

Hope for victims of bullying

Bullying, once confined largely to the schoolyard, is occurring more regularly in the home due in part to technology such as the internet and mobile phones. Now a new strategy aims to tackle bullies head on. **Merryn Porter reports**

FORMER Cronulla Sharks rugby league player Jason Stevens can still remember the cruel schoolyard taunts of the bullies who made his life hell for the first two years of high school.

The heavy-set boy with "love handles" was an easy target for the year 10 students who would make fun of his girth.

While he largely escaped physical attacks, he said the constant verbal abuse left scars.

"It really affected my self-esteem," he said.

Mr Stevens did not tell anyone of his suffering and it wasn't until year 9 when he grew taller and his sporting prowess began to come to the fore, that the bullying finally stopped.

But it left Mr Stevens with a desire to ensure no one else suffered the same fate.

Mr Stevens will be a speaker at a two-day conference starting in Bankstown today. It has been organised by the Sutherland-based Enough is Enough anti-violence movement.

Its CEO, Ken Marslew, said the Positive Solutions International Anti-Bullying Conference aimed to provide practical strategies to deal with bullying at school, at work and in general life. Speakers, including



Tackling taunts: De La Salle Cronulla students Josie Cullen, Dane Fazakerley, Mami Kanard and Ryan Gleeson with Jason Stevens and Ken Marslew.

Picture: Chris Lane

media and sporting notables Jessica Rowe, Wendell Sailor, Mike Munro and John Stanley, will discuss topics such as handling workplace stress, bullying and anger issues and creating success from adversity.

Bullying expert Ken Rigby and behavioural modelling authority Marvin Oka head a line-up of professionals covering anger management and meditation techniques, while bullying victims Nathan Cassar and Tomasa Wan Lun will

talk about their experiences.

Mr Marslew said bullying took many forms and had far-reaching consequences, not only for the victim, but the bully, and led to ongoing violence, depression and rage across all levels of society.

The organisation is also putting together a new anti-bullying strategy, involving a workbook and DVD, which will be trialled at Sutherland Shire high schools before it is rolled out across Sydney.

"It is our intention to build resilience into victims to prevent this behaviour extending from childhood into adult life and confront bullies with the consequences of their actions, to allow them to move on from being perpetrators," Mr Marslew said.

Mr Stevens said bullies suffered low self-esteem and had little self-respect, which caused them to lash out at others to "make themselves look bigger".