
UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO
Do the Write Thing

Student Writings
2009

Utah Board of Juvenile Justice



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UTAH'S NINTH ANNUAL CHALLENGE TO
Do the Write Thing

The Importance of the Do the Write Thing Challenge

Do the Write Thing is not about winning a prize. It is an essential part of a long-term strategy to help students and adults better understand each other and work together to prevent youth violence.

The *Do the Write Thing* Challenge is a program of the National Campaign to Stop Violence, which motivates students to make a personal, written commitment to resist and combat youth violence in their communities. Young people around the country are encouraged to voice their solutions for reducing violence that destroys so many young lives. The program works because it recognizes that the best solutions come from communities where violence takes place.

Utah's *Do the Write Thing Challenge* is sponsored locally by the Utah Board of Juvenile Justice. The Board monitors Utah's compliance with the core requirements of 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 encouraging them to involve their teachers and 7th and 8th grade students in the Challenge. Teachers were given suggestions about how to tie the Challenge into course work. Students could 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 were 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 1,550 students participated in classroom discussions about youth violence. More than 770 chose to submit essays for review. Employees of Zions Bank and students from Weber State University participated in the first round of judging, selecting the top ninety writings. The Utah Board of Juvenile Justice then selected the top eleven finalists, whose work was forwarded to Utah's VIP Judges. 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 student's 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

Kyler Nielson

8th Grade, Desert Hills Middle School
Teacher, Whitney Lee

Mira Reynolds

8th Grade, Highland Junior High
Teacher, Kim Irvine

Kyler Nielson - 8th Grade
Desert Hills Middle School - Teacher, Whitney Lee

The closest I've come to experiencing violence in my life is being bullied and that was bad enough. It began in kindergarten, I guess the kids saw me as different or they were better than me and I became the target. I was quiet and didn't stick up for myself, who wouldn't be afraid. They called me names, picked on me and pushed me. I kept telling myself that it would get better just hold on it will get better but it didn't. After years of it I felt horrible about myself and I didn't want to go to school anymore. I felt helpless, excluded, worthless, sad, scared and even more afraid to tell anyone. I couldn't focus at school and didn't do well, I really never had a good friend back then, my only good friend moved away.

I wanted to hurt them so bad, I wanted to get revenge and make them feel what I felt only ten times worse! I think that is why some kids use terrible violence on others to get back at them and maybe they think they will feel better about themselves.

I think that kids bully because they have been bullied or maybe abused at home by their parents or they just feel bad about themselves for whatever reason, so they act out at school and try to control all the other kids around them. The need for control and power takes over people and the way they think, act and feel. Here are some facts about bullying:

- ✓ **Bullying is the most common form of violence in our society; between 15 percent and 30 percent of students are bullies or victims.** (*Cohn and Canter, National Association of School Psychologists*)
- ✓ **Every day, 160,000 children miss school because of a fear of being bullied.** (*U.S. Department of Justice, National Association of School Psychologists*)
- ✓ **Young people who bully are more likely than those who don't bully to skip school and drop out of school. They are also more likely to smoke, drink and get into fights.** (*Nansel et al, 2003; Olweus, 1993*)
- ✓ **Bullies in middle school, without intervention, are three times as likely to have at least one criminal conviction by the age of 24.** (*Olweus, 2003*)
- ✓ **Harassment and bullying have been linked to 75 percent of school-shooting incidents, including the fatal shootings at Columbine High School near Littleton, Colorado, and Santana High School in Santee, California.** (U.S. Secret Service Report May 2002)

There are some things each of us can do to stop bullying and help the kids who are being bullied. My parents took me out of public school and put me in a private school for a year but I know that most families can't do that. What helped me even more was I finally found something that I loved to do and was good at, that is motocross racing. I didn't really like most sports but I loved motocross and my dad spent a lot of time with me practicing and helping me, it took my mind off all of the bad things.

When someone tries to bully me now I stand up to them and if they don't stop I tell a teacher or the principle, but when I was younger I was too afraid. We can stick up for someone else when we see them getting bullied and be nice to them sometimes they just need a friend. The schools need to talk a lot about bullying and tell the kids when they are getting bullied that the very best thing they can do is tell as many grown ups as they can. The bully needs to be faced by a grown up like the principle and told they can't come to school anymore if they are going to be a bully. Ignoring the bully can sometimes make it worse, once I got the courage to tell the principle and then stood up for myself it did get better.

All of the years of bullying has affected my life and how I feel about myself still today, I still feel hurt inside but I know that I can change that. I learned that everyone just wants to be accepted for who they are that is why we need to accept each other even with our differences or how we look. Just be a friend.

Mira Reynolds - 8th Grade
Highland Junior High - Teacher, Kim Irvine

The Guilty Onlooker

The impact stung like a thousand bees
As hand connected to cheek
But the pain was nothing
Compared to the meaning behind it
You're worthless, dirty, wrong
Are the words out of her mouth
From the one who gave you life
She wishes she hadn't

The other kids stay away from you
Like your insecurity is contagious
They feed off it with a ravenous hunger
By slowly cutting deeper
With their whispered gossip
And laughing taunts
You can't run away from the hurt
It follows you like a shadow

Violence, and especially youth violence, affects every life involved. Whether you are the victim, the bully, or just the observer, it will affect you. As the victim being hit, kicked, or punched hurts, but when you are continually degraded you feel like you're nothing. You're worthless. It feels like nothing you've ever done, are doing, or ever will do is going to make a difference. Punches may break bones, but words break souls. They can take the strongest soul and crush it, turn it into an ant under a shoe. Words can ruin hope.

Violence through the eyes of a loved one is heart breaking. When you watch someone you know get beaten, or even just picked on, part of you breaks off like leaves off a tree. No matter how hard you try to suppress the guilt about not doing anything for them, it will just keep resurfacing like a buoy of doom. It presses you until you can't stand it anymore, just looming there, making your life miserable. When you don't do anything for the victims of violence, you are worse than the bully. It's like one, enormous whirlpool of violence, and you're on the outside just watching, as the strong push down and climb over the weak to get out. As a thirteen year old, I have been the weak in that whirlpool, the pathetic strong, and the guilt ensconced observer; everyone has.

When I watched my classmate in the poem go through that cruel teasing everyday, doing nothing about it, I was worse than the bully. I could see her frantically struggling to ignore them and knew how it felt because I had been in that same situation. I *still* did nothing. I pretended not to notice or busied myself with something else, and I regret it. Now I think, maybe I could have helped her. Maybe, she wouldn't have had to just continue to revolve around that whirlpool, knowing her fate was inevitable, seeing it coming. Maybe, she wouldn't have had to become the bully to escape it.

The beginning of the leaves turning orange
Signifies the new school year
Another year of dreading everyday
Of cutting taunts
Of the escape from one hurt to another
Maybe...
It only needs to be an escape from the one hurt
Maybe...
There doesn't need to be hurt here
You can strike them before they strike you
Like leaving the starting line before go
There is a way out of the cycle

Haha!
It looks like mom messed up with the summer haircut!
I can't believe you didn't know that, moron!
You're so stupid!

Haha.
*They can't even try to hurt me anymore.
They're helpless now.*

Haha...

It's funny how in this cycle of violence the worst bullies were always the worst victims, or maybe it's not funny, maybe we should learn from this cycle, and never victimize people in the first place. Is that too much to ask? When someone hurts someone else they're just trying to replace the pain they feel. "Misery loves company," once said a philosopher named John Ray. When you're hurting inside and that's all you can feel you don't want to feel it alone, so you may try to hurt others. I know it sounds like I am defending the bully, but is that wrong? Believe it or not, but the person who's hurting you has feelings; they may not be expressing those feelings in the healthiest form, but that can be hard. Compare it to when you do something bad, and you know you need to tell your parents, but it's easier to lie about it. Like that, it's easier to just get angry and violent, than to handle the situation from a calm point of view. We've all lost our tempers, so shouldn't we try and show some compassion for others who do, too?

At the time that I watched my classmate become the victim, and eventually the bully, I had no idea why she would inflict the same pain that hurt her so terribly, on others. I couldn't even fathom the idea that she was defending herself, and I had no idea she was experiencing the same thing in her home, but I understand her now. I can imagine how she felt trying to run from one hurt to another, like a tennis ball bouncing between players. The next year she moved away, and that's when I decided that I wouldn't just sit and watch while somebody I knew got bullied. I would take action. If I heard someone degrading someone else I would

assert myself and confront them, but not violently. I don't believe in fighting fire with fire.

Youth violence has affected me through the eyes of another. Every form of violence is wrong, and to this day I am trying my hardest to stop it and make up for the time that I didn't. I try to be friends with everybody, whether he/she is a victim, a bully, *everyone*. Sometimes they don't want to be my friend, but I still smile at them in the halls or pass them the ball in gym. I'm not perfect; I've had my times when I was the bully. I always got back on track, and I know others can, too. Violence is unnecessary, and one person pouring water on a forest fire might help a little, but not much. We need more than one person, so I challenge you to, in the words of Jesse Jackson, "Never look down on anybody unless you're helping him up." and just maybe, we'll change the world.

Is it wrong to hope?

UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO
Do the Write Thing

Runners Up

Zack Dougher

8th Grade, Fort Herriman Middle School

Teacher, Brandee Davis

Name Withheld by Request

8th Grade

Zack Dougher - 8th Grade
Fort Herriman Middle School - Teacher, Brandee Davis

Violence

Violence, what is violence? When my class was asked this question most of the responses had to do with people punching, wars, and fighting. In my opinions punching, wars, and fighting are high levels of violence. To me there is not one form of violence, but two. I believe there is physical violence and social violence.

First I'll talk about social violence. Social violence is things like teasing, name calling, and taunting. I think that social violence hurts the most. It's the violence that is the hardest to live with. You sit there thinking that people don't like you for something you said or did. Something that you wish you could just take back; but you can't, so you sit there while it eats at you. Kids today tease you about everything you do wrong. They find something that you didn't mean to do or say and then they exploit it. A lot of times they do that because the person teasing has self esteem problems. They know that they have problems, so to hide their problems from the world they exploit others problems. We need to learn how to say "Hey he/she made a mistake, big deal." Unfortunately teasing is a big factor in suicide. From 2003-2007, Utah's age-adjusted suicide rate was 15.2 per 100,000 people. It is the 2nd leading cause of death for Utahns ages 15 to 44 years old and the 3rd leading cause of death for Utahns ages 10 to 14 years old. Suicide hurts, especially to the family. Innocent people kill themselves all because someone was teasing them. Like I said before, we need to say "Hey he/she made a mistake, big deal. Martin Luther King once said "Nonviolence means avoiding not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. You not only refuse to shoot a man, but you refuse to hate him."

Teasing hurts, it really hurts. It just makes you want to disappear. In my life I've been the teaser and the teased. When I was in 6th grade I decided I wanted to hang out with the "cool kids". I had seen them around school and saw that they teased kids. I had seen and heard that when you were in junior high you wanted to be in the "cool kids group". I didn't really want to tease kids but I decided to do it so I could be in the "cool group". After I did it a couple of times I felt horrible, but I told myself that it would pay off later. Eventually I got in the cool kids group but I figured out that they weren't so cool. I made a bad choice and hung out with them even though they teased kids.

When I hung out with them, I just observed while they teased kids, but after a while they decided that if I wouldn't participate in they're teasing that I shouldn't hang out with them. I guess they decided to have a little fun

before excluding me from the group. They use to tease me a little but not as much as they would tease kids that weren't in the group. A day later I knew I had enough of them, and they knew it too. They started asking if they could cheat off of my paper. I figured that if I let them cheat then they would accept me. I hated letting them just get away with cheating but I decided I would do it so they would accept me. They knew that I wanted to stay in the group and that if they acted like we were friends that they could cheat off of my work. As much as they acted like friends with me they still teased me. Each day they teased me more and more. I hated school and being used. I hated being teased the most. I felt like I just wanted to disappear. I felt like I was treated like dirt. I hurt inside a lot. I then realized that this is maybe how the kids I teased felt like. I gained respect for all of those who I teased because I knew how they felt.

Now I'd like to talk about physical violence. Physical violence is what everyone thinks of when you say violence. Physical violence is punching, wars, and fighting. It is often the result of social violence. It is harming another's body. Physical violence, as well as social violence, brings trouble. If you were to get in a fight on school grounds you would be suspended or even expelled and it would be applied to you records. If you were to fight and severely hurt someone you would be taken to court and you may be charged with felony charges. As for the war in Iraq, the U.S. is spending \$12 billion every month. That statistic was updated January 4, 2009. As far as January 14, 2009 the death toll is 4221. That's horrific. It breaks you hear to know they are dads, moms, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, uncles, aunts, and cousins that have all died in Iraq.

Violence is horrible. It hurts families. I think that to stop violence it starts with one person. He or she may stick up for themselves or others and someone will see that and do the same and sooner or later it will spread like wildfire. Nobody likes violence, but if we hate violence then we would do something about it. I felt great after sticking up for myself and being nice to people and I'm sure that if you stick up for yourself or others that you will feel great. Some say that violence will never stop, but they are bystanders and doubters. They sit and watch fighting and teasing of kids happen but don't do anything about it. We need to get involved and stop the fighting and teasing. We need to believe that violence can end. If you want it to stop then do something.

Name Withheld by Request - 8th Grade

I Can Make the Change

Anger.. Control.. Hatred.. These three words all have one meaning: violence. It is said that violence is an unjust or unwarranted exertion of force or power as against rights or laws. As of how I perceive violence; I tend to think of abuse.

I believe everyone has had the misfortune of being either physically, emotionally, or sexually abused. Although some people's experience with abuse has been few, everyone's seen it, everyone's heard it. An unkind word or a little fight outside; abuse is everywhere. I have never been more alone then when I've felt the feelings abuse brings. As simple or as complicated as abuse can be, I always get that same old feeling.

As a young girl, I noticed how abuse was affecting my family, along with many kids my age. I guess you wouldn't say my family; it was me. The dreaded play date mom set up with Jess's mom came and went every Wednesday. It wasn't Jess who was the problem, it was her older brother. Jess was my best friend for a while; we played house and barbies, watched movies and ate jelly sandwiches. I could name five million things I loved to do over there, but it was the big blue room that made the feeling start inside of me. The first time it happened I knew my soul didn't know any better and my thoughts were no longer clean. It felt like I was committing some huge sin that I couldn't control. I remember being backed up into the corner of his room, him telling me, "I only want to have some fun. After all, you need fun while Jess does her chores." I would try to make lame excuses like, "I really have to go potty." Or, "My tummy hurts, I don't want to do this today." But he didn't care. He'd unzip my pants and do what made him 'happy'. After he started, I would try to think of every possible way I could get out his room. He was much more strong then me so if I tried to run, who knew how far I'd get before he'd catch up. If I tried to scream, who knew how loud I would get until he hurt me even more. All I could do is count the seconds until what seemed like a lifetime was over.

Being the victim at seven was hard. I was already so insecure and I felt as if my life was absolutely hell. Before I even knew what self-esteem was; I had none. Before I knew what sex was, I had accepted it as something he and only could do to me. Before I knew my body was only mine and it was up to me to take care of it, some freak had taken over it. But worst of all, before I knew it, all I started wanting was more.

Sadly and disturbingly, that's how violence works. It takes over people like some drug they can't control. They want to kill, they want to hurt, they want to force. They pass that drug through some unwanted bee sting and from there it stings their victim. The bee sting passes like a virus and you can't stop it unless someone takes a stand and tries to find the cure. And it was up to the small eight year-old me, to find it.

At first I tried to be incredible woman. I thought I could stop the violence of abuse by pretending I was superman and I could just tell everyone to stop, show them my big muscles and the world would be fine. But I figured out it is nothing like that at all. There are steps you must take to stop violence. First: you must realize that what happened to you was wrong. You must tell someone you trust, which is the very hardest thing to do. You can't hold it all in, or you won't be able to move on. Second: you have to forgive your abuser. No matter how much he hurt you, it doesn't do any good to hate. You have to also forgive yourself. Then the healing process starts. You have to realize that everything's okay and you aren't alone. Thousands of others have gone through a situation just like you.

What I've been trying to get to is violence isn't only killing, it's many things. Violence is hard to deal with but what I would like to do is make it easier. Take what I know and what I've been through and spread it anywhere I can. Just like the drug, I want to get it out. But I want to get the right information out. Tell them that what was done to them was wrong, and it should be stopped. I want to tell people like me how hard recovering is but once you've overcome it you feel like you can do everything and anything. I believe we the children of today can change the wrong doings of violence, and I know I can help just a little. After all, we are the people for our future. We might as well start now by making it better day by day.

UTAH'S CHALLENGE TO
Do the Write Thing

State Finalists

Braden Bronson

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

Mauricio Robles

**8th Grade, Northwest Middle School
Teacher, Linda L. Lujan**

Sage Eastburn

**8th Grade, Highland Junior High School
Teacher, Kim Irvine**

Jackie Scheider

**8th Grade, Treasure Mountain Middle School
Teacher, Michelle Stratton**

Skye Mooney

**8th Grade, Treasure Mountain Middle School
Teacher, Julie Baker**

Devan Webb

**8th Grade, Desert Hills Middle School
Teacher, Whitney Lee**

Hannah Wilkey

**8th Grade, Highland Junior
High School
Teacher, Kim Irvine**

Braden Bronson - 8th Grade
Fort Herriman Middle School - Teacher, Brandee Davis

Violence in Today's World

Youth violence is becoming more and more of a problem in America. In the past 17 years arrests dealing with youth violence have increased by 22 percent. It happens everywhere and affects everyone. At church activities, school, the store, or even just walking down the street we often see someone getting bullied. This world is falling deeper and deeper into violent actions, and if it isn't prevented in early years violence will affect the future. The longer violence is allowed to continue, the more aggressive actions become. Because youth violence is becoming a bigger problem every year, we must find solutions that will create a safer, happier future for everyone.

There are many causes of youth violence. A lot of these causes are all around us and we don't even realize it. Outside influences such as videogames, movies, music, and books affect our thoughts. If they promote violence, they may make us think that hurting others is funny and enjoyable. Other reasons for violence can come from the home. Bullies may be violent because their parents hate a type of race or religion. Children in these situations learn that it's acceptable to use cruel words or actions to put down others. Some violent teenager have been abused which leads to these teens thinking it's normal to use violence to control others or to solve a problem. If a teenager is abused by his parents, is bullied by other students or is shouted at by a random person, he could become so angry that he wants to hurt someone. If he isn't taught that these actions are wrong, he might apply them to his own life without knowing it is bad.

Youth violence has affected me in many ways. The biggest form of violence I have seen is from bullying. At Fort Herriman, some of my friends have been made fun of because of their appearance, the way they speak, or even for being too smart. I've seen students get knocked around, shoved into lockers, and even blood on the floor after a fight. Violence can damage the victims in many ways. Some violence has gone so far as to send people into depression and sometimes suicide. But, violence, in a way, has had a positive impact on my life. It has made me realize how hurtful some things can be. It makes me want to prevent violence and help people who have been bullied. Youth violence can be prevented by taking ratings for movies and games more seriously. We can evaluate the music we listen to and find out whether it changes our actions towards other people. We can listen to the news and see if any of the actions we hear about relates to us, our family, or our friends. Schools should have anti-bullying programs that teach how hurtful and damaging violence can be. Teenagers need to learn different ways to express themselves rather than being violence. Youth violence can be tamed if everyone puts an effort into it.

In conclusion, youth violence hurts everyone. In the past several years it has increased a lot and will continue to increase if something doesn't change. If we want to create a different future, we must stand together to stop violence. Our actions today can influence people all around the world. So let's make a brighter tomorrow and eliminate youth violence all together.

Sage Eastburn - 8th Grade
Highland Junior High School - Teacher, Kim Irvine

45 MILES

Violence is like a maze. You spend so much time in it that you grow to love it, and if you are lucky, you will find a seeping hole that will escape you from the current crucial violence. It takes determination and a long time to escape the world of violence. Most likely, it will just lead to more violence that is insidious. There are many ways to express violence, but the one that hurts me the most is all the insidious things everyone does to you at school. I walk in the hall and I cannot get 20 feet into the school without being pushed or hit in some way. It is like starting a car race and only getting 2 laps done then getting ramped right in to the wall. You get so fed up with all this mediocre behavior that you have to go through. Not only does violence happen at school but also sometimes, the reason you are mad or angry is what has happened or happening at your house. When I was three my parents got a divorce. Therefore, it's not that I did not grow without a dad but it was painful only seeing him every other weekend. Every other weekend my dad drives 45 miles to come see me and take me to his trailer. My dad has become very caring and nice. Some say watching violence or playing violent games on the TV will cause you to become very fond of violence and soon grow to cause it but right after I get done watching crime shows or playing a war of gun game, I never feel like I want to go kill or hurt somebody. The only violence that really affects me is the fighting of all the gangs and all the atrocious violence that goes on at school.

Violence doesn't just exist in the U.S.A. but around the whole world. War is the main cause of violence to me. Finding out that at least 2,000 people die everyday astounds me. There are kids my age in Iraq trying to deal with guns firing, missiles blowing past their head, and watching innocent people die everyday. War doesn't just go on with other countries but also with teenagers and gangs. I never feel safe in the hall with all the violence that some of these people pile on to you. Walking out of the school you see a big crowd of blue in the corner of the field and on the other end you see red. All the violence these gangs cause hurts everyone. There is nothing wrong with having your own gang or group of epithets, but the way they use the ability of having this privilege is absolutely crazy. All this superfluous stuff makes a huge difference in the way I look at people and violence.

Don't promote violence or encourage it to go on. When I see gangs or somebody fighting I get as far away as I can. I never like to be apart of violence and nobody else should either. Tell people to stop if you see them bullying. The main and most effective way to stop violence is not to be a part of it. When everyone stomps violence away then no one will feel the need to start it. Violence is everywhere and will always be a part of our lives, but the violence that goes on at homes and schools do no good to the environment and the people around us. Violence just doesn't begin with pushing and fighting, but also with the words that come out of some of the bullies' mouths. Taking a punch is like having a painful fist swipe the front of your face, but taking in atrocious words is like having bombs blow up right in front of you. Punches effect you only a little bit but fire and smoke effect your whole body and stays there for a very long time. It will devour your body like poison that slowly kills you with a painful death.

Skye Mooney - 8th Grade
Treasure Mountain Middle School - Teacher, Julie Baker

A Fight Against Youth Violence
Too Deep to Heal

Some people are born lucky, some aren't. Some people are born in a safe environment where they can grow and learn, and some never experience that. There are few people that feel their lives are perfect, but what many of us don't realize is that someone else is always suffering more than us. There will always be someone who has it harder. I used to think that that's what it came down to, whether or not we were born lucky. Now I realize that luck is a matter of it, but two people born in the same town, people who have the same wealth, the same luck, can live very different lives. Not all of us are lucky, but does that determine what you do with your life?

I never thought about teen violence until the middle of sixth grade. In elementary school, they all warned us to "say no" to peer pressure. We were supposed to say no to drugs and alcohol, and say no to violence. Back then it seemed so easy. I would glance around the room at my peers and laugh to myself, none of us would ever do that! We all pledged to be friends on the watch, and we all pledged to be drug and alcohol free. Therefore, I made the conclusion that no one in my life would ever do anything bad. I would never experience any peer pressure, or go to any of the dangerous parties our school counselor was talking about. Teen violence would never touch me.

In the middle of sixth grade I was introduced to the first real-life case of a family affected by it. Though it was not direct, I saw how it tore at the edges of a once strong family. One of my best friends, a person I had known since kindergarten, was walking to drama with me when she told me she needed to talk to me. I thought it would be about boys or something gossip-like, so I anxiously leaned closer to hear the news. She stopped and started to tell me about her cousin, a seventeen-year-old

boy whose parents had just found out he was a heroine addict, and was being accused of rape.

I was frozen with surprise. As she finished telling me about it, I saw the tears well up in her tired eyes. I saw a once bubbly and cheerful face that was now dead. It was transformed by stress and grief. Not knowing what to say, I did what came naturally and hugged her. I tried to imagine what she was going through. What if my cousin, who was also one of my best friends, was found guilty of rape and drug abuse? I know I wouldn't be able to bear it. Even though it wouldn't of left a mark on my body or toxicities in my blood, it would of left an emotional wound too deep to ever heal. That's when I knew my life was going to change. One event, a life-changing event that affected my friend's cousin, had introduced me to teen violence, and I wasn't ready.

Even though I knew more was about to come, I wouldn't accept it. As sixth grade started to end, a boy got suspended for breaking another boy's collarbone. These kids were in my grade! They had fought a real fight. Real youth violence directly affecting two people I knew. I was shocked! How could sixth graders be getting in fistfights? How could two people I knew do enough damage to break bones? It hit me almost as hard as the issue with my friend's cousin. How could all of this be happening when I wasn't even thirteen?

I continued to ask myself that question through seventh grade. When one of my friends came to school with cuts on her wrists and everyone started to avoid her, I asked myself why it was happening. Why would she do this? Now I ask myself, why wasn't I there for her? Just like the rest of the student body I separated myself from anything different, too afraid of hurting myself. So I let her take her own road, a road that led to an eighth grade of drugs and abusive relationships. She doesn't notice me anymore, but I notice her. I see what she could have been if I was there for her. I see what she could have been if I would of gotten help. But that vision always fades quickly, because the image she has created for herself overcomes the way I see her, the way she would be if I were there for her.

Someone I am there for though, is slowly recovering from a youth-violence issue. The affects on her are strong, and she is fighting everyday for every breath.

Sometimes all I can offer is a shoulder for her to cry on, and sometimes what I offer makes all the difference in the world. Whether it's advice, distraction, company, or support, I know that what I am doing is helping her get through each day. I was shocked to find that the advice I give has impacted the situation in a positive way. Who knew a fourteen-year-old could make a difference in something so serious? By taking action, I have learned that what I do can change the way things occur.

From personal experience, I have seen teen-violence caused mainly by problems at home. The want for a higher social status also plays a part in teen-violence. Middle schools are run (by the student body), as we picture a land broken into casts and social rankings. People strive to become socially accepted by a desired group, and will often perform acts of violence to achieve it. I have also witnessed violence occurring because of drugs, alcohol, anger-management problems, access to weaponry, or being in an abusive relationship.

I have also learned from personal experience that what I do to help those affected by youth-violence actually does make a difference. Whether it is personally suggesting advice, or asking a trusted adult about what to do, I know I'm helping someone. Everyday I look at the tired eyes of those who have been harmed. Through them I see more than scars and bruises and hurtful words, I see a gash too deep to be healed. Everyday I ask myself if I could have prevented that wound, and more often than not the answer is yes. More often than not, what I would have had to do to help required little effort, but the strength I didn't have. Now as youth violence starts to make a bigger impact on my life, I realize the importance of taking action. I now know that it can be prevented, and that it is my responsibility to contribute to the fight against it.

Mauricio Robles - 8th Grade
Northwest Middle School - Teacher, Linda L. Lujan

Youth violence

Well youth violence is a very interesting subject. I think all people agree that youth violence affects everyone. Youth violence affects my life because all the influence in the world. I'm seeing all this violence on the news. Teens thinking that gangs are the best way to deal with there lives. Hurting everyone around them, like family, friends, and innocent people. Seeing every teen start to do all these things makes me think that one day I can be attacked by a teen that thinks that he's nothing. Starting to get more scared just to walk around my own neighborhood. Thinking of the things that can happen to me if get jumped by two of more people. Could get severely hurt or killed. Starting to hear about more teens getting their hands on guns and weapons. That just scares me, knowing that there could be some kids at my school with any kind of weapons.

I think there are a lot of reasons that cause youth violence. I say that the top reason is the media. For example there is the internet. On the internet you can see many things on pictures and videos. Like u can see videos of teens fighting or ganging up on one person. You could see stuff like how to use a gun or how to use a knife as weapon. You could see pictures of people using a weapon. There is also the television; you can see many violent shows that influence teens. You can see allot of gang related shows. There is music videos that do say things that have happened to that person's life that is very bad. There are a lot of movies that are gang related. Another thing that causes youth violence is peer pressure. There are many people that get into gangs just because their best friend gets into a gang. Their friends could say that they would not be cool if they don't beat someone up. Parents are also a reason that causes youth violence. If parents are violent with their kids or wife (husband), the kid would think it's alright to treat other people like his parent or parents treat him. I think that many kids do that because that reason. I think there are a lot a reasons of youth violence but these are my top three. One more thing, the media is full of junk, yeah sure there could be a couple of good stuff, but more that 50% is all junk.

I personally think that I can't do much by myself, but what I can do is tell my friends and family. If I see a friend getting peer pressured I would go up to him and talk to him. Tell that he won't become cool by getting involved in youth violence. Tell him that it would be perilous if he does go with the gangs and violence. It is very striving to avoid peer pressure but I would do my best to help my friend out. I would tell my aunt, uncle, and grandparents about youth violence for they can help their children. With doing this I can probably subside that amount of youth violence around me. I can tell my friends to tell their friends about how bad youth violence can be. Try to change more and more people a day. I will do this because I barely see people telling their children or friend of youth violence.

My whole point of this is that youth violence really affects everyone. There are many causes of youth violence that get into the mind of teens everywhere. Things I can do to help out other people that are having trouble getting the point to their son, or teens trying to figure out what to do. Every teen should avoid gangs and all the causes of youth violence.

Jackie Scheider – 8th Grade
Treasure Mountain Middle School - Teacher, Michelle Stratton

To me, teen violence is a hurtful way to discriminate and ruin other teens lives. Also, teen violence can be physical AND verbal. I think that some teens express violence when they are shut out of the world, have low self-esteem, want power, or have trouble at home. I have been through a lot of teen violence throughout my life.

I have never been the same after it has happened, so this is my story. In sixth grade there were all the typical popular girls, and they pretty much hated everyone. But still, everyone wanted to be them. In the middle of the year I became one of them. I became disrespectful to everyone, even my family and teachers, but I liked the power of being one of the “it” girls. All of us were not even real friends; we were just a group people that were on a mission to destroy lives. We had the power to control the whole school. I got suspended for a week because I had called a girl really hurtful names. I had also gotten in several fistfights. When I was suspended, I put myself in the shoes of the people that I had been mean to; I would have hated to be one of those kids. When I got back to school the following week, I tried to convince all of my “friends” to start being nice to EVERYONE. They didn’t listen to me, which made me drop out of their group because being mean took away all of my life. I tried to make new friends, but no one wanted to be my friend anymore because of what I did. I tried to apologize, but again, no one listened. I started to get made fun of because everyone wanted to get back at me and they knew I was vulnerable because I didn’t have my usual entourage to yell at them.

Those next weeks were hell. I had finally realized what I had been doing to people, then again, I didn’t blame them for being so rude. I just thought, this is what I need to get better, because torture is the best cure in most cases. So many people

rejected me, so I had to restart from the VERY bottom of the social chain. As the weeks went by, I started to gain respect for my teachers, got gradually better grades and got some new friends. In fact, the first person that accepted me was the girl that got me suspended. I still think of how generous she was for doing that.

Now, I am very happy and have real friends. Pretty much everyone respects me now and has forgiven me for all I have done. There is still the mean clique and I just hope that they can learn to not cause violence, because I don't want them to be hurt the same way I was. So what I am saying is that teen violence, in whatever way it is, hurts people and puts their lives in jeopardy. We should learn to cut out the violence and it will make everyone's lives improve.

Devan Webb - 8th Grade
Desert Hills Middle School - Teacher, Whitney Lee

School fight

What is violence?

Violence involved the act of causing pain to ones self or others. This can include physical or emotional pain. Words can hurt more than fists so it is important for us to think before we speak to others. Typical acts of violence include bullying, fighting, assaults of all levels, self inflicted injuries, exclusion of others within peer groups and more. Violence typically shows warning signs and indicators in early stages of a child's life and if left without correction, can manifest into much more advanced problems. It will typically start as bullying and aggression until it can lead to major acts of violence against others or themselves. After reading this paragraph from www.youthandviolence.com I want to tell you my own personal story. About how a violence incident has occurred in my life about one year ago.

"I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent." Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

It was a regular day at school and the bell just rang. I was walking down the hall, when I see a kid bumping in to everybody. Person by person, to where he finally got to me and shoved me. I didn't really do anything at that time; I just gave him a glare. The next day came around, and yet again now he's tripping people. So he trips me, I shoved him back and he started cursing and saying racist remarks. I couldn't even hold my anger and thrust back, even if I tried. I was so raged; I felt so much hatred thrust upon my body. I couldn't stand that the fact that he was saying those things to my face. Before I knew it, he came up to me and hit me in the head with a Gatorade bottle that he had been holding in his hand, I than punched him in his jaw, I felt like I was in the boxing ring, I was scared, nervous, and didn't really know what I was doing at the time. All I knew was that he couldn't hit me, and I had to hit him. Punch after punch, swing after swing. I'm landing them all, finally he swings at me after a few shots of mine to the face, he misses I pull my head back and he swings again, yet he misses again.

Just than a teacher came out of the hall ways behind the lockers, he starts holding me and him away from each other. Still he doesn't care; he comes at me with another swing, I than dodge it and swing at him. And almost hit the teacher. Right than another teacher came out from the opposite direction. The teacher started heading me down to the principals office, when all of a sudden I hear foot steps coming from behind me. I look back, only to see the face of the same kid that I was just done fighting, or so I thought. My opponent got away from the

teacher and had now gone for me. Now I was really scared, he jumped on me and tried to grip my neck, I punched and squirmed my way out of his grip, now I was more angry than before. I start punching him, left from right, swing after swing.

Before I knew it he wasn't moving anymore. All the anger was gone, all of my fear, nervousness, and anger all gone. Now it was sorrow, and sadness. I couldn't believe what I had just done. What were going to be the consequences? All of these things came to my brain at once, I wanted to just run up to him and tell him I was so sorry! And I didn't even know what I was doing than. The sad part is, is that I don't know his name, I don't even remember what he looks like, all I remember is what I had done to him. I knew what was going to happen the next day or two. He and his friends were going to kill me, that's all I could think about. Not just three or two, there was going to be a lot. I should have stopped myself, I shouldn't have retaliated back, I should've known better. Hopefully I will not have to pay for what I had just done to the kid that I have just got into a violent fight with.

Luckily, I still have a perfect life, and I didn't get beat up the next day by him and his friends. The only major consequence was that I got suspended. And right now, my life couldn't be any better. I count myself as one of the "Lucky Ones" in life. Not just because I didn't get beat up the next day, or because I only got suspended. It's because of how my life is now. And I don't wish for violence, it sickens my stomach knowing that there our kids this age, with far worse problems than the one I just told you about in my life. If there is one thing that I would wish for, it would be to have hatred and violence go away; it would only make our world so much better.

"Peace cannot be achieved through violence, it can only be attained through understanding." Ralph Waldo Emerson

Hannah Wilkey – 8th Grade
Highland Junior High School - Teacher, Kim Irvine

Promises Made and Promises Broken...

As I watched my mother cry, as if she were being squeezed like a tart lemon, she was saying go back to bed. I replied with an angel soft whisper I can't mommy I'm involved now. I waited for an answer back, but she was lost in her words and speechless. All I could think about was why is my mom crying in the middle of the night, and why? It made me feel bad that she was hurting inside and that she had to hide things from me and my older sisters. I wonder what happened or what is happening to make her feel like this.

To My Beautiful Daughter,

I'm sorry; I put you through all that I have put you through. That time when I told you that I wished you were never born and that I didn't love you. I should have not have told you that, and nobody should ever be told that by anybody .I know that it hurt you but sometimes it makes me feel good. I know that I can get angry but that is just how I am and I will try to fix it so we will not have any more problems. I'm sorry that I tell you that everything is your fault and I'm really sorry. Everything that I put you through like, let you see my boyfriend abuse me and let you watch us fight. I really should have told you to go in your room or to call the cops. Whenever me and your step father would fight and you would stand up for me I would tell you to leave me alone and if he hits me then I would try to hide it and I'm sorry.

My mind is all confused and messed up. If I say anything to you that bothers you then tell me and we will fix it and never let it happen again. I have made some mistakes and I have not learned from them yet but I will. I hope that you will forgive me for all that I have done to you that has affected you in anyway. Every time I see you I see sorrow and sadness. My life was different then what your life has been because I had a father and I'm sorry you didn't. We lived in a big house and we were wealthy. I'm sorry that I didn't give you a great life but I gave you all that I could. I wish that we could have been closer in our relationship and told each other our feelings that we feel about all of this. I know I have not been there for you through all of these hard times but we have to look in the future and see how we are going to fix things and get closer. I really do not understand what you are going through but if you would talk to me about your feelings then I would know what you are feeling inside.

I hate myself for being so ingrate and rude. My heart hurts for everything that I have ever put you through. All I think about is that I have hurt you in so many, many ways and you don't deserve any kind of violence like that. Sometimes you can make me so mad but a mother should always love her child and not abuse them. Even if it is verbal or mental abuse it should never happen to anyone. When I grew up I never had any abuse in my life and it made me

happy that I was not abused and hurt. This one day I realized that I was hurting you in many ways and sometimes it was my fault. I never have felt the way you must feel and I'm sorry.

Love,

Mommy

I wish my mom would write this apology letter to me because she has hurt me in so many ways and I don't think anyone should be hurt like this. She doesn't understand that she is hurting me but it is and it needs to STOP immediately. I will be the last person in my family that is hurt by violence. It has been in my family for years and I am STOPPING it now, this very moment. Ever since it has been going on it has affected my grades and how I think of things. It should never get to that point for no one. We can STOP violence by helping our kids in our community and speak up, don't keep hiding it. It will make a difference in many people's lives. That word above, "STOP" can change lives. Violence is one of the most troubles that everyone needs to worry about. WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

I know why my mom is violent and abusive, it's because she has been through some herself and she has been involved in drugs and that is why she put me through it. It mostly is if someone is abused with violence they seem to use it against their own children and they don't know it. This is known as youth violence and it is happening this very moment. It needs to STOP.

That's not all. When I have kids they will not grow up how I did, with abuse and violence. They will be treated how they should treat others with respect. It will never happen for them to witness what I have in my life. I don't want my children to have kids and use violence and abuse to solve things, so that is why I will not have them grow up with it in their lives. I want my children to take the time to talk to me if they have any problems or worries. We will be involved in each other's lives and I will want to know what is happening to them, what is making them feel the way they do. So I can STOP violence and abuse by helping people that I know have these problems and not have it happen to others.

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