

Can you tell me a little bit about your background? Anything you would like to share about yourself? Aside from filmmaking, I love to sing, dance and play the piano & guitar...anything that has to do with music really! Of course, I also like to just hangout with my friends and laugh... even with my little sister too, believe it or not! Ya know, not many people know that I am really into science. It's my favorite subject in school!

Why did you connect with PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center? I really connected with PACER because of their philosophy and work on bullying prevention... which is getting everyone talking about it, understanding it, learning about it, finding different ways to stop it! That's exactly what I tried to do with my film, I wanted to show another way to look at bullying, get people thinking about it differently and hopefully get them talking! Like PACER, I tried to get to the center of the problem, which is why someone bullies. I wanted to show what may be inside someone who bullies that makes him or her want to lash out. I mean, there is no way to know each person's life or circumstances, but there are core emotions behind it... like fear, anger, loneliness, humiliation, sadness. In my film, I tried to show what emotion, or emotions, could possibly be going on inside, instead of just saying "he or she is bad" and leaving it at that. I was hoping by showing this, or at least recognizing that we need to look deeper at what is "inside", maybe we can have a place to start the healing and hopefully stop the bullying. Maybe before it even begins. I really feel like this is what PACER is trying to achieve as well and I'm excited to learn from them and work with them!

Why do you care about bullying? I care about this because my friends were bullied and it was ugly to watch. I was also bullied, in a different way, but it didn't hurt any less. It aggravates me so much to watch people being hurt and pushed around! It isn't something that "just happens" and goes away, it can stick with you for the rest of your life. Kids have taken their own lives because it gets so bad and they don't see a way out of it. I don't see why this can't change! I actually believe it can! At one time I felt helpless, but now I feel like I can make a difference!

What inspired your film? I was inspired to do Because These Kids because I wanted to make a difference! I wanted to show that we are all connected. Meaning that we all have the capability of being hurt and we all have a choice as to what to do with those feelings. Do we strike back or strike out... bully? Or do we stop and really look at ourselves and others, try and understand, try and create change in ourselves and hopefully others! I really want Because These Kids are to open people's minds.

Are there particular elements of your film that have personal meaning to you?
The video depicts my view on bullying. I have always seen bullies and victims as the same, despite the way they MAY be seen.

What advice do you have for someone being bullied?
I would say stand up for yourself! It is important to be assertive and to clearly let the person bullying know he or she has to stop whatever they are doing! If this does nothing or you just can't find the words, ask for support from your friends, or go to an adult you trust. Even though it's hard, always try to do something about it, it will not just take care of itself, believe me, it usually gets worse. You can also reach out to an organization like PACER. They have great resources and a lot of ideas on how to handle all types of situations regarding bullying! Just try and remember, don't take anything the bully says personal. I know that seems impossible, but just remember, it is not really about you, it is most likely a reflection of how they feel on the inside. Sadly, they are trying to make someone feel just as bad as they do.

What advice do you have for someone who sees bullying? It takes a lot of courage, but if you see bullying, you need stand up for the person being bullied. If you are standing there and observing, you're not helping, you are just hurting. Always stand up for the kids who can't stand up for themselves! Definitely don't join in, even if you feel pressured or scared you may be bullied yourself. It would make you just as much of a bully! Rumors, oh man, stop any rumors you may hear going around that are hurtful. Again, stand up and tell the person that you aren't interested in hearing hurtful gossip! Words can hurt worse than fists sometimes. If you don't feel you can do anything, at least tell an adult ASAP!

What advice do you have for someone who is bullying? If you're bullying, you need to stop and think about everything RIGHT NOW. There's most likely a lot of anger, embarrassment, depression or sadness in your heart and you may feel like pushing it off on someone else will make you feel better, but it won't. Try talking about what is going on with an adult, a therapist, a teacher, an older sibling, PACER or whoever you believe can truly help you out... but never take it out on someone else!

What do you want students to get from this – what change do you see? I want the students who see this to open their minds up and find some sense of understanding and commonality. I want all those bullying, targeted, bystanders, and ordinary students to change the way they look at those involved in bullying and how they handle it all. If you see something unusual or cruel happening in the hallways at school or at the playground, DO something! I want these kids to start changing things on their own, whether it's personally or for someone else. Try being an advocate! Make a change! Use your differences and talents to create discussions about bullying or about unity! I used my film... what can you do?

Are there any "fun facts" about the film Because These Kids Are? I actually have three "fun facts" that I can think of. One "fun fact" is that this is my first triple credit on a film! I am so proud to be a writer, actor and producer on Because These Kids Are The second "fun fact" that people may not know is that both my mom and I were both producers on the film. Actually, so many family and friends banded together to support me in making this film! My Auntie Kathryn, who I still remember playing tic-toc-clock with, also was a producer and really supported me on this from the beginning. All of the cast I know from my original acting classes. We were all a big family working together to create something very special! The third "fun fact" is about the words that are at the end of the film. All of them came from my friends! While I was writing the script, I sent them all a text asking them to give me one word describing how they felt at the end of each school day. So, the words that you see pop up at the end are all their actual feelings.

Are you going to do anything else involving bullying? Yes! I want to learn and work with the PACER organization and be involved with them as much as I can. Also, while I'm still in my teens, I plan on writing a full length feature script around the topic of bullying. But in the meantime, I am doing what I can do each and every day at school. I want to make a stronger stand and really work on educating the people I see every day, because that is the first place we should all start.