Special Olympics, Best Buddies Teaming up to ‘Spread the Word to End the Word’

By Michelle Duke for Special Olympics Santa Barbara | Published on 03.02.2015 2:48 p.m.

Wednesday, March 4 marks the annual Spread the Word to End the Word day of community awareness promoted by Special Olympics and Best Buddies International.

A pledge drive will be held Wednesday at the County Courthouse from noon to 1 p.m. to kick off the campaign.

The R-Word Campaign engages schools, organizations and the community to learn about the dehumanizing and hurtful effects of the word “retard(ed)” when used in conversation and encourages everyone to create accepting attitudes and communities for all people.

Originally introduced as a medical term, the word “retarded” is now used widely in today’s society as a synonym for “dumb” or “stupid,” reinforcing painful stereotypes of people with intellectual disabilities as being less valued members of society. The R-Word Campaign declares the r-word hurtful, even if it is not directed at a person with intellectual disabilities.

“Just because we have a disability doesn’t mean people should call us names or attempt to make fun of us. We want people to respect our differences and see us as members of the community and never use the r-word,” said Chris Powers, a local Special Olympics athlete.

This year Special Olympics Santa Barbara is teaming up with PathPoint, UCSB’s Best Buddies the Montecito Family YMCA and Santa Barbara High School to lead the movement locally during the month of March. The public is invited to attend the following events to learn more about the R-Word Campaign and to take the pledge to end the use of the r-word:

» Kick-Off Pledge Drive: Wednesday, March 4, noon to 1 p.m., Santa Barbara County Courthouse

» Best Buddies Benefit Concert: Sunday, March 8, 5 p.m., SOhO Restaurant and Music Club

» YMCA Togetherhood Event: Saturday, March 14, 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Montecito Family YMCA

Students of Santa Barbara High School and UCSB’s Best Buddies will host rallies and pledge drives on their campuses to advocate the importance of ending the R-Word to students, faculty, and staff at their schools. The SBHS Special Olympics Club and Special Education classrooms will
join the downtown Kick-Off Pledge Drive to show their support for the campaign. Those who participate in the Kick-Off Pledge Drive will have the opportunity to meet local Special Olympics athletes and get a delicious cookie donated by the Fess Parker Double Tree hotel. Please join Special Olympics Santa Barbara in support of the R-Word Campaign and help Spread the Word to End the Word. Learn more at www.r-word.org.

— Michelle Duke is the special events manager for Special Olympics Santa Barbara.