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## Family, community struggles for answers after 11-year-old fatally shoots herself

By [Dean Narciso](#)*The Columbus Dispatch* • Saturday October 29, 2016 10:35 AM

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Outside Triad Middle School, Bethany Thompson hopped on the school bus Oct. 19 with a consuming darkness shared only with her friend.

"She told her she loved her and that she was her best friend forever, but that she was going to kill herself when she got home," said Wendy Feucht, 34, Bethany's mother.

The short trip to her home in Cable in rural Champaign County would be the 11-year-old's last.

Shortly after stepping off the bus, Bethany went inside and found a loaded handgun on an upper shelf, her father, Paul Thompson of Dublin, learned. Instead of playing with her cats and dogs or visiting with her pet snakes, she went to the back porch and shot herself. It was unclear who owns the gun.

The tragedy could have been prevented, said Thompson, 37, who buried Bethany on Monday and now is helping prepare fundraisers to help needy kids. He wants to know whether bullying at school might have contributed to his daughter's death.

"She was my baby girl. Everybody knew she was my princess. And she was a spoiled one," said Thompson, who is divorced from Feucht, who had custody of the girl.

Feucht said she is certain that bullying led to Bethany's suicide, noting that Bethany's friend told her that a group of classmates picked on the girls relentlessly on Wednesday.

"I think that she was just done. She didn't feel like anybody could do anything to help her," she said.

"People need to know that even the littlest things can break someone."

Thompson had planned to pick up Bethany on Thursday the 20th for a trip to Benny's Pizza in Marysville.

"She was all excited about it," he recalled of the conversation the day before her death.

Bethany was a survivor, eight years ago enduring brain cancer and the removal of a tumor that damaged nerves and gave her a "crooked" smile, her father said.

Kids in the fifth-through-eighth-grade school noticed, said Thompson. Some picked on her.

"I think that's why she took (her life)," Thompson said.

Feucht learned that Bethany had created anti-bullying posters but that an administrator prevented her from displaying them because they weren't positive.

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"I'm sure she felt pretty defeated," Feucht said.

On Monday, several parents raised concerns and wanted answers about Bethany and other allegations of bullying at Triad. Four years ago, a 12-year-old boy also took his life.

Superintendent Chris Piper couldn't answer all their questions, citing student privacy laws. But he has been meeting individually with parents. He is trying not to speculate about what caused Bethany to feel hopeless.

"Suicide is a complicated act. We're trying to find the cause," Piper said. "And there's no single thing that says this is what led to it."

Piper acknowledged bullying behavior against Bethany last year, declining to provide details. But the matter was resolved, he said.

"There was no evidence of a pattern of bullying this year," he said.

Piper said efforts are underway at Triad "to change the school climate ... and re-evaluate our anti-bullying educational side so that we are able to determine when things go from normal misbehavior to a pattern of bullying and to deter and stop misbehavior."

Teachers, students and others in the North Lewisburg school already are asking questions.

"It doesn't mean they did something wrong. But instead, what could we have done more?" Piper said he tells them.

A fundraiser to help with funeral expenses and raise money for children's programs is scheduled for 3 to 7 p.m. Sunday at North Lewisburg Methodist Church.

If you or someone you know is considering suicide, call the Franklin County Suicide Prevention Hotline at 614-221-5445; the Teen Suicide Prevention Hotline at 614-294-3300; or the Lifeline national organization for suicide prevention at 1-800-273-8255.

dnarciso@dispatch.com @DeanNarciso

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