

ANDREA BESTOR SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



ANDREA BESTOR

is a junior at Avon Lake High School. She is involved in Drama Club, Key Club and Model United Nations. Andrea takes voice lessons at the Baldwin-Wallace Music Conservatory, has sung with the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Chorus, the Oberlin Choristers and is a member of various music performance groups at her school. She plans to study psychology or perhaps pre-law.

Words, whether they are spoken, written or withheld, are powerful. They were for Jay*, a 15 year-old boy from my high school who took his own life last year because of the cruelty he was forced to endure every day he came to school. Jay was in special education, was heavy and had trouble connecting with others. Because of this he was an outcast and a target for bullies, his name even becoming an insult around school. It was common for students to jokingly celebrate his absences from class. Cruel words that were spoken pushed Jay to the edge, and the words that could've saved him weren't there. The day after Jay's suicide, our school had a moment of silence, and one student said, "Who cares? No one liked him anyway."

Although Jay's tragic death had a powerful impact on the majority of the students at my school, that impact was sadly short-lived. While mourning Jay, many people made a conscious effort to be more sensitive about the words they spoke, but unfortunately that didn't last. Only six students from my school attended Jay's funeral. Two of the six were my friend and I, and we weren't even close with Jay. Although, as I said, I wasn't well acquainted with Jay, his death made me more conscious of what I say to and about others, and I wanted to inspire my peers to be more conscious as well. If you were to walk through my high school halls today, you would hear hateful speech and harsh judgments. When I thought about how to address this issue, I wanted to come up with a concrete way of reminding people of how their speech matters immensely to others. That's how the Speak No Evil Campaign was born.

With the sponsorship of the school's Key Club, the Speak No Evil Campaign will consist of raising personal awareness, fundraising, and a school-wide education effort, which will include a symposium with speakers from Suicide Prevention Education Alliance (SPEA) who will discuss the devastating effects of bullying and depression on the psychological health of teens. To raise awareness, we will sell silicone wristbands, with the inscription "Speak No Evil." Students will be encouraged to watch what they say about others. When they do speak evil, they will switch the wristband to their other wrist. The purpose of this is to increase awareness of how often we speak disparagingly of others. The money raised from the sale of the wristbands will be sent to Into the Light, a suicide prevention organization, in Jay's name.

Even when said jokingly, cruel words can kill. I am confident the Speak No Evil Campaign will raise awareness about the devastating effects of hateful speech. I hope the effect will be lasting, just like the effect Jay's death had on me. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "In the end, we will not remember the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." I choose not to be silent anymore.

** Name has been changed*

