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Kids learn their self-defense chops

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Instructor Janet Goliger leads a self-defense workshop Sunday for children ages 8-13. The free class, organized by La Cañada's Youth Council, was designed to promote safety education by teaching self-confidence and conflict resolution, as well as verbal and physical self-defense approaches. (Courtesy of the City of La Cañada Flintridge / June 1, 2014)

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June 5, 2014 | 5:45 p.m.

On Sunday afternoon, a group of about 20 children between the ages of 8 and 13 walked into a self-defense class held at the Community Center of La Cañada Flintridge. Just two hours later, they all walked out knowing how to conduct themselves in the event of a potentially dangerous situation.

A free self-defense class was offered by the La Cañada Flintridge Youth Council, a panel of nine high school student leaders who meet regularly to discuss important issues being faced by young people in the community.

According to Greg Kwolek, an administrative intern for the city who oversees the Council, the group wanted to do something to increase the confidence and self-esteem of younger students.

The class was the brainchild of Mica Bernhard, 16, a La Cañada Flintridge Youth Council member. Bernhard, a La Cañada High School sophomore, saw a need for local youth to know how to defend themselves in threatening situations.

"Kids in our city need to feel empowered to let the world know when they are in trouble," Bernhard said.

Led by Janet Goliger, a PE teacher with Glendale Unified School District who also teaches self-defense, the students who attended Sunday's class learned basic moves as well as what to say and do in difficult situations.

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"Many kids don't know to yell the word 'stranger' when being attacked, but that is what other adults respond to the most," Goliger said.

--Sara Cardine, sara.cardine@latimes.com

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