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Jeffree Clark-Merteuil knows the hardships gay students face in school.

"In my case, it was very much, 'I'm alone, I'm the only one like this, I'm different,'" said Clark-Merteuil, the president of the Frontier High School Gay-Straight Alliance. "I felt alone and ostracized."

Clark-Merteuil said the gay-straight alliance club was met with opposition at first, but now it's more than 50 members strong.

In the wake of multiple suicides by teens bullied for their sexuality, the Frontier Gay-Straight Alliance held a candlelight vigil Tuesday to remember the young men, including Tehachapi teen Seth Walsh, who killed themselves after being bullied for being gay.

"I do believe that in the case of Seth Walsh, if his middle school did have a gay-straight alliance he would still be alive," Clark-Merteuil said. A gay-straight alliance group is a club that supports people of all sexual orientations. There are eight clubs in Kern County schools.

Recent teen suicides have sparked a renewed anti-bullying campaign. The Dr. Phil Show will feature Seth Walsh and others in an episode called "Bullied to Death." The Walsh family said they are surprised by the media attention.

"Overwhelmed, in a word," said Jim Walsh, Seth Walsh's grandfather. "Nobody expected that. We are a little mountain community of Tehachapi. A lot of people have a hard time pronouncing the name, let alone knowing where we are. And now Seth's death has drawn this much attention."

But if the attention helps another struggling student, the family said they are all for it.

The Dr. Phil episode airs Wednesday at 3 p.m. on Channel 17.

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News Article

KGET Channel 17, Bakersfield, CA

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