

SIERRA STAR

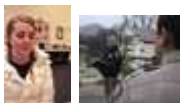
Tragedy moves students in driving safety program

[Jill Coppler](#)

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Kathleen Kabbani addresses Yosemite High School students in front of her son's memorial tree during a safe-driving session Monday.



Jill Coppler / Sierra Star

A small group gathered at Yosemite High School Monday, the start of Teen Driving Safety Week, to revisit the past. As part of a public awareness campaign of Impact Teen Drivers, the group assembled to watch a recently released video about the fatal accident of 14-year-old Yosemite High School student Ibrahim Kabbani more than a year ago.

"The community is still dealing with this," said Kathleen Kabbani, Ibrahim's mother, in an emotional address. "The kids are still in the process of reconciling this inside."

A young tree, still wispy, stood behind her, planted in memory of her son. At its dedication ceremony in November 2007, Ibrahim's father, Nour Kabbani, told a student assembly, that it would stand as the judgment tree. Kathleen was back this week to remind students of their duty to themselves and their loved ones to make responsible decisions about driving.

Ibrahim was killed in September 2007 in a single-car accident in Yosemite Lakes Park, when he was thrown from the back of a Ford Explorer after the vehicle hit a shoulder and rolled several times.

Six teens were packed in the car with Ibrahim riding in the cargo area without a seat belt. The driver, 16, had been cited days before for carrying underage passengers. In California, new drivers, under the age of 18, must have a provisional license for 12 months before they may transport anyone under the age of 20.

"To the kids, I say think hard," she said. "Think 100 times before making a decision."

The Impact Teen Drivers video was viewed just before her address and featured a similar message about the loss of Ibrahim's life and others to vehicle accidents. The awareness campaign website features Ibrahim's video and three others about California teens who were killed in accidents.

A post on the website makes an appeal to students, "If our words aren't getting across to you, our videos will. These mini-documentaries showcase the real impact left on the families, friends, and school communities of California high-schoolers who were lost tragically in avoidable car accidents.

Sophomore Kelly Mears said it was the affect on all the people surrounding her fellow classmate that has stayed with her. "It was amazing to see the impact [Ibrahim's] accident had on our campus," she said. "Even those who didn't know him were impacted. One little choice changed everyone's lives. It changed how you think. Life can be so unpredictable.

"I didn't know him personally, but just the thought that he will never graduate, he will never have his own family, he will never complete his dreams, that just ... it has a big impact."

Mears said it also gave perspective on her own choices. Mears said watching the video shed a new light on the message she gets at home for her father, who is a CHP sergeant.

"Watching the video, I just thought I wouldn't want to put my mom through that. It's not just about how something like that would affect me, it affects everyone. Just seeing that everyday struggle the families go through, that impacted me."

Kathleen Kabbani told the small assembly about the grief she still lives with. "This [grief] is something hard to define," she said. "It's ongoing. It is like a thread, pulled out of our lives, out of this community."

Another mother featured in a video compared the loss to a thread pulled out of fabric, her family continued to unravel.

Kabbani said her message to parents was about having a willingness to say no.

"You wouldn't give your child a gun and say 'go play' -- cars are lethal weapons," she said. "It's easier to say no than to say good-bye."

She said her last conversation with her son was about how she needed to speak up more for what she believed. She thinks it was preparation for raising awareness.

"We need to come together as a community and protect the lives of our children," she said. "I'm hopeful through this tragedy that lives will be spared."

YHS principal Steve Raupp told the group that the school is committed to raising awareness and educating young drivers on campus. The videos will be shown sometime at the end of April to the freshman class, but the school is still planning.

Raupp also said the school plans to apply later this month for the campaign's Create Real Impact grant. Worth \$1,000, 10 schools will be awarded based on an innovative use of the 'Impact' program or materials.

The materials, which include stickers, brochures, T-shirts and an accident probability wheel in addition to the website and video series, were sent to 12,000 public high schools in the state. The Impact Teen Drivers campaign began in partnership with educators, the California Association of Highway Patrolmen, California Teachers Association and California Casualty, and others to create an educational program for schools.

To watch the video featuring Ibrahim Kabbani, log on to, http://impactteendrivers.org/video/Ibrahim_Kabbani.