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B.C. psychotherapist tries to make virtue a reality in age of cynicism

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SUN ETHICS REPORTER

In an age that many judge cynical, violent and hyper-competitive, Linda Kavelin Popov is crusading for old-fashioned virtues, with stunning results.

The Saltspring Island women's book, *The Family Virtues Guide* (Penguin), has sold 120,000 copies in the past decade and been translated into six languages.

The psychotherapist has even advanced those virtues - such as kindness, confidence and truthfulness - on Oprah Winfrey's talk show.

She has led virtue conferences everywhere from MacMillan Bloedel to Hallmark Cards, Australian prisons to thousands of public schools, including one in the U.S. that endured a mass murder. The Virtues Project she co-founded is operating in 85 countries.

Popov's latest campaign on behalf of 52 simple-sounding virtues is a 13-part national TV series that premieres tonight at 8:30 on Vision TV. It's called *Virtues: A Family Affair*.

"Too many of our children are technical wizards and moral illiterates. But there's hope," says Popov, and 57 year-old mother of two grown sons. She and her psychologist husband, Dan Popov, began creating the Virtues Project (www.virtuesproject.com) after they moved from New York to Saltspring Island in 1988.

The *Virtues* TV series, which is funded by Vision TV, Telefilm Canada and B.C. Film, is designed to teach parents how to bring out the highest values in the home by shifting from shaming their children for their misdeeds to naming their virtues.

"This series shows parents steps they can take to bring out the best in their children and themselves," Popov said

Wednesday in a downtown Vancouver interview. Each segment in the 13 part series concentrates on a different virtue: including idealism, kindness, justice, tolerance, forgiveness, respect and courage.

While Popov knows that her campaign to promote ethics can sound sickly sweet to some peoples in this skeptical age, she has seen her techniques used enough - including at Vancouver Island's William Head Prison, among Canadian native Indians and with Los Angeles street kids - to know that Virtues Project "has teeth."

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She's seen hard boiled convicted murderer, who've never displayed anything positive, break down in tears after being told they exhibited a positive virtue. "After all," she said with a smile, "you can't even be a good thief without determination."

As well, she's seen the virtue of forgiveness embraced by the once hate-filled relatives and friends of two students who were murdered in a infamous 1996 high school shooting in Moses Lake, Wash.

And, in connection to her up-coming TV series that focuses on families, Popov has seen countless relationships between parents and children take a turn for the better when mothers, fathers, sons and daughters learn how to identify, emphasize and practice virtues.

She knows parenting can be "crazy-making" in a too-busy careerist culture that doesn't always allow quality time with children, who often end up raising

themselves though peers and by watching a shallow and violence ridden-media.

But after running Virtues programs throughout Canada, the U.S., China, Russia, Australia, Fiji, and many other countries, Popov has seen kids remind their manic parents to practice patience, mothers successfully ask lippy teenage girls to adhere to the virtue of respect and boys with attention deficit disorder practice much more concentration after being told they've shown signs of purposefulness.

Popov and her husband, who follow the Bahai faith, developed the core of their Virtues Project after selecting 52 virtues (one for each week of the year) commonly extolled throughout the scriptures of the world's major religions: Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. She stresses that the Virtues Project is not meant as a replacement for anyone's religion.

She emphasizes the virtues her program highlights are universally accepted. They've been promoted in countless secular public schools that strive to separate church and state, including New Westminster's Connaught Heights Elementary.

And although Popov believes it's good for parents to start teaching virtues to children as young as age three, she said: "It's never too late to look an older child in the eye and say: 'I really appreciate your courage to face the problem you told me about.' If we can awaken the virtues within their character, our children will be the excellent, compassionate people they are meant to be."



VIRTUES PROJECT
INTERNATIONAL

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