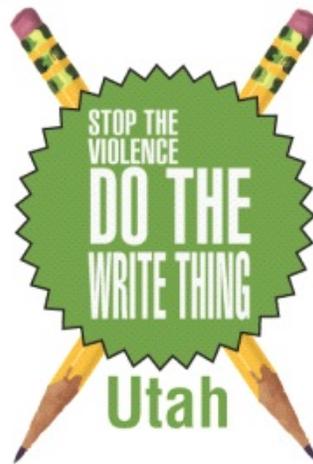

UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO
Do the Write Thing



Student Writings
2013

Utah Board of Juvenile Justice



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UTAH'S THIRTEENTH ANNUAL CHALLENGE TO
Do the Write Thing

The Importance of the Do the Write Thing Challenge

The Do the Write Thing Challenge plays a key role in Utah's long-term strategy to end youth violence. These student writings make powerful proposals on how adults and community members can interrupt the causes of youth violence.

Utah's *Do the Write Thing Challenge* works in cooperation with the National Campaign to Stop Violence. The first step to end youth violence is to talk about it. The *Do the Write Thing Challenge* makes this initial step possible by creating a platform for youth, giving them a voice about how violence affects their lives and how it can be prevented. The program empowers young people around the country to make a personal, written commitment to combat youth violence in their communities. The program works because it targets youth violence in the communities where violence takes place, then recognizes that the same communities hold the greatest power to create lasting solutions.

Utah's *Do the Write Thing Challenge* is sponsored locally by the Utah Board of Juvenile Justice (UBJJ) and managed by the UBJJ Youth Subcommittee. The Board monitors Utah's compliance with the core protections afforded in the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) as reauthorized in 2002. The Board is also responsible for administering federal funds appropriated through the JJDP to fill gaps in the continuum of juvenile justice services, from prevention to treatment. Members are appointed by Utah's Governor.

How the Campaign Works

The Utah Board of Juvenile Justice sent information to all Utah school district superintendents and middle school principals and teachers encouraging them to involve their 7th and 8th grade students in the Challenge. Suggestions about how to tie the Challenge into course work are available online for teachers. Students can research youth violence as part of a history class, write a poem as part of an English class, or even consider youth violence from a social science perspective.

Following a classroom discussion about youth violence, students are asked to write answers to three questions:

How has youth violence affected my life?

What are the causes of youth violence?

What can my community and I do to reduce youth violence?

School districts reported that more than 3,400 students participated in classroom discussions about youth violence. More than 1,700 chose to submit essays for review. Students from the University of Utah, Utah State University, Weber State University and Utah Valley University, participated in the first round of judging, selecting the top ninety-one writings. The Utah Board of Juvenile Justice then selected the top twelve finalists, whose work was forwarded to Utah's VIP Judges for scoring. The VIP Judges had the difficult task of selecting a boy and girl national finalist along with runners up.

Utah's National Finalists will participate with other National Finalists at the *Do the Write Thing* National Recognition Ceremony in Washington DC this July. Finalists will meet with members of Utah's Congressional delegation to discuss the problem of youth violence. They will also attend a reception hosted by the Ambassador to the United States for the State of Kuwait. A book containing the students' writings will be placed in the Library of Congress.

Congratulations to all students that took the Challenge to do something about youth violence!

UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO
Do the Write Thing

National Finalists

Timothy Hui

8th Grade, Midvale Middle School

Teacher, Jennifer Romney

Mikayla Weichers

8th Grade, Fort Herriman Middle School

Teacher, Kristy Searle

Timothy Hui - 8th Grade
Midvale Middle School - Teacher, Jennifer Romney

SMACK! As the victim falls to the ground, a crowd starts to gather. The antagonist beats and kicks the defenseless victim on the ground. As the crowd cheers on the bully, I notice that there are others that are averting their own eyes. Some are staring piteously at the boy who is getting bullied. Yet no one has the courage to stand up for him. Some think that if they help, they will become the next target. Others who have already been in this situation have no desire to relive it again. What they fail to realize, however, Youth Violence affects us all. Violence from young people is one of the most common forms of violence. Both fatal and non-fatal assaults involving youths have contributed a worldwide burden of injuries, disabilities, and deaths. Youth violence not only harms the victims, but also scars their families, friends, and communities. The definition of youth violence is : Violence involving young persons, typically children, adolescents, and young adults between the ages of 10 and 24. Violence involving young persons, typically children, adolescents, and young adults between the ages of 10 and 24.

Youth violence has an impact to every community it occurs in. Youth violence can affect you directly or indirectly. In my case in was directly. I was in fifth grade when I experienced bullying first hand. A boy named John was in my class. Whenever he could, he would always call me racial names, physically attack me, and made the other classmates gang up on me. It hurt every day to go to school. My parents were divided on how to deal with this situation. My father, like any father who discovered that his son was being hurt, told me to fight back physically. My mother on the other hand, told me to be more passive. She advised me to first ignore the bully, but if it became too much, then I was supposed to tell the teacher. I chose my mother's advice over my father's because it was a more peaceful alternative. However, the bullying did not stop; in fact it got worse. Apparently, John had already gotten into plenty of trouble before, and nothing seemed to deter him from picking on other students. The teachers had never actually seen him hurt someone before, but only from the complaints of multiple parents, that they knew he was trouble. Finally, I got so fed up with the lack of help coming from the teachers that I took my father's advice. One day before school started I was on the swings, when all of a sudden someone pushed me from behind and I fell off. I quickly took the opportunity to get revenge. Since no one was around to witness, I got off the hook easily. I realized then why the bullied become the bullies. They didn't fight back like I did, instead they endured the backbreaking burden of emotional pain. It continued until they snapped and vented the hurt and suffering, by bullying someone else. Hence, the vicious cycle continues.

Youth violence can start at anywhere. The home environment is key to the development of violent behavior in young people. Poor supervision of children by parents and harsh physical punishment are major points in the beginning stages of youth violence. There are also factors that involve social, political, and cultural influences. Gangs and local supply of drugs and weapons have a negative and dangerous effect for youth violence. Low levels of interaction within a community can lead to youth violence. Cultures that do not provide non- violent alternatives are prone to higher rates of youth violence. You see, youth violence can happen anywhere and at any time, as long as the environment is perfect for it to set in. Physical punishments still happen in

even the most inconspicuous places. My parents care a lot for me. However, they wanted me to be the best of the best. It was a very new concept especially for me. Because I wasn't as ambitious as they hoped, they would occasionally say very demoralizing things. "Why do I see my classmates living so peacefully and carefree while I suffer like this!" I thought to myself. I was lucky, however, because my parents saw how demoralizing it was to me. They realized how much a child needs love. When children feel unloved, they become resentful. That's where youth violence stems from! They feel cheated and angry when they see people around them having the needed love and support.

Although it seems that controlling youth violence is hopelessly out of reach, it's really not! Even right now students are joining a stand to fight bullying. YOU can put a stop to bullying, by standing by that lonely kid that gets picked on. You can become the bully's friend. Even the bullies need a good friend. They need people who are willing to hear them out, as they tell their life story. Mahatma Gandhi once said "***You must be the change you want to see in the world.***" Well, if we are to truly stop youth violence, each of us must take up the initiative and strive to be that change in the world.

Mikayla Weichers - 8th Grade
 Fort Herriman Middle School - Teacher, Kristy Searle

When you hear the words "youth violence" what do you think about or what's the first thing that pops into your mind? I asked 10 adults this question and 8 of the ten said the first thing they thought of was physical violence such as punching and kicking. Believe it or not, things don't really happen that much at my school (even though bullying happens everywhere). What it really is, is teasing each other for little or no reason at all. You would expect us to just blow it off or ignore them and tell an adult they can trust. The thing is, we can't just blow it off. We hold it in inside of us and we can only hold it in for so long until we explode with sadness and/or anger. It's also really hard for us to tell adults because we don't want them to get more mad at us and make it worse. Physical violence is a huge deal but, the truth is teasing each other is just as bad. Let me tell you my story and you will see what millions of kids go through everyday (even though my story isn't as bad as other kids).

It all started in about 5th grade when kids started teasing me for the color of my skin because I am African-American. They told me it was just a joke and they were kidding. I tried to just laugh it off and ignore it but there was still that part of me that said this wasn't right. I pushed that thought aside. This continued to happen and still is to this day (just different people). The only thing is, is that it's gotten worse. Now I would just walk around at school and bullies will yell out mean things for no reason. This is where I

started feeling really depressed.

I started to think of why my mom even had me and put me through all this crap. I was started to get angry and rude to her just like a bully. Now I was being the bully and blaming my parents for basically no reason. I wasn't happy with what I was turning into or what was happening everyday. I knew I had to turn things around before things got even worse again.

I decided to tell my close friends and mom about what I was going through. My mom told me that I should be happy with myself and what I look like because it really doesn't matter what color I am. She told me that if I was nice to people then they will be nice back. Just then that was when I realized that the people who were bullying me were people I never really talked to and honestly wasn't that nice to. My mom told me I should be friends with EVERYONE no matter who it is. At first, I thought "I am never going to be friends with bullies". but, it would stop unless I did something about it. "Maybe this is why bullies, bully other people" I thought. Maybe they bully people because they don't have any friends and this is the only way for them to get some attention. That was when I realized bullies really aren't bullies, but their just lost and need someone to help them. We can be that someone.

We can make the difference in there life.

All we need is a friend because friends help each other in any situation. My close friends that I told totally supported me, so we have support our friends (if their getting bullied) and our soon to be friends (the Bullies). To this day me and the biggest bully and some of the other bullies are best friends all because I said "HI" to them and smiled. The biggest bully told me that if it wasn't for me she probably wouldn't have any friends right now and maybe would have killed herself and that made me feel amazing inside. All of the kids out there can be hero's if you just find the courage to be it. I know your scard but you need to help because if you dont, the world is going to be like this forever.

A lot of people say that bullying will never stop in the world. well, those people are wrong because if we all work together and be a friend to someone who needs it, then we can make a huge difference in somone's life and eventually change world. I know that a lot of kids are scard to tell an adult but you can do it because if it wasn't for my mom (and friends who supported me) I probably would have never talked to the bully. I still hear mean things about the color of my skin every day but, instead of getting mad at them, I get the courage to become their friend. Youth violence can hurt people inside and out so why not help them or even yourself if your going through simular problems, Bully, the person

getting bullied, or even the Bystanders (neither getting bullied or a bully, but some who watches it happen)..... You can make the difference.

UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO
Do the Write Thing

Runners Up

Kenya Ellsworth
8th Grade, South Ogden Junior High
Teacher, Kim Irvine

Tyler Hill
8th Grade, Crescent View Middle School
Teacher, Jenna Fitch

Kenya Ellsworth - 8th Grade
South Ogden Junior High School - Teacher, Kim Irvine

LOST BOUNDARIES

Inside us all is fear, pain and personal experiences.
The perfect way knows no difficulties.
Only when freed from hate and evil
Does love reveal itself fully and without disguise.

So there I stood in front of the mirror,
Time stood still and my heart felt weak
All I could feel was pain and suffering.
I could hardly remember where I had been.

My hands looked tattered, my arm in a cast,
and my head throbbed with a swollen eye.
My legs wanted to give out from standing
And my mind was exhausted from thinking.

I felt as if I had lost the boundary of my physical body
And the break in the wind was the only thing to keep me awake.
I lay back down in my hospital gown waiting for time to pass.
In came my mom with tears in her eyes and the weight of the world in her hands.

She sat down beside me and explained why I was there.
She started to say "this bully at school..." then stopped
Instead she said remember your friend.
You knew her as a young child and grew up together.

Just a little over a year ago we grew apart
I went my way, she went hers
Unfortunately she started doing drugs
And hanging out with the wrong kids.

At home her dad beat her, at school she was teased.
As she tried to figure herself out she became more confused.
This confusion turned into anger, then violence.

I crossed her path at the wrong time and she laid me out flat.

As I lay on the ground she kicked me again and again.
I was helpless as she continued to take her anger out on me.
At some point I lost consciousness;
They tell me I am lucky to be alive.

As my mom told me this story I started to cry
For I remember my classmates watching this happen
And not one of them tried to stop it.
My heart was in shambles as I wished they were brave.

I knew they all believed in me and knew what was right
Sadly they all feared the same would happen to them.
And not one of them found the power to take control
Because violence is vicious and runs in a crowd.

I realized a bully is one of the worst things human kind has found.
Their repeated torment can last an entire lifetime for their victim.
I saw the affect it had on me.
And knew at that moment I had to be strong.

I now say stand up for what you believe,
Don't let your voice be silenced.
With open eyes, I've realized
That we can stop the violence.

Men are spread all over this earth.
With so many differences the evils became multiplied.
Let's not be arrogant, selfish, and lie.
We should pull our strengths together for the good of mankind.

We are the result of what we believe and think.
So change your mind to master self control.
Start to see yourself the way I see you;

as a perfect soul here to help those in need.

“The power to do great things generally arises
from the willingness to do small things.”

So see yourself as small with great power
To change the world we need team work and love.

When I hear the words youth violence
I think of bullies and feel pain
Pain that has been trapped inside me for years.
It tears my heart into a million pieces and rips my soul apart.

“Never be bullied into silence.
Never allow yourself to be made a victim.
Accept no one's definition of your life,
But define your self.”

If you believe in something let it be heard.
Don't let a bully make up an excuse anymore;
Encourage the victim to share their story.
And remove the fear and hatred all around.

Tyler Hill - 8th Grade
Crescent View Middle School - Teacher, Jenna Fitch

YOUTH GANG VIOLENCE

Violence means physical force with intent to hurt, damage or kill someone or something. Gang violence can come from grudges between gangs, gangs needing money or gangs that are trying to make themselves known in new areas. When gang violence occurs, innocent people are always affected by the outcome. Gangs destroy neighborhoods by vandalizing property, breaking into homes and garages, and drive by shootings that could even hurt or kill an innocent person by mistake. Violence within the gang "family" is seen as anger and destructive.

Violence seen and felt by the people the violence has impacted is seen through tears, fear, and by causing people to not trust or help youth in need of support and guidance.

I remember our garage being broken into and my mom's car being vandalized because my mom's purse was left in the car. Not only was our family car damaged, but the thieves took all of my mom's money from her purse and out of her bank account. I remember my mom and dad crying because we needed to go to the store for food, and we couldn't. My parents were mad at themselves for leaving her purse out there, and mad at the thieves too. I remember feeling useless and mad that I couldn't help my parents. But the worst part was being afraid to be home alone at all. I couldn't stay home by myself because I was worried that the thieves would come back again. At night we all slept with lights on, even my parents. My mom woke up all through the night thinking she could hear them back in the garage. This one event changed all of us, and we were even safe and not hurt.

Young people join gangs to feel part of a "family" situation where they feel like they have a spot, a job, a reputation of their own. Youth look to gang "families" to cover up for pain, regret or feelings of not being accepted by their true family situation. Gangs are a way for youth to escape where they come from and join something with instant acceptance and reinforcement of belonging somewhere. Being part of a gang gives troubled youth a sense of security making

them feel like someone always has their back, even if they have done something terribly wrong to someone else.

Violence to other people or things is wrong and should not be tolerated. Communities must get involved to protect their community properties and people. Neighborhood watch programs are very effective. Neighbors that watch out for each other and report what they see are very important to keeping our neighborhoods, schools, churches, and children safe from gang violence.

Youth gang violence not only destroys our troubled youth but their families, and friends too. Police forces are developing Gang Units to focus on these groups of youth, to learn their habits and where they hang out. These Gang Units also go into our local schools and teach our children what gang members do and how and why they are dangerous. These police officers teach us how to protect ourselves so that we can feel safe at home alone again.

I am a black, teenage boy that is proud of who I am and what I stand for as an individual and as a son, brother, cousin and grandson in my personal family unit. I hope that I always remember what is important to me and that doing right and being an honest citizen in my community and family is the most important value in my life. I am who I am because of the choices I make and the people I hang out with help me honor my values. I look forward to becoming a man, a father and a husband that can teach these values to my children and make sure they feel important in their family situation as I do in mine. I am honored to be a statistic of my black male community and I am proud that I will never change.

UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO
Do the Write Thing

State Finalists

Benjamin Butcher

**8th Grade, Treasure Mountain
Junior High School
Teacher, Julie Hooker**

Mason Edwards

**7th Grade, Crescent View Middle School
Teacher, Whitney Lee**

Abby Hall

**8th Grade, Crescent View Middle School
Teacher, Scott Christensen**

Kayla Hebertson

**8th Grade, Fort Herriman Middle School
Teacher, Brandee Bergum**

Lindsie Olson

**8th Grade, Desert Hills Middle School
Teacher, Elise Shepherd**

Ashley Ricks

**8th Grade, Fort Herriman Middle School
Teacher, Michael Farnsworth**

Noah Staheli

**8th Grade, Desert Hills Middle School
Teacher, Elise Shepherd**

Chandler Wakefield

**8th Grade, Midvale Middle School
Teacher, Jennifer Romney**

Benjamin Butcher - 8th Grade
 Treasure Mountain Junior High School - Teacher, Julie Hooker

Bullying Must Stop

“Most comedy is based on getting a laugh at somebody else's expense. And I find that that's just a form of bullying in a major way. So I want to be an example that you can be funny and be kind, and make people laugh without hurting somebody else's feelings.” Ellen DeGeneres.

LOSER! FREAK! NO ONE LIKES YOU! FAT A*S! GO KILL YOURSELF! YOU WOULD BE BETTER OFF DEAD! Kids are hurting other kids with terms like this every single day. Kids, also known as BULLIES create rumors, call kids names, and hurt kids physically. The victims don't deserve any of it! The victims will never laugh again, be happy again, SMILE again because of bullying. Some are hurt so severely that they feel like they have to take their life away. It makes them feel like no one loves them or wants to be around them. The bully makes them feel like they are a worthless piece of crap. It make them feel like no one cares about them, like they would be better off dead. We have all been bullied, we have all been the bully. No matter what the case is, it needs to stop.

It was the sixth grade, I was scared and shy. I didn't know anyone but the kids from my elementary school. I walked in ready to meet some new friends. It didn't go so well. Instead of being nice to me, kids would trip me in the halls, and rumors quickly spread. The rumor was all about how gay I was. I was depressed about this situation because I wasn't. Not that I have a problem with gay people! I just didn't want a lie about me going around school. It wasn't good! Kids would pick on me and make fun of me. Some of the things they would do is say “Hey Ben! Why don't you stop flirting and hugging the girls and go flirt and hug the guys!” At first everything really hurt my feelings, I didn't want to go to school but I had to. I didn't tell anyone about what was going on cause I didn't trust anyone. One day one of my best friends from elementary school turned it all around. If he heard anything about the rumor, he told kids to shut their mouth because it wan't true. If it wasn't for him the rumors spreading and the kids picking on me would not have stopped. It would have just gotten worse and worse. Every year the rumor comes back. Some kid that's either jealous of me or doesn't like me spreads a rumor that I am gay. Begging of this year I was called gay because I had big and white teeth. It hurt my feelings at first, but now I stand up for myself and now I don't care about what people think or say about me. I'm glad that its happened because if it wasn't for kids picking on me or rumors spreading about me I would still care about what people thought of me. No one deserves to be bullied but if it happens walk away and forget about it. If it continues tell a friend like I did, trust me they will help.

I myself have never been bullied physically but I have seen people in the middle of getting bullied in a physical way. It was fourth grade during the winter and this kid that nobody really liked was playing in the snow. This kid that thought he was “All that” shoved his face into the snow, tackled him into the snow, threw snowballs at him and would not stop. The teachers looked over and watched but they didn't care the thought they were “Playing.” The kid was crying and begging for the bully to stop. Of course he didn't, he thought it would make him cooler and better than everyone else. We all thought it was funny, even I was laughing. It took the whole recess for the kid to get free, once he did he ran away and screamed “I'm going to hang myself!” Right then teachers ran after him but he was no where to be found. About ten

minutes later the police showed up and so did he. The kid called the police and threatened to kill himself. He told the police who the kid was and they had to have a meeting with the police and their parents. It was a very scary and dramatic day for both the bully and the victim. None of it would have happened if the bully didn't pick on him in the first place. Even if the bully had to pick on him, one of the by-standers could have been the one to save the day.

All of these dramatic problems that occur are because of the bullies picking on the victims and the witnesses not doing anything. Anytime I think about what happened to the poor kid in fourth grade, I think about what I could have done better and how I could have stopped it. Now that I have more experience on the topic and I know how to stop it whenever I see it. We need to make sure EVERYONE knows how horrible bullying is and why we NEED to stand up for others even if there not in your "group" or not your friend. Even if they're not your friend you should still be nice to them and treat them like they're your best friend. That means that you don't stand up in the middle of class and scream "Sam has the cheese touch!" All you have to do it be nice to the kid because one little kind of act of kindness could lead to thousands which could lead to saving someone's life and who knows you might end up being best friends with the kid.

Mason Edwards - 7th Grade
Crescent View Middle School - Teacher, Whitney Lee

Violence

Violence is hard to define because there are so many different types of violence. Wars are violent. Street fighting is violent. Sports are violent. Car accidents are violent. Shoot, even walking home from school can be violent. Recently, a kid in our own community, who had been bullied, shot himself in the head in front of his classmates while they were on their way home from school. Have you ever shot a gun? Not an air soft gun, or a paintball gun, or a B-B gun, but a real gun. It is LOUD! Much louder than an air soft gun. When you go to the gun range you are required to wear ear protection. It is that loud. None of those kids who witnessed the boy shoot himself had ear protection on. Why would they? Can you imagine being a witness to something like that? Suddenly, without any warning, just feet or inches from you, someone kills himself, right in front of you. You would be so stunned. It would be a horrible gory mess that you would have never expected to see, especially when you were walking home from school. I'm sure there was screaming and crying and running away from the incident. The witnesses must have felt sick. It must have been total chaos. The people who witnessed this event probably could not stop thinking about it for a long time, and I'm sure none of them will ever be able to forget it. It will definitely have some kind of impact on their lives. This is not the only type of violence that affects young people, because all violence affects all people.

When I was in second grade, I had a friend who became violent with me. We used to go swimming together and we spent lots of time at each others houses. We even had quite a few sleep overs. He started to have issues acting out in school and getting in trouble, and he started telling me he was going to kill me with a baseball bat. One time, his mom was driving us to go swimming and something set him off. He started kicking the car window, trying to break it. His mom ended up calling my mom to come get me. After that incident we really didn't have any contact outside of school. I really didn't want to be around him any more because it made me uncomfortable. It is just not pleasant

to be around someone who is throwing a fit a thrashing around violently without really caring what they might do to the people around them. My mom decided after the death threats that sleep overs wouldn't be a good idea any more. Imagine that? After second grade he was diagnosed with a mental disorder and he attended a special school that could deal with his issues. I have never seen him again. Speaking of mental disorders, I thought the guy who went into the school in Connecticut and killed all those little kids and teachers must be crazy. My parents agree, you have to have a screw loose to do something like that.

It seems that mental problems and anger issues can lead to violence. I also think that being in violent situations can make you violent. People who grow up in poverty and have fewer chances in life often turn to violence. A lot of young people growing up in poverty join gangs because they don't have supervision. They don't have anything to do after school, and they don't see a reason to do their homework. The gangs can easily recruit them, and they quickly turn to crime and violence.

After school programs could really help kids. That way they would have something constructive to do and maybe have a chance that they won't join a gang. Schools could also start an ongoing program to deal with violence prevention. It could be something that was done once a week or every two weeks in a certain class. There are things we can all do to help prevent violence. It's hard for one person to feel like they can do much to prevent violence, but you can report actions that may lead to violence. Maybe you have a friend who is being abused or bullied. You can report those type of incidents to a teacher or authority. Maybe that could help prevent an even larger problem in the future.

Violence is all around us every day. It is on the news every night. Reports of car crashes, rapes, murders, and wars are common place. People hurting other people seems to be a theme of humanity. Some kids get really nervous or scared when they hear about senseless violence like the school

shooting in Connecticut. I think they are worried that the same kind of thing could happen to them in their school. Any reduction in violence could only be a good thing. That would mean fewer people in pain and less suffering. Knowing that you shouldn't have to put up with violence is a starting place. Don't tolerate violence in your own life. Report abuse, and don't stand by while others are being bullied.

Abby Hall - 8th Grade
Crescent View Middle School - Teacher, Scott Christensen

Youth violence has often worried me and my family. Everyday my mom reminds me and my siblings, "Remember who you are and what you stand for." I never really thought much of my mom's mantra until I became affected by youth violence. I have always felt and understood that bullying and youth violence was wrong; however, I have never personally realized how much it can hurt. I hate to reflect on it but I was never a victim, I was the bully.

Back at my old middle school, before I moved, I always hung out with the exact same people every day. There were four of us and I really didn't like two of the kids in our group. I had no reason why, they were actually really nice but I was too dumb to realize that. I started to ignore them. Whenever one of them would talk I would simply not reply. I would look at them funny once in awhile as if I were telling them, "Back off! I really don't like you." I had no idea how much I was hurting their feelings until one of my other friends in my group bullied along side with me. When I saw the tears I realized how mean and insensitive I had been. As my friend continued to throw harsh words at their faces I threw words of encouragement at my two friends who were getting beaten constantly. Slowly, although effectively things became a nice and violent free atmosphere. At the end of that year my friend and I (the bullies) moved away. Now that I see how mean I was I honestly hope my two friends, who I had treated so badly, are happy.

I don't know what caused me to behave like that. Perhaps I was jealous. I also think there can be a bigger reason behind youth violence. The atmosphere at home can, and probably will, have an impact on a child. Youth violence can start at the home. When I moved away from my old home it was mostly because of family issues. My siblings, my mom, and I were having trouble finding somewhere we felt safe and could be happy. Currently we are living in my grandparent's home. With all these little problems at home stacking up on top of each other I felt a little depressed. When I went to school everyday I played, what I thought were meaningless games with my friends. One example is I would try to trip them. After a while, I noticed they really had no feelings towards me anymore. When I began to feel the consequence of my own unkindness I started to realize my mistake and began to resist the urge to trip my friends. I felt happier each day I was successful at being kind. Thinking about these experiences have helped me to conclude that violence and bad behavior can start at the home. To keep a healthy home will help youth to treat each other with respect and kindness.

As an individual, I can do my part to reduce youth violence. Because of my own experiences, I believe youth violence is a chain reaction. Once one person is affected they pass it on to one or more kids who continue to pass it on. The chain keeps going because of our own human nature. When someone hurts you what do some of us do? Some kids will try for revenge. Revenge can be a form of youth violence. Revenge continues a chain reaction of youth violence. I can, along with others, stop the chain reaction. Stopping the chain reaction will require more effort than most of us realize. You have to take control of your emotions and hurt and sometimes that can be extremely difficult. Although, the more you win

the stronger you will become and the stronger you will become the easier it is to reduce youth violence.

Other ways I can reduce youth violence is to be an example to my peers. I can show them that violence is never the answer and living violence free can make you happier. I can also show that being friendly will help others feel important.

Youth violence has actually taught me a few life lessons. For example, I have learned that violence is never the answer. I have also come to realize that youth violence spreads as a chain reaction. I have become very cautious in my thoughts and actions because I don't want to be a bully without knowing it. Youth violence has also taught me how to be a better friend as well as a better sister.

My 15-year-old brother is kind of different. He is a positive person who always sees the glass as half full. He is also funny and lots of fun to be around. Although, some people just see him as kinda nutty and sometimes they ignore him. Not me; I see him as an example. Everyday I hear the same thing, "Your brother is really *interesting*. How are you two related?" Everyday I think the same thing, "My brother is the nicest person anyone can meet." My brother doesn't have many friends. He tells me people make fun of him for being himself. My little sister has a similar problem. At the moment, she is in fourth grade and is being made fun of for being herself. There is boy at school who bullies her and makes fun of her hair and her height. As a fourth grader what are you supposed to do? She talked to me about it and I gave her some advice. "Be an example and don't let the chain reaction continue." Youth violence has affected my family and that affects me. I can't just watch my siblings suffer. I will take a stand.

"Be the change you want to see in the world." Mahatma Gandhi said. I will be the change that I want to see in the world. What about you? Youth violence is all around us. The time to act is now. Either take a stand or remain a bystander. I took a stand. I will control myself and win against human nature. It's time we work towards eliminating youth violence for good.

Kayla Hebertson - 8th Grade
Fort Herriman Middle School - Teacher, Kim Irvine

Youth violence is everywhere. It happens in all shapes and forms. Physical, online, and verbal are all examples. Physical aggression is when a bully hits, punches, shoves, kicks, or any other assault. Online violence, also known as cyber bullying, is where a bully doesn't confront a victim, but conceals himself behind a computer screen. Verbal aggression is probably the worst type of youth violence. That is where gossip and rumors are spread around. People get scarred for life. It can start with one kid who isn't incontrovertibly bad, but has had rough experiences. The beginning point of where it all starts is at home.

Youth violence can come from child abuse, parents divorcing, teasing from siblings, a death in the family, someone they trusted betrays or manipulates them, or they were bullied first and that is why they became a bully. The bullies are depressed and they need to know someone is sadder than they are. They can't stand someone is happier or seems like they have a better life. They are jealous of everyone. Kids also bully because they really do think it is cool. They want to be or stay popular, and for some reason the kids that are rude really are popular. Youth violence has affected my life, and it did start in my home.

Growing up as a young child, my dad was very abusive. First of all, he was verbally abusive. He yelled at my two brothers, my mom, and me. His language was vulgar and he never had anything nice to say. Secondly, he was emotionally abusive to our family. He controlled every little part of our lives. He would only let us eat certain things, he told us when we had to exercise, he even controlled when he thought we should use the bathroom. My mom tried to stand up to him and protect us, but it was really hard. I remember one time my mom took us to McDonald's for hamburgers. When we drove home and opened

the garage, we saw that our dad was home early. My brothers and I started to cry because we knew he would take our food away from us and yell at us. My mom drove past our house and around the neighborhood while we ate our food in the car.

Ever since I can remember, my dad has always opposed everything I value. He mocks my religious beliefs and things that are sacred to me. My likes were his hates. Trying my best wasn't good enough. Still to this day he is like that. My mom tried to work things out with my dad two separate times and finally she knew we had to get out of this life. She has told me that the breaking point was seven years ago when my oldest brother, Cameron, was eleven years old. Our family was on an outing and my dad was screaming and swearing at us to hurry up. Cameron turned to my mom and asked, "Mom, how old do I have to be to get a restraining order against Dad?" My mom finally had the courage for us to move out and start a new safe life. My mom's sister, my Aunt Wendy, told us she would help us get away from this abuse. Wendy supported us in everything we did. She even helped support us financially. My mom, who is a teacher, needed that help. My Aunt Wendy became my other parent who I loved and needed. Then one day it happened. My aunt passed away from complications from Type I Diabetes about a year and a half ago. It was devastating. Fortunately, my family is away from the violence and abuse and we've been very happy for the past seven years.

I can't stand it when you walk by a group of popular kids who are talking and as you pass by, they laugh. It makes me crazy and paranoid that they are talking about me behind my back. People are also often excluded. This has happened to me before. People who I thought were my friends have suddenly ignored me and turned out not to be my friends. For example, a girl pretended to be my friend and was outgoing and nice one day. Then her

best friend returns the next day from being absent and suddenly I no longer exist. It feels like you're the new kid every day who has made no friends yet, and they make no effort to help you feel included. There are people who have been in my classes for years, but they still don't know my name or talk to me. When a new student arrives, they are often treated as king of the world and everyone makes a fuss over them. Meanwhile, you've been patiently waiting for someone to notice you and be kind. You sit down and all the chairs around you remain empty. They seem to be doing everything they can to avoid or ignore you. All of these examples are forms of bullying.

If you can be mean and spread that poison around to others causing them to be mean, depressed, and miserable, then surely there is a way to do the opposite! You can spread compliments, be generous, and kind. You can do simple acts of kindness, like giving someone a nice smile and saying hi. Standing up for each other when someone is being bullied or excluded is something we can all do. It's even possible to defend and help a bully who's being picked on. Then the bully will have the chance to realize that they're cared about and not alone. I try to stop bullying when there is someone left out because I know how it feels and don't want to see them in pain.

If we don't stand up to bullies and make a change, there are terrible consequences of bullying: depression, physical illness, turning to drugs & alcohol, and even suicide. It's critical that we all help victims see that things can change and get better. Talk to an adult if you or someone you know is being bullied or is in crisis. No one is worthless, it's never too late to change and start again. There are people who are there for you and soon enough, the bully will no longer matter to you. Family and friends can be true heroes in your life. We can each be a good example to others and have integrity in all our actions, even if we don't

think anyone is watching. If you are or were a victim, don't hold a grudge. Otherwise, you will be likely to become a bully and the cycle will continue. My mom, my brothers and I have lived in an abusive and violent home. We have made a conscious effort to break that cycle and change our lives for the better. Violence needs to end now!

Lindsie Olson – 8th Grade
Desert Hills Middle School - Teacher, Elise Shepherd

Violence is a very cruel thing. Violence can happen anywhere, it can happen at school, at home, and in your community. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent." When you are angry or scared you can think that you should blame everyone but yourself. You can feel confused and just want to hurt someone, and take your anger out on them. Violence does not solve anything, you think it will help you feel reassured, and take all of the stress off your shoulders, but that's is where your wrong. Violence doesn't just hurt someone else, it hurts you to.

Violence hasn't occurred in my life very often. There have been a few times that violence has been in my home but never too bad, but this one time my family got in a family fight. It was awful and I hate it! We start out having a family discussion and then we yell and disagree. We usually stay are ground, but this time my oldest brother and my dad started to get really serious. My oldest brother stood up to leave and my dad stood up to. My brother was walking out the door, but then my dad grabbed him by the shoulders and pushed him to the ground. Right then everything happened so fast I couldn't believe what was happening. My brother and my dad were on the ground wrestling. I looked over to my mom that had just recently had been diagnosed with cancer trying to stand and stop them. She was too weak. She could barely stand by herself. My mom passed away almost two years ago from cancer and this had happened only a month or two before, but today I still remember the look on her face. My mom was concerned, scared, and didn't know what to do. Everyone in my family was there except for my sister, but as I looked around the room as this was going on I saw my two other brothers watching in terror. My youngest brother was only 9! He did not need to witness that violence that was going on in our own home. When my dad and my oldest brother finally separated my brother left and didn't come back that night, and I could barely look at my dad. He was crushed. He felt so bad that all of us kids had to witness that. He had later told all of us that violence does not solve anything and he regrets what he had done. I still remember this and the most horrible thing is the look on my moms face. It makes me heartbroken every time I think of it. Violence has affected my life, and I will never forget it.

Violence mainly occurs when people don't agree. It can happen when people are fighting over a girl or boy. It can happen when someone cheats, steals, does drugs, or drinks alcohol. Violence is everywhere, and is caused by many things. In young peoples life parents are always asking why we act the way we act, but I think they forget that they are the ones that raised us. Young people look up to their parents and want to be just like them, but when our parents aren't being the best example we don't know the difference. When there is violence in the home with kids there to watch it usually affects the kid's life. We were taught to listen to our parents and to follow their example. Kids learn from that, and when they are angry all they have been taught to do is violence. Violence occurs often in young people's life. Kids my age

think that violence is the answer, but its not. Solving problems should not include Violence. When you have a problem you should talk it out calmly with the other person. Violence is never an option, especially for young people.

I have never really thought how anyone can stop violence, or how I can stop violence. It is a very deep question and I really don't know how to answer it. My little brother and I would always fight and argue. We would hit each other, kick, and bite. My mom would always tell us not to. The problem was that my mom was too nice; she needed to give us more severe punishments. That is the problem, parent's need to punish their kids if they are being violent. It will help so that they know if they are violent, that they will be punished. That is one way that everyone can help stop violence, but I still don't know how I can stop it. When I am angry I want to punch someone in the face, but I could be an example and just sort it out calmly without violence. The only way I know how to help is to be an example to all the people around me. If I am an example, then I might be an influence and the people that I influenced will be an example also.

While writing this I have learned that violence is a very scary thing. Violence is never the answer. Violence is just a mean thing, and no one should experience such an awful action. It doesn't just affect yourself and the other person, it affects everyone around you. It affects your children, family, and your friends. Violence has affected my life and many other peoples also. I never want to go through that type of thing ever again.

Ashley Ricks - 8th Grade

Fort Herriman Middle School - Teacher, Michael Farnsworth

An innocent girl walked down the school hallway. She kept her head down, hoping that she could get down the hallway to the classroom unnoticed. This would not be the girl's lucky day. Soon she spotted her normal tormenters and tried to hide.

She had never done anything to hurt or offend her peers that so often abused her, or at least she didn't think she had. She would never purposely offend or hurt anyone. She didn't understand why they were so terrible to her. The poor girl still had the bruises she had received from them last week, and she didn't think she could hide any further injury from caring adults. Then again, the girl thought, the beatings weren't all physical.

It was then that she was seen in her dark little corner. Deep down she had known that she had no chance of staying hidden. The girls of the group surrounded her. Today, it would be verbal abuse. She could never decide which beatings hurt more, but at least the verbal abuse was easier to hide from those around her. The boys of the group had threatened her life if any adult found out about what they did to her. The fear she felt often showed deep in her eyes. She knew she couldn't escape. Trying would make it worse.

The other kids in the hallway had done one of three things; surrounded the smaller group to watch, run away, or ignored what was going on. The girl knew that the teachers never came through this hallway and that none of the students that had left would bring help. Many students didn't care, and the heartless tormenters had stricken fear deep into the hearts many of the other students. They wouldn't risk becoming the new punching bag. No help was coming.

Not that the girl wanted this to happen to anyone else. The girl wished that someone would stand up to the group. Every night she dreamed of someone that had the courage to get a teacher or even talk to her. She would deal with the pain if she had a light at the end of the tunnel, but she was alone. None of the kids had tried before.

That wasn't her only wish. She also wished for those who hurt her to learn the extent of what they put her through. She wanted them to stop on their own. She didn't want them to suffer even after what they did to her.

Bullies are bullies for a few reasons. One reason is because they feel inadequate. They don't know how to lift themselves up so they try to tear people down to their level so they're just as good as everyone else. They feel powerless and they want to feel like they're more powerful than other people. Another reason is that they don't understand that everyone is equal. They aren't better than everyone else. My last reason is they don't think there is anything wrong with bullying. Everyday kids see violence on TV. On average, children see 8,000 murders on TV before they finish elementary school. The average person sees 200,000 violent acts on TV before they graduate high school. It's not a big mystery that a lot of kids think that violence is okay.

People tend to think that if it's not happening to them, it isn't their problem. That's another thing that needs to change in people's minds.

Think about the 30,000 Americans who commit suicide per year. Then there are the kids who were bullied and then brought a gun to school. Was there anyone to help them? Did anyone talk to them? How different would things have been if someone had decided to stand up for them, been their friend, or shown them that they were important and worth something? It might not be happening to you, but that doesn't mean that it isn't your problem.

What could those kids have accomplished if they had lived? One of those people could have found a cure for cancer! We'll never know because someone wouldn't look past their need for power and see another's worth. None it can't be changed now, but unless something is done, it will happen again.

People need to learn to see the good in others and recognize that every person is important. We need to be nicer to people. You don't know what people are going through.

We also need to learn how to be nicer to people. Even if you just smile at someone who looks like they aren't having the best day. It might be all a person needs to get through the day. It couldn't hurt. People want to be noticed and feel like they're important.

I didn't finish the story about the girl.

Three more months passed before a boy moved into her school. He was in her classes and noticed that she was always hiding. One day he saw the group surround her. At first he thought they were her friends. He assumed she must have friends, she was very sweet.

Soon he realized he was wrong. She was terrified and had an air of defeat. The boys stepped forward. One had his fist raised. The new boy ran over and stepped in front of the shocked girl. "Enough," he shouted.

The boys weren't used to being told no. The boy, who had been about hit her, took a step toward the new boy.

"Who are you?" he questioned.

"A human being just like her. She deserves better than this."

The new boy walked the girl out of the circle of bystanders. The two teens became good friends, and the bullies came to realize what they had done to her. They avoided the girl, thinking she had no reason to forgive them. Why would she? They had been horrible to her. They couldn't forgive themselves. That difficulty only made it easier for her to forgive.

One day at lunch, she noticed their behavior, and she beckoned them over.

"I forgave you every day; you didn't understand what you were doing. Don't punish yourselves. There has been enough pain. Sit."

Not all stories end as well as this girl's.

Like the girl, victims need to forgive. They can't let bullies rule their lives. Like the boy, we need to stand up for others and be a true friend to those who need a friend. If we befriend a victim, we need to be a true friend. The worst bullies are the ones you call friends.

Kids that are bullied need someone to be there for them. Whether that person is a peer, a teacher, or family, someone needs to be there. They already feel put down, unimportant, unneeded, and useless. Don't leave them on their own. Pay attention to other people. Notice when someone is having a bad day. Ask what you can do to help. If people can be friendly to everyone, there wouldn't be so many cases of violence.

Kids that are bullied need someone to be there for them. Whether that person is another student, a teacher, or a family member, someone needs to be there for them. They already feel put down, like they aren't important, they feel unneeded and useless. Don't leave them on their own. Pay attention to the people around you. Notice when someone seems to be having a bad day. Ask what you can do to help. If people can be a friend or at least friendly to everyone, there wouldn't be so many cases of bullying or other violence.

When I was in first grade and my sister was in third grade, a fourth grade boy would pick on her. She had a little stutter so he called her "Stutter girl."

One day, I had walked down the hill from my school to her school and saw him teasing her. I told him to stop, but he ignored me. I got mad and clenched my fists. I was about to walk toward him, but he saw that I had my fists clenched. He was a very fast runner. He didn't bother my sister after that.

If people stood up to bullies, the majority of bullies would stop. A lot of bullies are afraid of people who don't fear them. They know that they don't have power them.

Even if the bully is your friend or family you have to stand up to them. The boy who called my sister "Stutter girl" wasn't the only kid that bullied her. I never got a chance to "speak" with the other bully. The bully was my sister's friend.

The bully's aunt was my sister's old teacher. The teacher didn't have to get involved, but she knew it was important to stand up for my sister, even if she would anger her sister and her niece.

We need to remember that everyone is important and we all deserve more than violence. We need to change how we view each other.

Noah Staheli – 8th Grade
Desert Hills Middle School - Teacher, Elise Shepherd

Violence is defined as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatening or actual against a person or community that results in injury, death and physiological harm. When I think of violence, I think of the many people who risk their lives every day to stop it and bring peace. I think of how scary life would be if no one made an effort to stop violence. I think of the bravery of those who stand up and pronounce loud and clear how wrong it is. I think of people who have done nothing and are hurt by others who have committed themselves to violence. Finally, I think of ways I can help stop violence and establish peace in the world.

I have never personally experienced violence in my life and I am grateful for it. However, I always feel bad for those who experience it in their lives. It happens every day in some countries and even here in the United States. I have heard many stories about violence on the news, the newspaper and from people I know. My great grandpa was a hero and veteran in World War II. He even received two purple hearts for his bravery. I can only imagine what it would have felt like to be in his shoes. He experienced firsthand the violence that the Germans and the Japanese pounded on the world. Even those far away, who had nothing to do with the war, were affected by its violence. War, how I describe it, is a violent way to solve problems. War marks a heavy toll on whoever fights it, but sometimes, such as World War II, it is necessary. My grandpa chose to fight for his country and people. He risked his own life to save others from violence. I will always love and respect my great grandpa and his bravery and, most importantly, for doing his part to end violence.

Causes of violence are either over something very serious or something that was never meant to be fought over in the first place. One of the most common causes of violence is revenge. With young people, revenge is very common. A person makes fun of, or embarrasses someone for popularity, or to be noticed. The person who was humiliated wants to get back at that person who has embarrassed him. Although it may sound good to humiliate that person for what he did and make him pay, it is not right. Revenge can lead to a nearly never ending cycle of getting back at each other that often becomes relentless and results in violence. Revenge causes even more damage to one's own self. Revenge should never be allowed to start. Other causes of violence could be from drugs or alcohol use, bullying, anger and jealousy. Young people who misuse alcohol or drugs can be unpredictable and violent, depending on how much they use it. It is never worth it to destroy your mind and body with these feelings or substances.

Likewise, there are many ways to prevent violence from ever happening. Forgiveness is a very important and straight forward way. It diminishes the thought of revenge and allows peace to enter fully. In many circumstances, if the world learned the true meaning of forgiveness, then wars would end and nations could work side by side together in harmony. Another way is to extinguish the thought of violence in the first place. Practicing peace daily can help you think less of violence until it disappears entirely. I could be a peacemaker toward young people by being an example and show people that violence is not the right thing to do, even though it may seem right. If someone is being bullied, I would defend him and protect him from being physically or emotionally hurt. Seeing this example, I hope that people will learn from it and add it to their daily lives.

I think of violence as a deadly poison. Once fully immersed into you, it is impossible to escape and you are its prisoner. Violence is the wrong way to go. It destroys the lives of families, friends and even entire nations. It ruins the world and its beauty. Young people should never have to go through a dark path of violence and darkness. Thomas Edison said, "Non-violence leads to the highest ethics, which is the goal of all evolution. Until we stop harming all other living beings, we are still savages." It means that if we do not stop harming others, then we are not coming any closer to reaching that goal. If someone is immersed in violence, there is hope. If they surround themselves by family, friends, leaders and teachers that will help them, then if they are willing, they can end violence and learn peace once again.

Chandler Wakefield - 8th Grade
Midvale Middle School - Teacher, Jennifer Romney

I've been a participant in youth violence. Of course, it wasn't anything life-ruining or incredibly malicious, but it still falls under the term nonetheless.

My friend stole my hat in fourth grade. He was probably only teasing, but I didn't know that at the time. And I was *furios*. The hat he took wasn't any ordinary hat. It was a family heirloom, a hat passed down from my grandfather to my father to me. If I had to, I would have guarded it with my life. The thought that someone had taken it was unbearable. A chase and minor brawl inside a dark room ensued, and when the dust cleared and we were dragged away from each other, I swore that I would never be his friend again.

Four years later—this year, actually—we made up and are now, if not friends, then good acquaintances. I've vowed to not be violent to anyone except in self-defense, so that likely won't happen again. But for a long time we despised each other. We had one of the worst relationships in our neighborhood. And what if one of us had injured the other severely? I knocked him over; I could've broken his leg. And, since we were in a dark room as we chased each other, we could've easily tripped over something and twisted an ankle.

Youth violence can start out from innocent teasing if the other party goes too far, which is what happened there. But it usually isn't that innocent. A lot of the time, the teasing and insulting is done specifically to see the other party hurt or put down, making the hurter feel good. They're brought up for a time by bringing someone down. Other times it's because of jealousy that insults are given. Often, this can escalate to physical or verbal combat, when emotions of jealousy and inferiority have escalated to hate.

Adults can deliver violence to children, too, and that violence is almost entirely out of frustration. Sometimes a hit is delivered because they don't know how they can get their child to listen otherwise. It can be often done because they feel the need to let any pent-up rage out, and the child is conveniently there.

Youth violence is a problem that needs to be solved, and I know that I need to help. One of the ways that I will do this is by actively acting against youth violence. If I see two people fighting each other maliciously, I'll report it to the office. Any acts of bullying will see at least some intervention from me. If no one goes against these acts of violence, why would anyone stop performing them?

Secondly, I won't be afraid to state my opinion about this. If anyone asks me, I'll stand and say what I think—that youth violence causes too many problems to be ignored. I won't be timid when I see youth violence, and I won't be timid when I talk about it either. If someone is afraid to speak about their opinion, why would anyone listen to them?

Finally—and most importantly—I need to follow what I preach. I shouldn't insult others unless they know it's completely in jest, and I should make sure they know that. I should only fight in self-defense. If I'm a good person, other people are bound to follow my example. If I don't follow what I say...

Youth violence has a variety of causes and consequences, and it can end up ruining lives. I believe that it needs to be stopped. Although the chances of people being able to eradicate it completely are very, *very* slim, we need to work to eliminate it as much as possible. I will take a stand. I hope you will as well.

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