

Girls win national award for teaching peers

By **DEB PETERSON**
 Bulletin Staff Writer

Thirty ninth-grade girls at Yellville-Summit High School are safer today because of McKenzie Hada and Sarah McCallie — safer from the eating disorders anorexia and bulimia. As part of their involvement last year in Family, Career and Community Leaders of America, a national leadership program for students, Hada and McCallie, both 15 and of Yellville, created a presentation for their eighth-grade peers on the causes and effects of two diseases that primarily affect girls.

Anorexia is an eating disorder characterized by an unrealistic fear of gaining weight, self-starvation, and conspicuous distortion of body image, according to the girls' report. Bulimia is an eating disorder characterized by recurrent episodes of excessive eating followed by strict dieting, self-induced vomiting and excessive exercise or some other means of losing weight.

Hada's and McCallie's presentation was so effective that the girls won district and state awards for it, and represented Arkansas at FCCLA's 2009 National Leadership Conference July 16 in Nashville, Tenn., where they were awarded one of only four gold medals in the Students Taking Action with Recognition (STAR) competition.

"We pulled up in our little van and there were all these tour buses," McCallie said of arriving at the hotel in Nashville.

More than 5,300 FCCLA members from all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands attended the conference.

"The impact they had may not be seen for several years," said Yellville-Summit Middle School counselor Kary Duffy, who participated in the girls' presentations. "They were taken seriously. Their message definitely got

across."

Several factors influenced the girls' decision to choose this particular topic.

"The media is pushing girls every day to care about outward beauty," Hada said. "They're supposed to have perfect hair, be skinnier. Outward beauty is not what matters. Inner beauty is more important."

See YELLVILLE/Page 6A

McCallie, who has always been slender, has been called "chicken legs" and told she needed to lose a couple of pounds.

"It hurts," she said. "I never got into bulimia, but in part I can understand how someone would go there. I've felt the trigger."

"I bet almost all teenage girls, and some guys, have thought about it even if it's not drastic," Hada said.

So the girls got busy researching both diseases. They read books, consulted the Internet, and invited Sarah Brisco, a health educator at Ozarks Unlimited Resources Education Service Cooperative in Harrison to join them in their presentations as an expert. Brisco brought nurse practitioner Susan Butler to answer medical questions.

"We didn't really know a lot about it when we started," Hada said. "My idea about it was that girls think they're fat and they want to make themselves throw up to lose weight. That was my general idea."

Hada and McCallie learned that isn't the case.

"It's not just about your body image," McCallie said. "It's also a mind thing."

"A lot of girls become anorexic or bulimic because

they want to be in control when horrible things are going on in their lives," Hada said. "There are bigger issues in their lives than wanting to be skinny. When kids have problems at home, like their parents are divorcing, sometimes all they need is a little attention, someone to care about them."

Hada says the project has made her more aware of what's going on in her friends' lives. She pays more attention now.

"I try to be there for them so they know someone cares," she said, "so they don't turn to anorexia or bulimia."

Girls who do succumb to an eating disorder can have a difficult time overcoming the disease. Up to 20 percent of girls with anorexia do not survive complications associated with it, according to the girls' presentation, which included a slideshow, statistics, diagrams, and photos of girls suffering from the diseases.

"The photos were gross," McCallie said. "They look like skeletons."

"It gives me chills," Hada said.

Diagrams in the presentation detailed the complications associated with anorexia, some of which are depression, hair loss, heart failure, rough, dry skin, bone loss and swollen hands. Complications from bulimia include tooth decay, seizures, stomach ulcers, liver and kidney damage and constant abdominal pain.

One of the benefits of Brisco's participation in the project was her firsthand account of having struggled



with bulimia herself. She also handed out cards to the girls in the audience who wrote questions confidentially for Brisco to answer. While her bulimia is under control, she confided to the girls that you never fully get over the disease, that she still has the desire and is still getting help.

In addition to giving their presentation to national judges in Nashville, Hada and McCallie, and Hada's mother Marlene Hada, their teacher and sponsor, attended seminars on leadership and family matters, and discussed their project with other STAR participants.

"I feel like I'm a better leader for it," Hada said of the experience. "This year I'm going to be president of **FCCLA**, and Sarah is parliamentarian and technical coordinator. I learned so much from the motivational speakers, from planning, talking to professionals, researching, speaking to my peers."

"We got a lot of ideas from other FCCLA clubs,"

McCallie said, "things we can do here."

"We're thinking about bringing Ms. Brisco back to talk to more girls," Hada said. "Instead of just dropping our project, we want to build on it."

Hada and McCallie feel strongly that teen girls need to know what a healthy size is for them.

"We've definitely lost the definition of healthy," Hada said.

"The girls really connected with their peers," Duffy said. "They planted a very important seed of knowledge."

dpeterson@baxterbulletin.com



Bulletin photo by Deb Peterson

Sarah McCallie, 15, and McKenzie Hada, 15, students at Yellville-Summit High School, show some of the awards they received for a presentation on the causes and effects of anorexia and bulimia they gave to all eighth-grade girls at their school.