

Quelling the anger in bullies

Aug. 1, 2006. 01:00 AM

[CHRISTIAN COTRONEO](#)

STAFF REPORTER

There's even a camp to collect the kids who just can't go away.

At Camp Wimodausis in the heart of the city, the kids who arrive every morning and leave every afternoon are just not the kind you send to some northern retreat for a week or two. At least not yet. To protect their identities, the names of the children who visit Wimodausis can't be published. But some of them, well, they've already made a name for themselves in a playground or two.

There are many bullies at Camp Wimodausis, as well as would-be bullies and, of course, the would-be-bullied.

"These are the kids who would get kicked out of Parks and Rec camps," says camp director Karen Sewell. "As a result of not knowing how to deal with certain situations they encounter, a lot of them have been physically aggressive."

But at Child Development Institute near St. Clair Ave. and Dufferin St., where the camp program is run, they spend time learning to check their emotions. It often takes place in a little room with a two-way mirror under the banner of a program called SNAP, or Stop Now and Plan.

That's where, on a typical day, a boy in green meets another boy and pushes him to the ground without warning. The other boy springs to his feet, cocks a fist and ... walks away.

"They learn to identify what they're feeling when they're angry and learn to stop it," Sewell says.

"That's one of the things that can hopefully allow them to generalize their learning outside of here."

The program is funded by The Toronto Star Fresh Air Fund, a charity that has been sending underprivileged children to camp since 1901.

Each session at Wimodausis hosts 24 kids, about 18 of them boys, because, as Sewell says, "boys tend to be more overt — more physically aggressive."

Eli McBean knows about dealing with aggression.

"My whole family had come (here)," the 16 year old recalls. "My brother and my sister.... My mom just wanted me to vent in different ways."

At 6, McBean enrolled in the youngest camper group, dubbed the Sharks. By age 11, he was a leader-in-training at camp — and today, he's a counsellor.

Now, when he's about to lose his cool, "I think about what I'm going to do before I do it."