



JOE KORDICK
YOUTH CHARACTER
AWARDS

2006 ~ 2007

ESSAYS

JOE KORDICK YOUTH CHARACTER AWARDS

2006 – 2007

The Joe Kordick Youth Character Award recognizes young people whose lives and achievements demonstrate an enduring commitment to qualities associated with good character and whose beliefs, attitudes, and actions have consistently exemplified the Six Pillars of Character – Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship:

- ☆ Uncompromising integrity and courage demonstrated by a willingness to do the right thing despite social pressure or personal risk
- ☆ Generosity of spirit and willingness for self-sacrifice in devotion to helping others
 - ☆ Community service in working for the common good
- ☆ Perseverance and inner strength enabling the young person to overcome physical, financial, or other difficulties.

This award is named in honor of the late Joe Kordick, founding Chairman of CHARACTER COUNTS! of Martin County.

ESSAY TOPIC

Describe a particular character trait you feel best describes why you deserve this award and describe an activity or project in which you have been involved that illustrates why you are the best candidate.

JOE KORDICK
YOUTH CHARACTER
AWARD FINALISTS

2006 – 2007

HIGH SCHOOL
ESSAYS

Michael Alexander
Jensen Beach High School

Michael Sean Alexander
Jensen Beach High School

My community volunteer service activity surrounded the initiation and implementation of Community Food Drives. This project was intended to benefit local Martin County residents beginning in the fall of 2003 when my family and I moved here from Broward County. I have continued this project throughout my high school career and I am currently organizing my Fourth Annual Food Drive through the 2006 holiday season.

Throughout my life, serving, giving and helping those less fortunate has always played a large part of my family's life. Being the youngest in my family, I watched my mother, father and sister serve the community in various ways. My parents were scout leaders, church volunteers and club volunteers through the Rotary Club of Coral Gables. At a very young age, I use to help my dad ring the bell for the Salvation Army during holiday time. I also sold my fair share of Girl Scout cookies, helping my sister and her troop. Serving our community is just what we do. I simply recognized through the years that the need to help those less fortunate never disappears. Having empathy towards people less fortunate, is the character trait that best describes me. My food drive was founded upon this trait.

Upon moving to Martin County, I easily saw an opportunity to be of service and initiated my plan. I thought this was one way of becoming immersed in my new community. Little did I know, this initial service project would grow into something much greater?

I began my project by calling the United Way and getting basic information about starting my own Food Drive. I then developed a time line for the event, establishing the dates of the collection, taking into consideration the sorting and distribution process that happens afterwards. I devised a list of non-perishable items for the community members

to donate from and established convenient collection sites throughout my neighborhood Palm Cove. My goal was to make it as easy as possible for neighbors to make a donation. I produced flyers on my computer and hand delivered them to over 200 homes. Most importantly, I physically met as many new neighbors as I could explain the importance of the Food Drive and gained their support. The first year the collection was substantial, but not what I had envisioned.

Throughout the years, I was able to garner more support from my community. I believe this happened when in 2004 we experienced the twin hurricanes. I went from house to house helping elderly residents secure their hurricane shutters, without payment. I made lots of friends! I also initiated at that time, a Hurricane Relief Drive collecting geriatric hygiene supplies as well as baby needs. That proved to be very successful as well. That same year, I turned my home into toy central for the White Dove Holiday Project, as the collection site for Toys for Tots. I can barely describe the feeling I got when my neighbors would show up with gifts. Not just ordinary gifts, but great gifts and lots of them. I live in a very generous community and have witnessed this first hand.

Wanting to reach more community members, I approached my church, Holy Redeemer, where I am a teen mentor and co-catechist for a high school Confirmation class. I then organized, with their permission, a student food drive. In combination with my community, I collected over 1000 lbs of food and several hundred dollars in food gift certificates. I am currently in the process of my Fourth Annual Drive which will take place from November 7th through November 30th.

My project has reached a large number of Martin County residents throughout the years. I have also learned that even if one person or one family is helped then I have been successful. Assisting those less fortunate is only half of the success of this service project; giving them hope for their future is the other half.

Am I worthy of receiving this prestigious Joe Kordick Youth Character Award? Yes, in all honestly I believe I am. I took a small community project and grew it into something much bigger than I even imagined. I also believe that the true reward is in the giving. That has been a gift I have been given throughout my entire life.

Danielle Blakeslee
Jensen Beach High School

Danielle Blakeslee
Jensen Beach High School

My name is Danielle Blakeslee and I am a senior at Jensen Beach High School. Attending a brand new high school gave me an opportunity to make a difference in my school which I didn't even realize was taking place until recently. During my sophomore year I was placed in Mrs. Dahn's special needs classroom to be a teacher's aid. I never really had the chance to work with special needs people before, so by being placed in Mrs. Dahn's class a huge door opened for me. At first I was a little scared and overwhelmed but that all quickly changed within minutes of being in the room. Immediately students were introducing themselves to me, asking me what my name was, shaking my hand, and asking me questions about myself. I was amazed! Growing up in New Jersey in a small town, I had never seen people with disabilities communicate so well, do class work, or in fact go to a public high school! It seemed like the possibilities were endless for my new friends! I knew from that point on that I wanted to become a special education teacher! Mrs. Dahn has taught and shown me how to make a difference in our world for people with disabilities and this is exactly what I am doing!

I started off by volunteering with the FRIENDS chorus which is made up of students with disabilities from elementary through high school. We even have a few volunteers' with disabilities that help out! FRIENDS meets even Monday for an hour and a half and also performs many times throughout the year all over south Florida! It is such a fun chorus to help out with! I love coming to practices and even more going to the concerts! It is a great feeling when people watch our choir perform and are touched and amazed at the possibilities that people with disabilities have! For the past three years I have been working with a certain individual named Ian. Ian is an 11 year old boy with Autism and is very challenging. When I first started working with Ian he would barely sit in his seat and would not act nicely throughout practice. He would get loud, pull my hair, wrap his arms around my neck, and try to sit on my lap. Although many people would be afraid of someone with inappropriate behaviors like these, he made me want to work even harder to help him do better in FRIENDS. Ian has gone from not being able to last one song during practice or a concert to standing up on the risers nicely with a smile on his face with the rest of his friends, and I love knowing that I helped him to get to that point! It was a lot of hard work, but it was definitely worth it!

On weekends I work with a 31 year old woman with a disability. Her name is Casey and honestly, she is my best friend! We go to the movies, out to dinner, and laugh the entire time we are together! With as much fun as we are having together, I never realize the people who are seeing us have such a great time! I want the world to see how fun Casey is and how she is not different from you and me. She is an amazing woman and will brighten up your life! Although people sometimes stare because they notice that Casey looks and acts a little different, I believe that they are noticing she is normal and that people with disabilities are just like you and me!

School events are one of my favorite things to get my peers involved in! For this years homecoming, a friend of mine, Mary, and I helped Krystal, a girl in our class with Down syndrome, become a homecoming candidate. Krystal represented the FRIENDS chorus and was escorted by Craig, another student in our class with Autism. Krystal and Craig were to attend homecoming practices, wear the right attire, ride in a convertible in the homecoming parade, be present on the field during the football game, and go to the dance! With many hours of dedication from all of us, shopping for dresses, picking up the tux, makeup appointments, finding the corvette, and attending all the events for homecoming, it was all a success! Krystal and Craig looked awesome in every event of homecoming and Mary and I were so honored to be able to help our friends participate in this school event!

Powder-puff is another favorite school event that I like to get my peers involved in! After several days of football practice for the girls, and cheerleading practices for the boys, we were all pumped up and ready for the big day! During the pep rally everyone sat with their class and competed against each other in contests to see which class was the best. Face paint, football jerseys with nicknames on the back, and high spirit for our classes really helped bring in the excitement for the flag football game later that night. Not only did the students from my class get to participate in the pep rally but they also played in the game! I really can't explain how wonderful it feels to help give the students in my class the opportunities to participate in school events like these. As everyday goes by I feel that our school and community become more aware of people with disabilities and the endless possibilities that are out there for them! I want to make sure that my peers get to have the chance to achieve the same goals that I do and to enjoy all of our school events and activities!

Another way that I like to involve my peers is by inviting them to join my classes. Whether it is Science, Math, or English, everyone is always willing and excited to go! I feel like it makes a big difference in my school when my friends with disabilities join my classes because all the students get to see that they too have the opportunity to learn something from the class and can actually do it! Last year I used to take a student to my environmental science class who was like a walking encyclopedia. He would read books all the time and memorize the information in them word for word. No one really knew that he loved to learn about animals, the ocean, and almost every form of transportation until he would raise his hand during a lesson and start talking about the subject we were on, using scientific names that we had never even heard before, being absolutely correct, and knowing more about the topic than almost everyone in the room! Giving him the chance to express himself and show his passion for the world makes me so happy! Everyone in the class was amazed and probably would have never given him the chance to show his talent if it weren't for that day in class.

My most recent involvement in my school is a club that I founded with two of my friends, Mary and Jake. The club's name is INSPIRE, because of all the inspiration from Mrs. Dahn, Mrs. Von, Para Professionals, and most of all my friends that have disabilities. INSPIRE gives everyone in our school a chance to be more involved with school activities, our community, and for everyone to get to know each other better. We have many projects set up and are planning to have a great time together.

In the end my goal in life is to make a better place for people with disabilities. There are so many possibilities for them and I want to support my friends in achieving as many goals as possible.

Amanda Brown
Clark Advanced Learning Center

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Clark Advanced Learning Center

Middle School. Ugh. Thinking about still sends chills down my spine. Although nothing could prepare me for the challenges I endured during those three years, I would not be the girl I am today without all the heartache. I remember walking down hallways and getting pushed into walls, being smacked around because of my braces and acne and being called a loser and worse. Things never came easily for me then. I didn't have any friends and I spent most of my time hiding in bathroom stalls, even during classes, just so I wouldn't have to face my peers. When someone was civil to me all I knew to do was lash out even to teachers and staff. It was after a particularly unpleasant day that I took my first steps towards my own moral integrity, it was also a day that changed my entire life course.

I came home from school and found my parent's door shut. This hardly ever happened and certainly could not be a good sign, but I pushed away my feelings of unease and went into my room, shutting the door quietly behind me. That day had been awful. At the time, I had a pretty severe stuttering problem that was usually triggered by nerves. During the day I had been asked by my English teacher to read my paper aloud and even though I had the paper right in front of me, I stuttered, completely terrified at the idea of standing in front of all those people. My worst fears soon became a reality as my peers mocked my impediment despite our teacher's warnings. Kids could be so cruel.

It was after a day such as this that I most needed someone to speak to, someone I trusted implicitly. My grandfather was always the man I called; he was such a comfort to me. It never failed when I was down he would be the only one who could make me smile. Even when I felt like the biggest failure the world had ever seen, he would tell me "There is so much good in you Amanda Kay, you just wait, you'll surprise everyone, even yourself, you just wait honey." That day it was just the kind of thing I needed to hear but as I began punching in the numbers my mother opened my door. "Who are you calling honey?" she asked gently, as she perched on the edge of my bed. "Papa" I said shortly. Though I loved my mother very much, she and I too often quarreled over my many imperfections. Right now I just needed to hear that things were going to get better, I needed to speak to my grandfather. She reached solemnly for the phone and put it gently back on the receiver, "There is something your father and I need to tell you sweet heart." Then something terrifying happened. My father came in, with tears streaming down his face.

To this day it was probably the worst moment of my life. A confession from both parents revealed that for the past ten years my grandfather had been battling leukemia. I had never known. Apparently it was Papa who had asked our entire family to keep his disease a secret from me. He had taken chemotherapy without my knowledge; we had ridden bikes together, gone swimming, we played baseball; I had pushed him to do all these things that could've shortened his life, could've killed him. As I sat there stunned by this revelation I admitted to my parents all the activities I had pushed my grandfather to do and to my surprise they both smiled. "You were the apple of his eye honey, he didn't want your pity, he just wanted your love." At that moment I broke down, the most generous and kind man I had ever met, my grandfather was gone.

On our way to the funeral I thought back upon the kind of man he was. I thought about his story. Starting as a door to door salesman, he ended up buying the company he worked for and making it one of the most nationally accredited companies in the U.S. Nothing had ever gone to his head; he had always remained a humble person, respectful and trustworthy. He gave everyone a chance. "People are not born bad", he had once said, "over time society can make them hard, but deep down all they need is someone to believe in them and a chance to prove themselves."

As the limo pulled up to the church, my hands began to shake. I looked down into my lap at a crumpled piece of paper. My grandfather had asked that I give the eulogy. I was a terrible speaker; I hated being in front of people, but I would get through it. This was for Papa. It was what he wanted. I had to do this.

When I stepped out of the limo I merged into a sea of people who were just standing, all looking up at the church. As I maneuvered my way up to the two giant oak doors and pushed them open, I was greeted by hundreds of people packed into the giant church. Every seat was filled, every inch of carpet was occupied by feet. Even the middle row that lead up to the front of the church was filled with people. Apparently those standing outside were unable to fit inside the church and had consented to wait until there was room to pay their respects. I looked around at the crowd, they were all so different; some young, some old, I saw a heavily tattooed man standing next to an elderly black woman in a big hat both sobbing. All of these people had come out of their love and respect for my grandfather. When it was my turn to speak I got up from my seat and made my way to the front of the church. As soon as I turned around to look at the crowd it hit me, this is my chance. Papa was giving me my chance. He had always believed in me, he had always supported me. He knew all I had needed was a chance. And though it came in an unexpected way, on a terrible day, my grandfather did for me, what he had for so many of the people before me, he had given me a chance to prove not just to my family but to myself that I was able to overcome my past and become the person I should have been all along.

In the past four years I have founded and participated in so many clubs, organizations and activities that I probably couldn't name them all if I tried. Last year I was elected Student Body President and this year I was inducted into Phi Theta Kappa. I've started an Ambassador's Club and a Homework Help Club and am an honorary member of the Red Cross Club. But the activity that I am most passionate about is my role in the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. I have been going door to door after school to raise awareness about these two devastating diseases and to collect donations that will help find a cure. In February I will be leading a team at the annual Light the Night walk to honor survivors of these diseases and in memory of those who have passed away including my grandfather.

So if you are unclear of what the trait is that I possess that is so special it is this: Even though I may stumble at times, I never, ever, stop trying to be the best person I can be. Inspired first by my grandfather, I am now determined to do my very best to continue his legacy of kindness. He was everything that Character Counts promotes and everything I strive to be every day of my life.

Lauren Cavette
Martin County High School

Lauren Cavette
Martin County High School

The character trait that I feel best describes why I was nominated for The Joe Kordick Youth Character Award is caring. I have demonstrated the trait of caring numerous times through my volunteer hours within local schools to benefit my community. I have a sincere love for making other people happy by going out of my way to help them or just by making their day a bit brighter. My latest project that showed how much I care about a local elementary school was a mural I painted of the "Teddy Bear Picnic" in a kindergarten hallway. Volunteer artists were sought to create a visually appealing environment for the kindergarten children. The mural was to incorporate educational concepts such as shapes, numbers, alphabet letters, and characters. Knowing the positive influence I could have, I gladly agreed to be a part of this project. I was driven and excited to paint and create, my hobby, for the good of others. I was determined and cared enough to make the mural really inspiring! I sketched out an ambitious rough copy, drawing as much detail as I could. I spent three years painting the mural, taking my time, so the end result would keep the children's imaginations satisfied for years to come! I was trusted to enter the vacant school on weekends and during the summer until I had painted the finishing touches and fine details. There was great satisfaction in spending my time for benefit of the young children who would learn from my work. It was so rewarding to hear the kindergartners pass by me as I painted and compliment me on my painting or tell me which bear was their favorite. Some little ones told me they too were artists. I could easily see the mural excited them. I felt like a great motivator and role model to open their eyes to what they could do in the future. I had the woods, the grass, and the entire entourage of food surrounded by bears finished in time for the new school year. On the first day of school, I was told parents were taking pictures of their children in front of my mural. Knowing this made me feel so satisfied that I could add to their memories of kindergarten. In my experience as a high school student, I see some tasks are not always completed above and beyond the original intention or even attempted at all. However, I care enough to contribute my heart and soul into projects, especially those that benefit young learners in my community.

Additionally, I spent a very memorable summer volunteering with Conney Dahn's exceptional education students at South Fork High School. I came to the classroom in the mornings and spent the entire day helping with a variety of activities. Sometimes I was assigned to one individual student or others times I helped out with the whole class. I was trusted to guide one to the restroom or help a girl, whose vision was limited, across campus. Whether it was assisting to put on a bathing suit or taking the time to figure out what the blonde student with the big smile in the front row needed, I learned how to work with all aspects involving these students. I helped teach them basic life skills such as setting the table and cooking lunch. We took field trips, including traveling to the grocery store, where I helped the students with their grocery lists so they could plan for upcoming lunches. Working with these ESE students was an amazing experience. I could truly expand and expend my amount of care and patience for them every day! By the end of the summer, they weren't just students with special needs, they were my friends. I had spent so much time with them that I came to know each one individually. The influence was mutual. Even after two years, their faces still light up when they see me and say "Hi" at school. I think every one can learn a lot from the simple love and compassion that radiates from each of these students. Their impact on me is so great, as a result, I am even more determined to go out and show the world a little caring goes a long way!

By caring about the well-being of others, I know in my heart my character has had a positive influence on others, particularly young and special needs students. I'm honored to be recognized for my character and glad that I can make a difference in numerous lives just for the pure happiness of knowing I have done so.

Timothy Jones
Challenger School

Timothy Jones
Challenger School

My name is Timothy Jones and I am a senior in high school. My home school would be Martin County High School. However, because of my disability I attend Challenger School the Special Education facility for Martin County School District.

I have a commitment to the Six Pillars of Character: Trustworthiness, Responsibility, Respect, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship. I try to incorporate these character traits into my daily life. Sometimes it takes concentration to follow the six pillars because I am a Special Education student. I have Tourette's Syndrome. The fact that I have Tourette's Syndrome does not interfere with my school work. I have made the honor roll every year since ninth grade. However, my Tourette's makes it difficult to focus, so I often have to put extra effort into social and personal developmental skills.

It's important to increase good character traits to become a caring and active member of the community. Focusing on Character Counts made me a better person. I used to be a spoiled brat that had everything done for me. I blamed my handicapping condition for everything. Now, by concentrating on specific traits I've become more independent and mature. I've been putting these character traits into my life and they've been helping me grow as a person. Attention to the pillars have enabled me to take my mind off of my handicap and made me a productive member of my school community. There is also a huge carryover to my life outside of school.

Of all of the Six Pillars of Character I would like to focus on Caring. I truly believe that I incorporate the Caring pillar for assisting my handicapped peer student, David every day.

Every morning for a year and a half! have been going to Ms. Basilico's class for Varying Exceptionality students. I go at 8:30 am and leave at 9 o'clock. The student that I assist is David who is a twelve year old boy and is Trainable Mentally Handicapped. He is non-verbal, deaf and has poor vision. He is also autistic. He has asthma and behavior problems. When I first started working with David all I was doing was guiding him in riding a tricycle and playing with him. This was basically keeping him entertained. Now I'm doing more skill training with him and enabling him to interact with his environment. This is very rewarding for me to help David work to his potential.

Each day I have to wake David and bring him to the workshop table and introduce him to the tasks that his teacher assigns for him. Some of the tasks I help with are counting skills, matching and sorting by shape, color and usage. I also present numbers and letters to David. I also assist David with assembly tasks using simple puzzles and manipulative objects. Sometimes David and I just draw or look at books together or explore the power of magnets. I had to learn some simple sign language and gestures to let him know when I want him to choose, sort, count, or assemble. I pat him on the back when he's done it correctly, and re-teach him when he doesn't understand the task. Many times he just doesn't want to work. I have to coax him into it and I have developed patience to let David work when he is ready and not do the tasks for him.

There are a lot of challenges when I work with David. He falls asleep on the bus and falls back to sleep when he gets into the classroom. Ms. Basilico says that David doesn't sleep through the night most of the time. When I wake him, he's sometimes angry or cries. I calm him down by playing with him or rubbing his back. Sometimes he wants to wrestle a little. Everything I do with David is a hands on experience because he can't hear or talk to me.

Ms. Basilico thinks I do a great job with David and that I have helped him learn a lot of new skills. But even more, David thinks of me as a friend. Children with disabilities usually do not have a lot of friends. I should know because I have a disability myself. I have made a friend in David and have grown and matured. Caring for something and someone has changed my attitude. I now know that I have so much to offer not only David and my school, but also my entire community. Caring must be nurtured and this pillar can have an enormous effect on your whole perspective of life.

I humbly submit my nomination for the work I do with David as an example of my inclusion of the Caring Pillar into my daily life.

Andrea Ramos
South Fork High School

Andrea Ramos
South Fork High School

I have always heard the saying "you should give back to your community ..." but never truly knew what it meant until recently. Volunteering for the American Cancer Society over the past four years has given me a greater understanding of what it truly means. This experience has made me realize that by creating awareness, getting my community involved, and giving time, I can make a difference. This project has helped me mature into a more caring and responsible young adult. Sometimes life throws you unexpected curveballs. One of the important things that I have learned from my mom is that everything happens for a reason. When I began my quest to find a place to volunteer, I had no idea that I would end up working and caring so much for a single cause.

In January of 2003, I saw a notice that the local American Cancer Society unit needed volunteers. The next day I made an appointment to meet with their community representative. By the time I left the meeting, I had been appointed to a committee position as Youth Chair for Relay for Life. I would soon find out that Relay for Life is an 18 hour event held annually in local communities. Through the efforts of local schools, businesses, and volunteers, the American Cancer Society is able to raise money and awareness about cancer.

Before I knew it, I was recruiting youth teams from my high school, giving presentations in front of dozens of strangers, and helping to organize the 18 hour event. Besides the fact that I was attending meetings and recruiting other volunteers, I also spent time during my lunch and after school talking to teachers and promoting the event in my community. That first year wasn't the hardest, but it definitely taught me the most. Even when I was unsure of the process or couldn't answer a question, I went with the flow and did the best that I could. I took the initiative to educate myself about the Relay for Life event and programs offered through the American Cancer Society. I met with my principal, approached members of my church and community, and entered a new realm of life. In a matter of months I went from being just another high school student to the girl who was in charge of Relay for Life. After five months of work the event finally arrived and became the stepping stone for my work with the American Cancer Society. Before the first event was even over, I had already started planning and recruiting for the next year.

Since that first year I have been involved with four relays and have been promoted to higher committee positions. Currently, I am working on my last relay at the high school level, and have had to face new obstacles and challenges. At the conclusion of the 2006 Relay, I was the only remaining committee member. I considered throwing in the towel and taking a break my senior year but I knew in my heart I wanted to continue. After losing my grandma to cancer just a month after the event, the purpose and the need for Relay for Life and the American Cancer Society, resurfaced in my heart. To keep this event striving and active in the community, I have dedicated myself to rebuilding the event. Together with several of my recruited friends, we are working to expand the event. As the only Relay veteran, I am spearheading the effort to bring back old teams and recruit new teams for the 2007 event.

Since I have moved to a higher committee position, I am now mentoring a close friend to take over the responsibilities that I previously held, so that my shoes will be filled at the high school level when I graduate and move on to college relays. I feel confident that long after I have left this relay event, it will continue to grow and make an impact in my community. I am also working with the new staff member from the American Cancer Society, who is counting on me to carry this year's Relay, which I am eager to do. In the midst of applying to colleges, preparing for many IB exams, and still participating in many programs at my high school, Relay for Life is still my top priority.

JOE KORDICK
YOUTH CHARACTER
AWARD FINALISTS

2006 – 2007

MIDDLE SCHOOL
ESSAYS

Karely Aguilar
Dr. David L. Anderson Middle School

Karely Aguilar
Dr. David L. Anderson Middle School

Thank you for nominating me for the prestigious Joe Kordick Youth Character award. Nominating me for this award motivates me to keep going with my dreams and goals. I'm going to talk about the three characters that I think describe my personality: trustworthiness, responsibility and respect. Also, there were some hard times I had in the past which will help me in the future.

I was born in California but, when I was 1 year old my mother took me to Mexico, which is the place where I grew up. Since I was a child my mother always showed me that I need to respect if I want to have a future with no problems. She used to say, "that everything bounces back ". If I respect others, they'll respect me too. With time I have seen that is the truth. Those things that I learned in my childhood have always helped me. For example, I came to U.S.A. one and a half years ago. I have never been punished because I always respect my teachers, friends, and I follow the rules. I had other problems but for different reasons. As I said, I have not been in the U.S.A long, but last year was the most horrible year of my life.

I couldn't speak one word of english and I was so scared of the first day of school that if anybody said "hi" to me, I hid under the table. That was a really bad experience.

Something I learned was to be responsible by doing school work and helping my mother keep a very clean house. My homework is not a really big problem because I love school. My mother wasn't sure if she could keep paying for my supplies and for school clothes. I really liked living with my mother in Mexico, but the first thing I have on my mind is to keep studying so I can finish college. At this time I think I would like to be a doctor or a dentist. My family and my goals are the two things that push me to do better at school.

I consider myself a trustworthy person in any kind of situation, or problem. I'm a very persistent person and I like to help when somebody needs me. It is important for me to give my best effort to get any project done. Also, something that I learned is that there is nothing impossible. It may be hard but not impossible. For instance when I was learning English I thought I would never learn how to speak English. Now I know that I was wrong. Both of my little sisters are really negative about learning. I tell them this is how I was in the past

In conclusion I feel like I'm an excellent candidate because I have to work so hard and I appreciate education so much. I look forward to studying and make all my goals come true.

Heather Bateman
Hidden Oaks Middle School

Heather Bateman
Hidden Oaks Middle School

I heard what I thought were grunts of frustration, and turned the corner to see where they were coming from. I was astonished! There in plain view, was an elderly man with his arms full struggling to open the door. He wasn't the only one around though. There were a fair amount of people filling the room, and not one of them went up to the man to offer him help. So, I marched right over there myself, gave him a smile and asked if he needed any help. Out of the six pillars of character, caring would best describe me because I'm kind, I'm compassionate, and I love helping others and making a difference in someone else's life.

First off, I think I deserve this award because I'm simply friendly and loving. People aren't as nice as they could be. I guess they're all consumed in their own lives. I understand that, it's pretty easy to get caught up in everything. Getting a smile from a complete stranger is becoming even more and more unusual. My thoughts are that this can be changed, starting with me. If I make sure to smile at a frazzled stranger, then maybe they'll do the same for someone else. Then that person will smile at yet another person, and so on and so forth. It doesn't end with just a smile, I try my hardest to hug a friend who needs it, reassure a person who needs reassurance, or be a friendly shoulder to cry on. I do these random acts of kindness, hoping that one day when I need one of these things, someone will be there to repay the favor

Next, I care about others and about the community. I'm in Girlscouts, and with my troop I take part in a lot of community service. In the past year or two I have participated in food drives, toy drives, and a beach cleanup. I have also volunteered at school functions, a fundraiser for the children's museum, and a breast cancer walk. But, my favorite thing that I've done that shows compassion was visiting my grandmother and her roommate who didn't have very much family. A friend and I would rush to the nursing home after school to spend the afternoon playing cards, having wheelchair races, and the occasional picnic in the garden when the weather was perfect. Visiting the nursing home was extremely hard, because it was sad about how many people would get excited over the your arrival. It wasn't surprising to have someone randomly strike up a conversation or offer you a couple of dollars to wheel them around the building. Although, it was sad, it was also very rewarding to know you have really made someone's day, as were the other things I've been involved in.

I'm sure most people agree, there's no better satisfaction than that of you feel from helping others. In second grade, I found this joy for the first time. I started helping a mentally disabled kid during extended day. I found so much happiness from knowing that the smile on his face was there because of me. Soon after I began joining him and other kids like him on the playground. I would teach them songs and how to play games like ring-a-round-the-rosy. By 3rd grade, I became an unofficial peer pal (a club open for fourth and fifth graders, in which they would give up there recess period to visit and help the mentally disabled children). By the time fourth grade came around, I was more excited than a toddler on their birthday to finally be a peer pal, and I would spend almost all of my recesses coloring or helping the kids with their current schoolwork. It wasn't just me helping them, though. I have a feeling they helped me a lot more than I could ever helped them. These kids were the ones that taught me what good character was. They taught me every aspect from simply sharing toys, to persistence and to never, ever give up, no matter how hard it gets.

In conclusion, all I have to say is that I try. I try to be the better person. I strive to have good character, and for every kind thing anyone has ever done for me, I try to repay that kindness to someone else who needs it. I'm going to leave you with this quote said by Elmer G. Letterman: "personality can open doors, but only character can keep them open".

Lisa Bresson
Stuart Middle School

Lisa Bresson
Stuart Middle School

“You have such a giant heart.” That seems to be what I am always told. I have always been known to be the caring one. When I think of the word caring I immediately think of helping, loving and willing. All of these qualities are ones that I possess, and together I feel that they shape me into the caring individual that I am known for.

To begin, I have always loved helping others. I have been involved in the Peer Counseling program at Stuart Middle School for the past three years. In this program I work with the Trainable Mentally Handicapped children for one period of the day. They have something new to say or show me that really touches my heart each and every day. When the children seem to be having a rough day a lot of times all it takes is someone to sit and listen to them. These children need a great amount of help and care on a daily basis, and I am always right there to do what I can.

Also, to be a caring person I feel it is very important to have a loving personality as well. I have been helping the children in my church’s nursery for quite some time now. While helping in the nursery I have always been very loving toward every child who has ever stepped foot through those doors. Along with the children in the nursery I also volunteer at Gertrude Walden Day Care Center. I work with the one and two year olds, which usually consists of reading books, playing with blocks, dressing up, or just having an open lap for the kids to sit on. My loving and caring individuality has been noticed by these children and their parents who have complimented me on my positive attitude in both places.

Finally, I feel to be a caring person you must also be very willing. Caring is something you are willing to do and something that comes directly from your heart. I am on the Peer Mediation team; in this after school activity we are trained to mediate other students with the simple every day conflicts that occur on campus. I have willingly volunteered to represent Peer Mediation as team captain. My position is to make sure I am right there to do whatever might be needed. I prepare all meetings the day before as well as taking notes at the meeting. As well as the Peer Mediation Team, I also have willingly given up my Friday nights to volunteer at the Bread of Life soup kitchen. Here I administer to the elderly and homeless people of the community. They all receive dinner and a comfortable environment to come and socialize. For most of them this is there only night out for the week. It has been very encouraging for me to see some of these helpless people receive the nourishment and care they need to help get through another week. I always do what is needed with a happy heart and a smiling face.

All in all, to be a caring person you must have many other positive characteristics. As you can see I have always been helpful, loving and willing. These qualities have made me the caring person I am today. For all these reasons I feel I am the best candidate for the Joe Kordick Youth Character Award.

Derrick Edwards, II
Dr. David L. Anderson Middle School

Derrick Edwards
David L. Anderson Middle School

My most important character trait, which describes my life is responsibility. As the oldest of eight children I've learned to treat everyone like a brother or sister. Since my mother and father are working very often, they have learned to make me in charge of the household on a daily basis. More important they have learned to trust me and teach me what it is like to have such responsibility given to you at an early age. As a .responsible adult for my brothers and sisters I am asked to make decisions, which are important and keep my brothers and sisters safe.

Our age differences make me relive my own experiences from elementary school. I know exactly what a five-year-old thinks when he attends his first day of school. Or what about when a six year old learns to ride a bike for the first time. When an eight year old tells me she needs help with her homework I remember learning that kind of math for the first time and what it felt like when I could not solve a math problem. Keep in mind that not only do I have to relive my past experiences; I also had to deal with my own frustration of not knowing what is required since I was not in my sisters classroom to learn the assignments. The nine year old and thirteen year old love to play basketball just like I do. They have to realize that in our household that schoolwork comes first.

Finding time to communicate with my parents has become a difficult task. They want to know what happened each day and whether I encountered difficulty with any of my six siblings. We also attend church on a regular basis, which has given us a good upbringing in being good citizens in our community. I learned that keeping a strong faith in our family lets us help each become closer and more in tune to what is important to each other.

It seems very strange for me to get in any kind of difficulties in school. How would I explain to my brothers and sisters that their mentor is not respecting their teachers and getting the kind of grades that are expected of them? I take the straight road and do not get in trouble.

As a basketball player on the school team I know I have a responsibility to my teammates. In order for our team to play up to the competition and to become united we must learn to sacrifice for the benefit of other players. Each day the drills that we must practice reminds me of what my goals are for the future in school and in life. I look forward to the coaches asking me to make a play work or to assist other team members to score points even though I would like to be shooting and scoring points.

One of my more responsible moments at home came when my own mother became sick and I had to take care of her as well as my six brothers and sisters. This really tested my strength of what I do on a daily basis. My mother realizing what I must do when she is away from home could not help but thank me constantly during her illness. The biggest challenge that I had with my mom being ill for an extended period was that everyone wanted her attention. This did not help my mom since it was more difficult for her to concentrate on getting well quickly.

I am slowly realizing what it will be like when I have children of my own. It is quite a chore to balance your life on an everyday basis and make sure that as a parent you don't forget to you enjoy your own life but that you live your life through your children.

Lexi Gioseffi
Murray Middle School

Lexi Gioseffi
Murray Middle School

Being responsible by definition is being accountable for something within one's power. We all have an obligation and responsibility to give back to the community what it has given to us. I show responsibility by completing this obligation as well as always working my hardest. Responsibility is working your hardest, responsibility is having the power to take control and give back to the community and feeling accomplished afterwards, and it is participating in projects that show responsibility, like how I am a member of the Builders Club. After all, "You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today" (Lincoln).

To start off, responsibility is working your hardest. Whether it is in your studies, in a sport, or any other activity, you should always show your true potential. Responsibility can also be toward yourself. You can prove to yourself that you can be responsible. You can get high grades and make an excellent tennis serve if you work your hardest. Being responsible in this form is the true meaning of responsibility.

Furthermore, you can describe responsibility as taking control and giving back to the community. Responsibility gives you a power that will allow you to succeed in a deed. It is donating to a charity or completing community service, but most of all, it is a character counts pillar to give back in turn of what you have taken. Responsibility is to replenish the society for future generations as in the past others have done for us. This is taking control and giving back to the community. Responsibility is also feeling accomplished. Responsibility to me can be described as wanting to feel accomplished again, wanting to come back for more. Responsibility is addicting. Being responsible is something no one can do once. It is like being in a rip tide. Once you are in, you can't seem to escape.

In addition, responsibility is participating in events or in projects. I show responsibility by attending Builders Club-a group that serves the community- meetings every Friday in return for giving back to the community and feeling accomplished. We plan events along the lines of beach clean-ups and collections for the less fortunate. One of the most motivating projects that I participate in every year is the "shoe box project." We first advertise the collection of items and then collect them. After the collecting is over, we separate the items into categories like hygiene and school items. We take two or more boxes that we have also collected and wrapped, and fill the boxes with necessities and fun items. Then the boxes are loaded and delivered. I see this event as being responsible and completing the obligation of giving back to the community. After this event every year, we get a card to thank us. As I read the card I feel accomplished and responsible.

To sum up this thought, I deserve the Joe Kordick Youth Character Award, because I show responsibility. I take control and give back to the community, I feel accomplished after doing something responsible, and I participate in the builders club. Through this, I think that I understand the meaning of this Character Counts pillar more adequately. "It is not only what we do that we are held responsible, but also what we do not do" (Moliere).

Jessica Gutierrez
Indiantown Middle School

Jessica Gutierrez
Indiantown Middle School

Everyday after school I have the responsibility of caring for my brothers and sisters. They range from 13 to 8 years of age. I make sure they do their homework and give them a snack when they come home from school. While they do their homework I have chores to do for my mother. Sweeping the floor, mopping and taking out the trash are part of my responsibilities. As the oldest child at home I feel I should set a good example. When I am done with my chores I also sit down and complete my homework.

I feel I exhibit responsibility in school by being a good student. I listen in class and follow the directions of all my teachers. It is important to me to get a good education therefore I always finish my work and study at home for my tests. In the classroom I am in charge of taking care of my teachers reading library. I collect the books and put them away for her everyday. Collecting the books from the students, handing out supplies and worksheets for my teacher are some of the jobs I have in the classroom. Often I lend my classmates pens, pencils and other supplies when they do not have them for class.

Showing responsibility is important to me. Everyday by completing my homework and class assignments on time help teaches me responsibility. I want to be a responsible adult when I grow up. Why not start now?

Emily Holland
Stuart Middle School

Emily Holland
Stuart Middle School

Imagine a world full of people who don't care, a world where everyone is uncaring and intolerant of others. How sad and scary that would be! I have sung the songs and listened to the message of Character Counts since kindergarten. This message has influenced me to be the person I am today. In Character Counts, you learn the six pillars of character: trustworthiness, responsibility, respect, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Of all of these pillars, the one pillar that describes me most is caring. To care, you must want to help others. You have to want to change people's lives from within your heart. It feels wonderful to help someone and change their life - or even just their day. To me, caring is not just an activity or a trait we learn about in school, but a way of living.

When I was in first grade, my little sister was diagnosed with cancer. I cared for her and played with her to keep her smiling. It was rewarding to do something meaningful with my day. More importantly, she realized she had someone at her side. Over the years there have been many opportunities for me to help others.

In fourth grade there was a girl who everyone made fun of. This girl looked different from everyone else and was very self-conscious because of that. I cared for her and showed her there was nothing wrong with looking different. She started to feel less self-conscious and began to wear more confident clothing. She became one of my good friends. It was spirit lifting to see how much I influenced her and raised her confidence.

In the past year, I met a girl who was having trouble making friends. She is like everyone else except she acts a little different and is very shy. I have been working on showing everyone how nice she can be if you talk to her. She has become my friend and many others as well.

In addition, I have been babysitting a severely handicapped child for the past two years. I go to her house most Fridays and play with her and make her happy. It makes me feel pleased when I see her smile a mile long when I walk in the door. I have come to love her like a sister.

Caring for someone can be as important as helping a handicapped child or as simple as helping someone with homework. I have recently been helping my fifth grade neighbor with her homework. When she gets frustrated, she calls me, and I help her through it by making it fun. I remember how hard fifth grade can be and wish I'd had a helper. Sometimes Mom just can't help like another kid can.

As you can see, when I meet someone who needs help, who seems sad, or who needs a friend, I feel good about helping him or her. I hope it makes a difference in their life or even just their day. Imagine a world full of people who care, a world where every one helps each other. How amazing and wonderful that would be.

William Li
Murray Middle School

William Li
Murray Middle School

I believe that trustworthiness, responsibility, respect, fairness, caring, and citizenship are tied together by a common thread. However, I chose responsibility as my best character trait, because I feel that it best describes me.

This year, I was selected to be a member of National Junior Honor Society (NJHS). There are specific criteria that one must meet in order to be considered as a member. I was selected because my grade point average is 4.0 and because I am involved numerous co- and extra- curricular activities, leadership positions, community activities. For example, I was a Peer Leader and one of five students from each class selected to be in the "Train the Trainer" program. As a trainer, I trained the other students to stay off drugs and alcohol.

The NJHS is currently hosting a food drive, and I am one of the students that are entrusted to pick up, count, and keep track of the food. My peers and I work together to distribute the food to those in our community that need a helping hand.

I have been playing the flute in the Murray Middle School Band for the past 3 years. I like playing music in an ensemble or by myself. Earlier this year, the other members of the band program (6th to 8th grade), elected me to be the band captain. My responsibilities include organizing the band to practice and play current music. For example we are currently preparing for our Christmas parade and concert and I help the director. When the director is not able to attend, I cover her position. This gives me the opportunity to take a leadership role as band captain.

In the 6th grade, I started working as a volunteer in the SeaWind Elementary School's Math Superstar program. Although I graduated from SeaWind and I'm now a student at Murray Middle, I still volunteer every Friday to help collect the worksheets from each part of the school campus and then grade the paperwork. Then during the weekends, I use a computer to tabulate and record the grades on a floppy disk and return it on Monday. The teachers at Sea Wind trust me to be fair about the grades and not tweak or curve them.

I also volunteer as a librarian's assistant at the Morgade Library. I organize and put the books back in their proper place on the shelves every Saturday afternoon. The head librarian only accepts organized and responsible people to help out at the library or else it will be hard work locating a misplaced book.

I am also very active in sports and have been a member of the Hobe Sound Soccer Club for the past 3 years. I usually play the mid-field position. I like playing soccer because it is a very challenging and physically demanding sport. Playing soccer also affords me the opportunity to hang out with my friends and practice teamwork.

In summary, I lead a very busy life. The broad scope of my activities involving leadership, volunteering, community service, academic studies, and sports have taught me trustworthiness, responsibly, respect for life, a scene of fairness, and caring for others who are in need, as well as good citizenship.

Raquel Molina
Indiantown Middle School

Raquel Molina
Indiantown Middle School

Of all the Character traits I feel that Responsibility best describes me! I think that responsibility best describes me because as a student I always do my homework and I am always on time for all my activities. Responsibility means to me that I am to be dependable at both school and at home. I set an example for my brother and sister by completing all of my chores when expected at home. In addition to completing all of schoolwork when expected, each morning I am expected to come to school early to fulfill my role in my school's news network called TNN. If I am not there to report the news and weather, I will let my team down. They depend on me to come early so the news will go on time.

As a student of IMS I have shown leadership qualities as a member of NJHS, Vice President of Student Council, and have been selected to serve on TNN. Although I am quiet and shy, each morning you may see my face and hear my voice broadcasted into every classroom each and everyday during the schools Thunderbird News Network.

In addition I have earned the presidential academic excellence award, and achieved high grades to earn the honor of teacher and principal honor roll for the past three years at IMS. As a member of NJHS I have collected food for families, offered baby-sitting a day care services during parent teacher conferences. Most recently I have served as a translator for teachers at Warfield Elementary during their parent teacher conferences. School activities that I have enjoyed have been as a member of the Thunderbird Volleyball team, a member of the yearbook staff at IMS, a clarinet player in my school band program, and as a Warrior Cheerleader.

As an active student at Indiantown Middle School I feel I set an example as a responsible student that not only cares about my family but I care about my school.

Jonathan Tobias
Hidden Oaks Middle School

Jonathan Tobias
Hidden Oaks Middle School

The award that I have been nominated for is the Joe Kordick Youth Character Award. The award is about your character, what your character means to you, and how it demonstrates who you are and why you deserve this award. Character can only be described as in one particular way, the aggregate of features and traits that form the individual nature of some person or thing. I feel character also describes the way in which it shows the traits of being a loving and caring type of person that also has some fun in caring for myself and others. The character trait that I display which best describes why I deserve the award is caring for others. One of my many noble acts in being a caring person was helping my mother after surgery.

Surgery is when the art, practice, or work of treating diseases, injuries, or deformities by manual or operative procedures. That is what happened to my mother because she had a tumor in her temporal lobe; it was also wrapped around her optic nerve which controls sight. The surgery had lasted eight and a half hours in the operating room. While my mother was in surgery I was in school worried sick, if she was going to be ok or if what happened actually happened, which it did. My mother had survived the surgery but her eyesight isn't working to well, so she is in incapacitated in her right eye. I had really become caring when she had recovered enough from her operation to return to the house.

When my mother had returned home things were very far from being normal, they were either as hectic as World War II or as dull as curling in Canada (no offense to Canadians). My mom would have to sleep propped up with stacks of pillows and have a box of medications next to her bed. She also had a drink of water beside her bed because of the fevers that had come or gone. Several nights I would blow up an air mattress to sleep next to her side if she needed any little thing like help walking to the bathroom or just some exercise. I had to care for my mother as if she were a baby as she did to me when I was an infant. I had been at her side until she gave me reassurance that she could walk again on her own, as well as do anything else that was needed.

As in an earthquake, there is the after shock, and with my moms recovering habits there too was an after shock to that as well. Her eye sight had been damaged in the surgery because the tumor had wrapped around the optic nerve. When my mother and I are in public she sometimes needs help walking so that is the next point in time I feel important as I hold out my arm for her for support. My mother also has to now wear an eye patch to cover her eye because it had swollen up after the operation. My mother can now drive again but she'd rather not drive at night or without somebody else in the car to tell her if it's ok to move into the right lane or not.

My mother not being able to see is only a quarter of the whole problem. I also protect and care about the way people treat my mother. Whether it is a friend calling her Moshe Dayan or a waitress saying arrrgh (pirate talk), I turn my mother away from all the commotion of her eye into the other room where I would tell her not to listen to them and they're wrong. After she is comfortable about her eye again, I would go into the other room and ask them how would you feel if the exact same thing had happened to you or a very close loved one? They would stop harassing my mother until the next time they saw her and my mother is being very strong about it.

Another great reason for me to deserve this special as well as rare award is because I care for the community. to help out my community I am a mentor at my synagogue. I help the synagogue because I am Jewish and a respected member of my Jewish community. I go to temple every Tuesday to assist my rabbi teach the younger kids on how to improve their reading capability in the Hebrew language. The kids I help teach are between the ages of 5 and 8 and sometimes there is a 12 year old that needs my assistance. For my acts of kindness and caring my rabbi, synagogue, and community are very grateful.

These reasons are great examples for my deserving the Joe Kordick Youth Character Award. I am a very, very caring person towards my mother and my family. I am also proud to be good person and caring person towards my friends and the community, in which I am very highly respected.

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