

**News**

[Local News](#)  
[Features](#)  
[Opinion](#)  
[Letters](#)  
[Schools](#)

**Sports**

[Sports](#)  
[Team Schedules](#)

**HomeTown**

[Senior Life](#)  
[Births](#)  
[Obituaries](#)  
[What's Up](#)  
[Agenda](#)

**Photo Gallery**

[Photo Gallery](#)

**Classifieds**

[Daily Regional](#)  
[Ads](#)  
[Place an Ad](#)

**Submit Information**

[News Tip](#)  
[Community](#)  
[Event](#)  
[Letter to the Editor](#)  
[Printable Forms](#)

**Subscription Services**

[Subscribe](#)  
[Vacation Hold](#)  
[Delivery](#)  
[Problem - contact Dist.](#)  
[Mgr](#)  
[Single Copy](#)  
[Locations](#)  
[Vendor](#)  
[Application](#)

**Archives**

[Story Archive](#)  
[Photo Archive](#)

**A coach for the classroom****Training and coaching teachers and administrators has been a 20-year passion for Ruth Herman Wells**

By [Michelle Te](#)

While universities prepare future teachers to work with "Beaver Cleaver," more often than not, teachers in the classroom find chairs filled with students acting more like "Beavis and Butthead."

For nearly 20 years, Woodburn's Ruth Herman Wells has been coaching and training school teachers and counselors on how to motivate those disaffected, disengaged students to learn despite the many issues surrounding their lives. She often feels like a lost buoy in the ocean as she conducts national workshops on the topic of troubled kids.

"People have just grabbed me by the hands and said 'thank you,'" she said. "People who have wanted to retire early, but have found that this will help them."

Wells operates through an organization she founded called Youth Change, which offers resources and workshops to turn around troubled youth.

She has just completed her newest book series, "Behavior Change Handouts," which complement her earlier offerings, "Quickest Kid Fixer-Uppers" and "Breakthrough Strategies to Teach and Counsel Youth" series.

"I try to make people 'instant mental health experts,'" said Wells. "While I know they are not really experts, at least I teach them some of the basics. Today's kid is more violent, more emotionally disturbed and has more extreme problems."

She recently returned from a trip to New Orleans where she offered workshops to teachers and counselors who are trying to educate students whose lives have been completely altered by last year's Hurricane Katrina.

"Kids are distracted there," said Wells. "They don't care about school, they are traumatized."

While there, Wells saw electrical wires falling down in the streets, debris strewn everywhere, and even street signs gone.

"I couldn't figure out where I was going to find the school I was supposed to be at," she said. "It's tough for people to live like that. Kids are apathetic, traumatized and distracted."

Her mission was to show educators that there is "absolutely" a way to teach a child who is going through something like that.

"The reality is, if a kid goes through Katrina, or lives in poverty, or is not getting much attention at home, the world doesn't care," she said. "The world says that you still have to



Photo By [Michelle Te](#)

**Ruth Herman Wells continues to help teachers and administrators in dealing with disaffected students.**

attention at home, the world doesn't care," she said. "The world says that you still have to read, write and make change."

She tells teachers that they must not abandon their mission of teaching, but try to find a balance in understanding what a child might be going through.

"You can't force a child to learn," she said. "You have to hit the balance, and some teachers don't understand that."

Yet, children are living in perilous times and circumstances, she added.

"One of the classics was when a child said to a teacher, 'My mom hasn't moved in three days and I don't know what to do about it.' That mom had died."

In the classroom, teachers are also often dealing with students who are more violent and demanding.

"Teachers are saying, 'This kid has pushed me or touched me inappropriately. I'm scared in my own classroom,'" said Wells. "Teachers just don't know how to control the kids because they are doing such scary stuff. Kids are going through their own 'personal Katrinas,' and teachers aren't trained for any of this."

Hearing about and working with so many negative situations might seem hopeless, but Wells believes the opposite.

"The options are quite positive on what teachers can accomplish," she said. "It's really overwhelming how I am received. This summer we had a hard time keeping up with requests for inservice. We couldn't get from place to place fast enough."

Yet Wells said she feels somewhat discouraged by the pace of change.

"It's sad to see the pace of change is really, really slow," she said. "In 20 years of doing this, I've seen education move toward testing, uniforms, and things like that that may not really help a child."

Loving and caring teaching in the home is not happening as it should be, she said, and more of the responsibility is falling to the schools.

"Kids need school to be a haven, but if the teacher is not trained, then school can just be part of the problem," said Wells. "What I do should be basic 101 for every teacher and university."

Wells has taught continuing education classes at Portland State University for two decades, and has written four books for Pro Ed Publishers.

Those attending her workshops can earn college credit.

A conference in Portland Oct. 12 and 13 still has one opening. Contact Wells at 800-545-5736 for more information. The website is [www.youthchg.com](http://www.youthchg.com).

[Go to top.](#)

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