, he has routinely taught anti-bullying seminars to more than 150 schools in the Sacramento academic school system. Kovar is breaking new anti-bullying ground today by offering martial arts schools a golden opportunity.

**"A WHOPPING 28 PERCENT OF STUDENTS BETWEEN THE AGES OF 12 AND 18 ARE BULLIED EACH YEAR. I BELIEVE THAT NO OTHER INDUSTRY IS IN A BETTER POSITION TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT THAN THE MARTIAL ARTS INDUSTRY."**

## MARTIAL ARTISTS AGAINST BULLYING



### KOVAR SEES BULLYING AS A MAJOR SOCIETAL

issue worldwide, despite the fact that awareness of the problem is at an all-time high. A lot has been done regarding bullying, but he feels the martial arts industry can do a better job and can be more effective by implementing a unified approach.

From the statistics he cites, it's clear that a better defense against bullying was needed. His new website, Martial Artists Against Bullying (MAAB), launched in March 2014 and can be found at [www.donewithbullying.com](http://www.donewithbullying.com). The site is simple to use, comprehensive and available to all martial arts school owners.

A whopping "28 percent of students between the ages of 12 and 18 are bullied each year," shares Kovar. "I believe no other industry is in a better position to do something about it than the martial arts industry."

He defines martial arts as a great way to combat bullying because martial artists naturally incorporate self-defense systems and instill self-confidence.

Bullying peaks in the 5th, 6th and 7th grades. One in 10 students drop out of school due to bullying, according to the MAAB site. With bullying awareness on the rise, Kovar hopes to head it off at the pass by focusing on children in grades five through eight, when students are most susceptible. Statistics seem no worse than before, but the



**"BULLYING PEAKS IN THE 5TH, 6TH AND 7TH GRADES. ONE IN 10 STUDENTS DROP OUT OF SCHOOL DUE TO BULLYING, ACCORDING TO KOVAR'S MARTIAL ARTISTS AGAINST BULLYING SITE. WITH BULLYING AWARENESS ON THE RISE, KOVAR HOPES TO HEAD IT OFF AT THE PASS BY FOCUSING ON CHILDREN IN GRADES FIVE THROUGH EIGHT, WHEN STUDENTS ARE MOST SUSCEPTIBLE."**

tolerance level has changed. Years ago, victims were just expected to "suck it up," Kovar says.

In the 1990's, Kovar developed his first anti-bullying program, which "at the time was the most progressive anti-bullying program out there, but we hadn't modified it forever" he says. After "massive amounts of research with a bunch of really smart guys helping me," Kovar says he reorganized the program into Martial Artists Against Bullying.

Kovar considers bullying a two-fold problem. The bullying itself is one component and the other is lack of effective tools and resources. The "done-with-bullying" sessions, located on the MAAB website, solve the resource issue, and the program can be disseminated in either three- to five-minute huddles/Mat Chats or a full-day workshop. Outline, scripts and marketing materials are all readily available for that purpose.

## **BULLY, BULLIED, BUDDY**

A CLEAR DEFINITION OF A BULLY IS NEEDED IN order to sift through this problem. A bully's actions have repetitive intensity and create a clear imbalance of power. The bully exerts intentional infliction of physical and mental distress on a continuing basis. A bully is not the kid who name-calls once or throws a ball down in frustration.

When Kovar was a kid, the thought of being bullied always felt threatening, he says. He's had some personal experiences that today have made an impact on the way he views bullying.

**BULLY:** As a youngster, Kovar witnessed another friend being bullied by a few kids, but instead of helping, he joined in. To this day, he still clearly sees the hurt look his victimized friend gave him for that behavior.

**BULLIED:** On his first day of school after moving from Montana to California, in 5th grade, he met his nemesis who he calls "Barry the Bully." Barry went out of his way to push Kovar around, put gum on his seat and call him names. He was a lot of bark and no bite, but it didn't *feel* that way.

**BUDDY:** His third example is his friend, Steven, who stood up against "Barry the Bully" for him. Steven seemed to step in whenever Barry was around. Thanks to Steven's kindness, Kovar created the concept of "buddying" in his program. As you can guess, buddying is the exact opposite of bullying.

Kovar's personal experiences, martial arts expertise, and desire to eradicate bullying, pull all the program's loose strings together.

## **MEANINGFUL MISSION**

THE MISSION OF MAAB IS TO enlist the international martial arts community in a unified effort to educate, inform and help eradicate bullying. This program is designed to help children of all ages overcome the negative impact of bullying. It teaches:

- 1. Awareness.** How to identify predator behavior.
- 2. Avoidance.** Realistic ways to avoid being a target of bullying.
- 3. Assertiveness.** How to stop bullying behavior.

If that mission sounds worthwhile to you, you are not alone.

In the 10 days following the site's initial launch, nearly 500 martial arts schools registered and pledged to offer Kovar's bullying program in their communities. Since then, MAAB's registration has soared to more than 1,000 schools from five different continents. The more schools that register, the more the mission starts to make sense.

# HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE ANTI-BULLYING LESSONS

THERE ARE A COUPLE OF WAYS the Martial Artists Against Bullying program can be incorporated into an existing martial arts curriculum. One way is to break the topics into four sessions and discuss them in huddle or mat-minute scenarios. During the course of four weeks, there are two, five-minute huddle discussions that include topics like “What to do if Someone is Being Bullied,” roleplay scenarios, a review and a strategy. After four months the program rotates through again.

Another option is quarterly sessions when a different topic is presented four weeks in a row as single classes. And finally, the most effective version of the program is the one-day seminar, where all four sessions are presented together.

Each session is designed to give participants realistic strategies for dealing with most academic school or neighborhood bullying scenarios. Here’s how some of the sessions play out:

- ▶ **Session I.** What is bullying? Why do people do it? Why is it bad to bully others? (45-60 minutes)
- ▶ **Session II.** What we should and shouldn’t do when we see others being bullied? (45-60 minutes)
- ▶ **Session III.** How should you deal with bullying? (60-75 minutes)
- ▶ **Session IV.** Buddying (45-60 minutes)



"As individual martial artists, we make a difference in our community, but as a united movement, we are changing the world," Kovar points out.

The most surprising aspect of this comprehensive anti-bullying product is that it is free to martial arts school owners. At first, the turnkey program was going to have a price tag. But, as he worked the plan, Kovar says he quickly realized it did not feel right to monetize bullying.

Eventually, there will be opportunities for donations; however, Kovar is committed to keeping the program available, for free, to anyone who wants it.

There are only a small set of rules for members to follow. School owners and instructors must teach the anti-bullying curriculum for free, without a hard sell for their school; and they need to make a simple pledge.

"There's no doubt that participating in this program will be good for your business. It will bring a completely different audience to your school. Your school will be regarded in your community as a positive force in the movement against bullying. [Because of that] your school could gain additional media attention," Kovar says.

While this type of subtle marketing approach may take longer than the hard sell, Kovar contends that "you could end up with a lot more students than if you try to close them on a three-year contract."

The pledge part is simple. School owners agree to offer these seminars to the public free of charge, or as a fundraiser for a worthy charity. The benefit back to the school owner is that, while the overall program aim

**"THE MISSION OF MAAB IS TO ENLIST THE INTERNATIONAL MARTIAL ARTS COMMUNITY IN A UNIFIED EFFORT TO EDUCATE, INFORM AND ASSIST IN THE ERADICATION OF BULLYING. IN THE FIRST TEN DAYS, NEARLY 500 MARTIAL ARTS SCHOOLS REGISTERED ON THE SITE AND PLEDGED TO OFFER KOVAR'S BULLYING PROGRAM IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. SINCE THEN, MAAB'S REGISTRATION HAS SOARED TO MORE THAN 1,000 SCHOOLS FROM FIVE DIFFERENT CONTINENTS."**

is anti-bullying, the benefits and values of martial arts are subtly communicated. Consequently, students may opt to continue learning a martial art.

Instructors are allowed some personalization of the program sessions to fit their school style, but the course should not feel like a sales pitch that is "thinly veiled as an anti-bullying seminar," Kovar states. The emphasis should be 100 percent on giving back to the community. "No one should leave feeling pressured to join your school that day. They should leave feeling confident and empowered."

There are some types of promotion that can work in conjunction with the program. They include:



- ▶ Handing out bookmarks with school contact information.
- ▶ Offering fundraisers where students can join for an introductory one-month fee and the money from the fees go back to a charity or a public school.
- ▶ Positioning an instructor after sessions to answer questions about the benefits of martial arts for those who wish to inquire.

## **COST-FREE PROGRAM**



YOU DON'T TYPICALLY EXPECT SOMETHING FOR nothing, but in this case you get all the right stuff.

Martial arts school owners who sign up receive complete lesson plans and scripts to teach anti-bullying at local academic schools or at their own school. There are free marketing materials to promote events and all school owners can be listed as anti-bullying program participants on the MAAB website. The site, Kovar says, will act as a referral service back to the martial arts schools offering the program. And, all the free stuff offsets the costly bullying issues that kids face.

There are some great ideas out there on how to deal with bullying, but specific concepts and applications are difficult to find.

"There is so much abstract information on the Internet, but it's not really usable," Kovar points out. "So much of the available information is written at a college-administrative level."

Bullying or predatory behavior in grade school- and middle school-aged children needs to be addressed through role-playing, small group



discussions and empathy training. MAAB addresses bullying behaviors with hands-on, experiential learning that provides real solutions and can take place in a martial arts school setting.

Kovar's program is designed to deal with school and neighborhood bullying scenarios. He knows that young students learn more quickly when they are actively participating.

"We can get them involved by having them answer a few well-placed questions, followed by role-playing. It's important to always give a student time to respond if you ask a question," Kovar says.

A student may need to hear a question more than once or in more than one way in order to draw an answer. The important part of this program is not necessarily the lecture. The students need time to reason through the problems presented until they draw the appropriate conclusions. Instructors need to make students feel comfortable and engaged. If they are made to feel self-conscious or "dumb," they'll stop participating and make good communication completely ineffective.

So far, MAAB has been a labor of love, so to speak. Kovar hopes to keep expanding and eventually even have a full-time staff member dedicated to the program. He's working on non-profit status and partnering with other high-level, mainstream foundations for funding. He's also seeking help from any willing philanthropic organizations that see the value and potential in this project.

In 2015, Kovar plans to launch another website, this time targeted at teachers, parents and children. The overtone will be a strong



**“THERE’S NO DOUBT THAT PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROGRAM WILL BE GOOD FOR YOUR BUSINESS. IT WILL BRING A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT AUDIENCE TO YOUR SCHOOL. YOUR SCHOOL WILL BE REGARDED IN YOUR COMMUNITY AS A POSITIVE FORCE IN THE MOVEMENT AGAINST BULLYING. [BECAUSE OF THAT] YOUR SCHOOL COULD GAIN ADDITIONAL MEDIA ATTENTION.”**



preference that they get involved in the martial arts. The new site will have links to the schools that offer the bullying program in their areas, which will help increase traffic to those businesses.

## LASTING IMPACT

THE MARTIAL ARTS INDUSTRY IS IN A GREAT POSITION to have an impact on bullying. Bit by bit, Kovar hopes his outreach will gain momentum and help to diminish and deter bullying. If martial artists participate in this program for just a couple hours a week, he believes the impact will be massive.

A powerful and purposeful anti-bullying seminar is an opportunity for martial arts school owners to make a progression of lasting change.

One thing is certain when it comes to Kovar’s view of bullying. “It’s time to take a stand,” he encourages. He sees a trend forming. And the core of it is that martial artists around the world are fed up with bullying. ➔

✉ *Andrea F. Harkins is a 2nd-degree black belt in tang soo do. She and her husband own Family Martial Arts in Parrish, Florida. Andrea is also a karate and motivational blogger at [www.themartialartswoman.com](http://www.themartialartswoman.com). You can reach her at [daharkins1@hotmail.com](mailto:daharkins1@hotmail.com), or on Twitter @aharkins1.*

🌐 *To learn about other resources available to martial arts school owners, check out the Martial Arts Industry Association’s website at [www.masuccess.com](http://www.masuccess.com). Through this constantly-enhanced website, members can access an enormous amount of useful information on just about any topic from A to Z.*

**MARTIAL ARTS SUPERSHOW 2015**  
**MEET THIS FEATURED SPEAKER**  
**DAVE KOVAR**  
**JULY 6-8, 2015** The Venetian™ | The Palazzo™  
 MASUPERSHOW.COM | (866) 626-6226