

Unity Award Recipients

- 2019 -

The “Together Against Bullying” Award

Awarded for taking action to prevent and change an attitude or behavior that physically or emotionally hurts, harms, or humiliates someone.



Charles Kolin

“Charles Kolin’s positive energy and hard work enabled him to almost single-handedly bring Unity Day to his school, Greens Farms Academy (GFA). When Charles first heard about Unity Day and saw a video on PACER’s website promoting the event, he was inspired to make this day of celebration and awareness a reality at GFA. Others’ thoughts and feelings have served as the driving force behind Charles’s commitment to this project.

From the very beginning, he wanted students who felt different or excluded to know that they weren’t alone. For the event, he wrote a speech in which he revealed his own experiences with being bullied at his previous school. In his speech, Charles shared the following: “Although I had to go through my bullying experience alone, my hope is that no one else has to. Putting an end to bullying is an extreme task. I truly believe in the best of people...I believe that if we unite as neighbors, as a family, we can end bullying so that our classmates, those who are different, those with disabilities that you can or cannot see, those who are the new kids, are all treated with compassion, understanding, and kindness. We can make sure that no one walks alone and that no one is isolated. The power of many can positively affect so many people’s lives and make them feel welcomed and part of a team.”

Thanks to Charles, the majority of the school wore orange wristbands throughout the day and, more importantly, carried on conversations about kindness and inclusion that were sparked by carefully written discussion questions. Charles wants his school to ‘lead the charge for Unity Day and help people all over the world.’”

The “United for Kindness” Award

Awarded for demonstrating outstanding act(s) of being helpful to others.



Riverhead Peacemakers

“Six years ago when I became the prevention social worker for Riverhead Community Awareness program, a student came to me about starting a bullying prevention club. From this, The Riverhead Peacemakers were born. Every year this group of dedicated fourth graders acts as role models in their schools. They read every class a book about not bullying and have them sign a pledge not to bully and to be kind. They have every school in our district participate in an event called the Great Kindness Challenge where they complete as many kind deeds as they can. During this time, all the elementary schools read a book

called Emily and the Kindness Bracelet and have the students participate in a kindness bracelet activity. Since its inception, the Peacemakers have grown and have become an integral part of our school community spreading their message of inclusion and kindness.”

The “United for Acceptance” Award

Awarded for looking beyond the differences of others and celebrating what makes each person unique.



Mr. Jamie Pernick & Mr. John Efthemis

“Mr. Pernick is one of our assistant principals and Mr. Efthemis is a highly regarded English teacher here at Lancaster High School. For the past five years, they have spearheaded a group of students who orchestrate a truly heartfelt musical performance at a “Bands Against Bullying” show that takes place every April. The dedication that these two men show to the students who volunteer to orchestrate this performance and be involved in the production of the show is second to none. Mr. Pernick takes care of the logistics of the event and attends the meetings necessary to be able to take part in the show. Mr. Efthemis works directly with the students, putting well over 100 extra duty hours from December through April when the performance takes place at the University at Buffalo, Amherst Campus.

Both Mr. Pernick and Mr. Efthemis have helped to broaden the minds of many students, faculty, and family members alike about being empathetic to one another and allowing each unique individual to contribute something special to this show. This year we have 29 students directly involved and the theme of the performance touches on issues regarding bullying, racism, gender identification, and academic issues among peers. The efforts of these two educators have helped to provide insight to all who are fortunate enough to see this production! Both Mr. Pernick and Mr. Efthemis should be acknowledged for

their selfless contributions to many students, especially over the past five years when they have participated in this “Bands Against Bullying” program.”

The “United for Inclusion” Award

Awarded for outstanding acts to help others feel like they belong and know that they aren’t alone.



Sachiri Henderson & the BEAST CREW

Sachiri Henderson, a 14 year old 8th grade student, started the club BEAST CREW her 7th grade year at middle school. BEAST stands for Bullying Ends against Students Together, which she came up with after experiencing bullying in 4th grade. The objective of this enthusiastic group is to provide a safer and kinder campus. They meet with an objective of eradicating bullying on campus and creating a kinder and inclusive campus. They have shown acceptance to peers and others on campus and work to include other

students in the club regardless of their abilities. It's refreshing to see this amazing population of young people share their experiences while working to ensure that others do not have to experience similar traumas. This club has been instrumental in creating change at Youree Drive Middle by bringing a greater awareness of bullying's prevalence, working as a group to address issues and create an atmosphere of acceptance.

Along with founding BEAST CREW at her middle school, Sachiri has used PACER's mission throughout her pageant career and has now made BEAST CREW, Inc. a corporation with the objective of having BEAST clubs and/or Unity Day events at schools and community organizations, who are already on board to share kindness and be inclusive of others while addressing bullying. She has lead her school in a number of community service projects and worked to create a kinder campus by speaking on all forms of bullying, using personal power to speak up, bystander approach, and conflict resolution to name a few. The highlight of her efforts is the annual Unity Day event, which has brought together the community. Her desire to create visible change on her campus as well as educate the community is evident in her pursuit to create a kinder community as she went from being a target to a survivor herself."

The Faces of Change Award

Awarded to individuals and groups for outstanding acts to make a difference in our community, nominated by PACER's Youth Advisory Boards in Minnesota and California



Rogue Robotics, Farmington High School Robotics Team

"The Farmington High School Robotics Team, known as Rogue Robotics, was created "to give students an opportunity to develop an interest in STEM and other team skills." Along with exploring creativity through STEM, this robotics team has been active in creating inclusion within their local community. They have made a powerful impact this year by creating two functioning power wheelchairs, hand-built from Power Wheels riding toys, for children with disabilities. The team has taken their expertise in technology and building, as well as assistance from GO-BABY-GO, to create these power wheelchairs, which can cost thousands of dollars.

While this team has won many competitions in the past, this work in their community has made a widespread impact. As one team member shared, "I think we won here more than we do in our competitions." – *Nominated by PACER's Youth Advisory, Minnesota*

Kaia Kallestad

"The moment Kaia Kallestad walks into our 2nd grade classroom she radiates kindness from her head to her toes! She is a breath of fresh air. She sees the good in everything! There is not one ounce of negativity in this young lady. She finds ways to encourage her classmates throughout our school day. She will say, "Great job!", "You can do it!", and "Can I help you?" to all her classmates. Her infectious smile and quiet, subtle ways can change a student's mood. Her kindness rubs off on everyone. If we are finishing up our Morning Meeting with one of our daily activities, you will find Kaia giving high fives to the winners of the game. When a classmate is sharing a story or special personal item, Kaia is sitting, watching, and listening to every word. She knows that item is special to her classroom friend and she wants them to shine during their sharing time. Kaia demonstrates kindness in every act she does. During this school year, Kaia was bullied by a classmate. She didn't tell anyone at first, but then found the courage to talk to her parents, who are amazing advocates for their daughter. They reported what was going on and from then on, Kaia has used her own voice to report any type of bullying behavior. I am nominating Kaia Kallestad because she is the perfect example of how a person should treat others. Kaia is creating a kinder world!" – *Nominated by PACER's Youth Advisory, Minnesota*



South View Middle School Peer Insights

The South View Middle School Peer Insights group creates a culture of acceptance and inclusion within their school walls, which extends to their community. This group started in 2010 with the simple question, of "Why Not?"

Students and staff looked at their school's footprint and schedule and asked themselves, "Why not include students with disabilities?" and from there the inclusion revolution started. Students with and without disabilities now have formalized times within their school day to interact with one another through academic tutoring or social activities. The impact of this group creates a school culture that expects inclusion in their everyday lives and extends outside of their school days. This group also participates in events with Special Olympics MN where they showcase their unified mindsets on the sporting field. Peer Insights is recognized nationally as a 'premier program' for inclusion at the middle school level.—*Nominated by PACER's Youth Advisory, Minnesota*



Prairie View Student Council

"Since one of our school expectations is to Be Kind, the student council decided to sponsor an entire Kindness Week in February. To prepare for this we made signs and put up a banner in the lunchroom. We made signs that said 'Time to be Kind' and hung them from every hallway clock in the building. We also made morning announcements the previous week and challenged every classroom to compete in a friendly competition to decorate

their classroom door for the week by incorporating a heart into their theme. For the actual week, student council officers read a quote about kindness over the intercom every morning. Students were also challenged to perform random acts of kindness all week long. Student council members had pockets full of erasers with positive affirmations, such as 'awesome' and 'super,' that they handed out all week when they observed students being especially kind or helpful. We wanted to make sure the staff was included, too, so we wrote up cards and put out treats each day for the entire staff. Some of these were oranges- "Orange You Glad It's Kindness Week?" and doughnuts- "Doughnut Forget It's Kindness Week!" We put up a RAK Staff Challenge in the staff lounge, too. This had five suggestions for the week, one for each day, and included such things as, "Tell your class three things you appreciate about them," and, "Praise a staff member you work with." Lastly, during lunch we pulled down our big screen and played peaceful music with beautiful scenery from all around the earth to remind us that kindness is needed all over the world. This was our first Kindness Week. All items were purchased by the student-run student council school store proceeds, although we tried to keep cost minimal. I believe it was a big success due to the hard work of our student council members." - *Nominated by PACER's Youth Advisory, Minnesota*



Pete Martinez

Pete Martinez is a Youth Outreach Worker for The Conejo Recreation and Park District in the City of Thousand Oaks. He works with “at-risk youth” and connects with each one through compassion, acceptance, understanding, and respect. He conducts bullying awareness workshops designed for 7th and 8th grade students in the Conejo Valley Unified School District. Participating students are “awakened” to empathy, shown how to recognize the various types of bullying, are encouraged to prevent and respond to bullying, and understand the importance of standing up to bullying and how to do it. Pete believes that there is power in kindness, but it takes a little courage to use it on ourselves first and toward each other every day. Pete helps youth understand that we are ALL connected with each other and that the more we try to win over someone, the more we lose. In the 35 years of service to youth Pete has gained just as much as he has given. Pete always says, “You would be amazed how much you get back when you let go – think about that and then feel it”. – *Nominated by PACER’s Youth Advisory, California*



Abi Smith, Pepperdine Waves Debate Team and Woodlake Elementary Debaters

This group sponsored, created, organized, and produced a Pepperdine University debate on the question, “Can we imagine a world without bullying?” Through their efforts, they secured the support of the University and got credit for Pepperdine students who attended, created teams from the Pepperdine Waves Debate Team and Woodlake Elementary School who debated the premise, and promoted the event actively. 315 Pepperdine students attended and 100% commented that they learned something new about bullying. – *Nominated by PACER’s Youth Advisory, California*



Deborah Huffman

"Ms. Huffman coordinates and produces the AAU Journey Dancesport CA State Championships/West Coast AAU Junior Olympic Qualifier for Dancesport as well as the annual West Cost AAU Jr. Olympic Games for Dance (held in CA), where she has promoted bullying prevention in a world where it is not often talked about. Inspired to work on bullying prevention after her grandson died by suicide after relentless bullying, she has included bullying prevention materials in all events over the last two years, and created a fundraiser for NBPC at the West Coast AAU Junior Olympics qualifier & AAU California State

Championships for Dancesport this past March (where dancers learned the "Unity Dance" – a PACER creation – and performed it on the competition dance floor). She is working with the AAU (Amateur Athletic Union) to encourage the topic of bullying prevention to be represented in all AAU sports." – *Nominated by PACER's Youth Advisory, California*