



**JOE KORDICK
YOUTH CHARACTER
AWARDS**

2008 – 2009

ESSAYS

JOE KORDICK YOUTH CHARACTER AWARDS 2008 – 2009

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 Chair of CHARACTER COUNTS! of Martin County.

2008 – 2009 ESSAY TOPIC

“The CHARACTER COUNTS! program is in its 13th year in Martin County. Think about how The Six Pillars of Character – Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship – have played a role in your life. Write about one or more of these character traits and describe specific examples how you have applied these traits in your life, in your school, in your family, or in your community.”

**JOE KORDICK
YOUTH CHARACTER AWARD
FINALISTS**

2008 – 2009

**HIGH SCHOOL
ESSAYS**

Katelyn Kirkpatrick
Clark Advanced Learning Center

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Clark Advanced Learning Center

My family life seems close to perfect on the surface. My parents have always been willing to sacrifice certain things in order to make sure I have what I want or need. This however changed nearly four years ago when my older sister became pregnant at the age of eighteen. It was one of those, "I can't believe this happened" but at the same time "I am so happy I will be an Aunt." It was soon after my niece, Hailey, was born that my life started to become meaningful.

My sister, Kristin, was involved in drugs and alcohol, did not graduate from high school, and could not keep a job if her life depended on it. Because of the Hailey was taken out of Kristin's care and my parents were awarded full custody. Hailey now lives with me and my parents full time. My sister, now living in Michigan, has a second child. My parents forgot how difficult it was to raise a toddler, especially one as active as Hailey. My parents had already raised a generation and were beginning to enjoy their "mid-life" fun when Hailey became their full-time responsibility. This is when I decided to step in and accept more responsibility.

I have taken the responsibility of helping care for Hailey. On a daily basis I pick Hailey up from daycare and watch her until one of my parents get home from work. I spend many Saturdays watching Hailey so my parents can run errands or so they can just have a break. This can be hard at many times; juggling school, work, personal life, and a home life.

Sometimes it is very hard for me to accept responsibility for a child that is not mine. However, Hailey, at age three, has taught me two very important life lessons. First, I found that before Hailey I did not care about others as much as I should have. My focus was towards myself and what was best for me, rather than caring for what others needed or wanted. The first lesson: "Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile." I can honestly say that I genuinely care about others.

The second lesson that Hailey taught me is a lesson that many parents, such as my own, teach us at a very young age: "Life is not fair!" I have heard this many times, told this to many of my friends, but never truly embodied this myself until Hailey. It is unfair that I have to help raise a child that is not my own. But what is unfair is for me to blame an innocent child. I have recognized that what is unfair for me, may be unfair to others. And that is what truly matters.

There are six separate pillars of Character Counts, but I have found that certain ones go hand in hand. This is the case with Fairness and Caring. In order to really show Fairness, one must also be a caring person. It seems hard to believe that a little girl at the age of three could teach someone such as myself a few life lessons. But Hailey actually has. Because of Kristin's mistake I have been able to spend the last three years of my life being a more genuine person than I ever thought I could be. I have become genuinely aware of other's needs, I have been able to perceive a new definition of fairness and I have been able to "care" on an entirely different level.

Lysa Vola
Jensen Beach High School

Lysa Vola
Jensen Beach High School

Resilience has often been the key to success in the face of struggle. Helen Keller once declared, "Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved." My own character has been reflected through personal strife, and my compassion towards less fortunate individuals.

I was five years old when I was adopted out of the Department of Children and Families in New York. I had been placed into foster care as a young child, on charges of neglect and abuse. I was not being properly fed or adequately cared for by my biological parents. My parents me along with three of my biological siblings, and three other children who I am not biologically related to. Most recently, they adopted my four-year-old sister in 2005. Since my adoption in 1995, my parents have continued to foster children, enhancing my passion for wanting to give back to the foster care system that I once belonged to. I have dedicated my service to helping provide gifts for children in foster care agencies. I have also helped to raise money, toys, and supplies for other needy local families at Christmas time, through projects such as white dove, toys for tots, Habitat for humanity, and hibiscus house fundraisers. Furthermore, my dedication towards helping others was truly reflected when I helped fix up a shelter for foster children, Called Children's Place South, located in Delray Beach, Florida. I participated in that makeover project during my freshman year of high school, where I gave up one weekend to help redecorate, paint, and clean the facility that the children lived in. Ironically, some of the foster children that had lived in our home at some point were residents at that particular shelter, so I was able to also reunite with them. Two little boys at the shelter were particularly very special to me, because they had been placed into our home a year earlier because their parents couldn't adequately provide for them. They were Mexican and I remember the fear on both of their faces, as they approached our front door step on Halloween night in 2004. They stood there, only three and six years old at the time, along with their infant brother. They didn't speak any English, and only my dad and I could truly comprehend what they were saying. I helped my mom each day to translate what they were asking her for. I will never forget them, because they were so afraid, yet they reminded me of how I might've felt being switched around between homes, as a young Hispanic child within foster care.

In addition to how adoption and foster care have altered my life, my father was also proclaimed physically disabled ten years ago. He can no longer work, so my mother must provide for our family. Unfortunately, my father's disability has caused me to grow up quicker than I may have liked to. Since he is disabled and my mother must work double shifts to support our family, I have taken on the burden of also helping raise my four-year-old sister, Krista. I have given up much of my free afterschool to take care of her almost every day and I have become more of a second mother to her, in our own mother's absence. This added responsibility has made me strong in facing my family's unique circumstances, and I have been resilient in not letting my personal life interfere with my academic progress. My dedication to school in the face of personal complications serves as the epitome of strength in the face of struggle. I have maintained an impressive rank in my class, as well as a nearly perfect GPA all throughout high school. I have developed a good sense of character through community involvement and the responsibility I have shown within my family. My life has never been typical by any means, however, like Helen Keller once noted, "Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet," and my life serves as a testament to this statement.

Veronica Richter
Martin County High School

Veronica Richter
Martin County High School

I was born in Lima, Peru, in a society where caring and respect are the status quo. Children are expected to respect their elders and be kind to whomever they meet. As a Peruvian child, I followed the rules of society because of my mother's constant reminders and reprimands to watch my manners and actions because they affected the people around me. Though I didn't understand why, it was clear to me that caring and respect were important traits for a young lady to have.

When I was nine years old, my mother and I moved to Stuart, Florida. Though the culture was completely different, I chose to be caring and respectful of the people around me. I then realized just why respect and caring were important: they are necessary traits to be a happy and complete individual. Since then, I have used caring and respect on a daily basis and have acquired other traits which have built my character along the way.

When I was in the eighth grade, my mother thought it would be a great experience for me to attend an annual leadership camp held by the American Red Cross. Though I didn't want to go, I respected my mother's wishes and went. Respecting my mother's wishes was the best decision I ever made, since by going to the camp, I became exposed to the many leadership and volunteering opportunities available to me in our community. I began to volunteer at the Red Cross participating in projects such as Santa's Helpers and Soup Kitchen and gained citizenship. Soon, I was asked to head the Red Cross's annual Adopt A Family Project, in which we "adopted" a needy family for the holidays. I will never forget how the father from the family pulled me aside and with tears in his eyes thanked me for all we had done for him.

Through my experience with the Red Cross, I became a leader and an active member of society. I became filled with the spirit to improve the world around me be it through my volunteering or leadership efforts. Around my sophomore year, my need to aid my community led me to become a leader at my school. I began by starting projects with the class of 2009, and have now contributed numerous hours to my school. I've aided in distributing schedules and lockers and I've organized and created projects such as Adopt a Class and Powderpuff. I can proudly say that over the past four years my willingness to help have aided me in becoming senior class president, and led me to meet a number of incredible people that are part of our student body and my school's faculty. Today, I have contributed over 650 hours to the betterment of my community and have spent every minute giving it my all.

Throughout my life, I have grown and gained character traits which I can attribute to my success. Yet I never forget the impact caring and respect have had on life. I am still kind, compassionate, and respectful towards everyone I meet- whether it is an administrator or a janitor. I smile and greet my peers whenever I see them in the hallways, and whenever any of them are having problems, I always stop what I am doing and help them as best I can. I respect my family members and teachers just as I did when I was a little girl in Peru. After all these years, those traits I didn't quite understand have become a part of me, as my teachers, family members, and friends, all know me as a kind, dedicated, and respectful person.

Jamar Spencer
Martin County High School

Jamar Spencer
Martin County High School

With the help of my family, I have learned to incorporate all the pillars of Character Counts into my life. However, respect and trustworthiness are two attributes that I have been taught in order to become not only successful in life, but also a well-rounded individual.

I give great gratitude and appreciation to my parents and grandparents who taught me the importance of respect. I was taught to give all adults the utmost respect when responding or being spoken to. The "yes sir, no sir" "yes ma'am, no ma'am" policy was to be used when speaking to any adults. The use of anything else was unacceptable and was considered disrespectful. I was taught to respect not only adults, but everyone in their respective places. That would include women, friends and foes. For me, being respectful is not a task. It comes naturally. I am hopeful that the parents of this generation will instill in their children how to respect not only themselves, but other people.

Not only has my family instilled the importance of being respectful, they have also stressed the necessity of being trustworthy. I have learned that a trustworthy person is one who can be depended upon, no matter the situation. It is equally important when others notice when one is trustworthy. For example, one day I was asked by a school official to file paper work. I wasn't expected to stay beyond the allotted time to complete the task, however I did. The school official told me that the below average person would have just left. The average person would have left the task on the desk unfinished, and the above average person would have done exactly what I did. He also commented that he was very happy to know he could trust me to complete such a task. He also stated that I possessed the attribute of trustworthiness, which would be necessary when being considered to a job in the future.

In conclusion, I can say that with the help of my family, I have incorporated respect and trustworthiness into my life. These fine attributes will help me to be successful in life and to be a well-rounded individual.

Nathaniel Bruton
South Fork High School

Nathaniel Bruton
South Fork High School

The six pillars of character are all of equal importance, but I feel responsibility is the character trait which has played the largest role in my life. Responsibility is important because it is what makes us strong; it gives us the foundation to apply the other pillars of character within ourselves, and thusly build ourselves and build up others.

I have used responsibility to keep myself successful in school, and to help my family and community throughout my life. Being responsible is what allows us to get tasks done on time, keep our promises, help others, and better ourselves. Without responsibility, one would lack the motivation and dedication to not only help his or her own community, but to simply be an active family member as well.

I have applied responsibility in school by joining and remaining in advanced classes throughout my life so far. Currently in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, I intend to further my career in college and empower myself with knowledge to best help my peers. Since the children of today are the path-makers of tomorrow, it is of utmost importance that our youth be educated and be responsible with their schoolwork.

Key Club is another outlet with which I have revealed responsibility. I was introduced to Key Club during my eighth-grade year in middle school, and decided it was a great way to aid the community. Although volunteering with Key Club encompasses several other pillars of character such as caring, citizenship, fairness and respect, responsibility is still present. It is responsibility that motivates us to participate and prevents us from giving up. I have now been with Key Club for all four years of High School and have participated in countless fundraisers for community causes, food drives, book drives, Special Olympics, fundraising breakfasts, homework tutoring, and many other local events including "Shopping with Santa". During my summers, I've individually collected more than 500 pounds of gently-used clothes for children. In this past August 2008 primary, I volunteered my services as a poll worker to benefit the Kiwanis Club of Jensen Beach, which helps local children too. Being involved is key to the success of our future. That is why we, as a community, are responsible for ensuring children better lives and shelter, if only temporary, from hardships.

Since trustworthiness is another pillar of character, I feel it is only fair to explain why responsibility is so important to me. As much as I may like to think of myself as a 100% character focused person, I'm not. I imagine very few people are. Therefore, responsibility is important to me because when the other pillars fail—citizenship, fairness, caring, respect, and trustworthiness—responsibility keeps me helping others despite any internal or external conflicts I may have. As such, I have focused myself whole-heartedly on this single pillar of character because with responsibility, anyone can use that foundation and its strength to better not only their circle of influence, but to have an impressionable impact on the lives they touch in their community and the world. By doing so, we are nurturing others and instilling in them a sense of responsibility, and the worth and importance to act prudently.

Melissa Licato
South Fork High School

Melissa Licato
South Fork High School

My father, a merchant marine, has always fostered a grand love of the water that has trickled down into our family and affected most everyone, including me. I grew up essentially on the water and ocean, or as close to it as I could manage, and as soon as I could swim it was impossible to remove me from the water. I grew up knowing how to drive our family's boat, as well as the maintenance skills and personal trait of tenacity that goes along with it. Eventually, the time came when I wanted to start taking the boat out by myself, but my father, ever responsible, said that first I must take and pass the Florida's boating course offered by the local Coast Guard Auxiliary. Although I was reluctant at first, believing that I already knew how to handle a boat on the water, I nevertheless signed up and off I went. And so began my fascination with the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

In all honesty, I was not too enthused about attending the boating class, and was afraid that I would find it boring due to the content that I presumed I already knew. In addition, the instructors didn't exactly excite me, as they were all older and I felt like I wouldn't be able to relate to their experiences. I could never have been more mistaken in my life. Soon enough, I looked forward to attending class. I was excited to get there and talk to the flotilla members and hear their personal stories. Many Coast Guard Auxiliary members are retired members of the armed forces; not only Coast Guard but Marines, Army, and Navy as well. The fact that these men and women were veterans, actual hometown heroes, who were taking the time out of their lives to sit down and teach the public, amazed me.

The best part, however, were the extra moments I could squeeze in before and after class. Many flotilla members would take the time to talk to me, and their stories fascinated me. Even better is that their "stories" don't actually end with their service and war stories. The Coast Guard Auxiliary is a civilian unit of the Coast Guard, and although there is no weapons or legal authority of arrest, the Auxiliary is authorized to perform many of the same operations and missions. Members go through hours of training, sometimes taking classes with the active duty Coast Guard members, in order to sharpen their skills and become valuable assets of the Coast Guard itself. These amazing people who are now my teachers, are still actively involved in keeping the waterways safe, still giving up their time when they could rightfully be enjoying more relaxed lives, in order for the good of the community.

This sense of responsibility that was instilled in me by attending the board class morphed into a grant amount of respect for the people who were giving up their time to teach people like me. This respect for them then morphed into the pillar of citizenship; it wasn't long before I found myself wondering how I could participate, how I could help them help other people. Members must be seventeen years of age at least, and as soon as I passed that milestone I signed up. I am now a qualified boat crew member, and can actively participate on missions assigned to our flotilla from the Coast Guard, such as search and rescue and surveying the varying aids to navigation that are present on the waterways. I am also working on becoming watch-stand certified, so I can then man the radio station run by our flotilla and help distressed boaters in this manner. I am an active member of Flotilla 59, and was even elected to a Staff Officer position for the second year running. This is a huge commitment, and I relish every minute of it, for I am able to not only help other people, but fortunate enough to have great mentors that have truly embodied the six pillars of character. Perhaps the best way to sum up my experiences is this; no one can inherently be born with the six pillars naturally ingrained in their character, it must be taught and shown through example. I have some of the most trustworthy, respectful, responsible, fair, caring, and fanatic citizens as examples, and I can only hope that one day with the traits that I possess, and that they are helping to exemplify, I can accomplish as much as these brave men and women who simply won't stop giving to their community. They are the ultimate heroes.

**JOE KORDICK
YOUTH CHARACTER AWARD
FINALISTS**

2008 – 2009

**MIDDLE SCHOOL
ESSAYS**

Linda Lu
Dr. David L. Anderson Middle School

Linda Lu
Dr. David L. Anderson Middle School

Trustworthiness? Respect? Responsibility? Fairness? Caring? Citizenship? Many people do not know what these very important words mean. Well, let me try to sum it up. These words are what we call the six pillars of character. To show character you must follow not one, not two, but all six pillars of character. There is not one specific character trait that is the most important because all of the traits are equally important.

The first character trait is Trustworthiness. If you do not show Trustworthiness, you will not be trusted by anyone. Similarly, you should never lie to anyone about anything. Also, you should always be loyal to your friends, family, and school. Of course, you should stand proud and true of everything you do.

The second character trait is Respect. You should respect your parents by listening to them the first time they ask. You should respect your school by following the rules. Similarly, try to never break the rules and if you do you must accept the consequences. You can show respect to your friends by not talking behind their back (gossip) and, of course, you should not talk about them badly in front of them either. If you seldom show disrespect and sometime you do, all you have to say is "Sorry, I really did not mean to be disrespectful."

The third character trait is Responsibility. You should always lend a helping hand. For instance, you could help the elderly, open doors for people, etc. Another way to show responsibility is by not procrastinating. Similarly, you should never wait for the last minute to do your homework. Most importantly, you should never blame others for your actions.

The fourth character trait is Fairness. When you do everything in life, it is usually about waiting. You should always take turns and never skip in lines that you wait in. Also, you should always be open-minded. Take everyone's advice into consideration. You should NEVER criticize anyone's opinion. When you play games you must play by the rules. NEVER CHEAT!!

The fifth character trait is Caring. You should be peaceful about the world and everybody in it. Care for others by showing love. Similarly, you should never, and I say never ostracize anyone. Never leave anyone out of the group. Always try to encourage others to join your group of friends.

Last but not least, the sixth character trait is Citizenship. You should always try to vote in an election. Every voice counts. Also, be a good citizen by being polite. Never be rude to anyone about anything. Additionally, do your share. Similarly, you can help by doing community service. You can help out in hospitals, libraries, and many other places.

In conclusion, now I think that you have been informed about the six pillars of character. Trustworthiness is about showing your trust. Respect is all about following the 'Golden Rule'. Treat others the way you like to be treated. Responsibility is about never blaming others for your own actions. Fairness is about taking turns and playing by the rules. Caring is about giving love, and being kind. Citizenship is about doing your share in the community. So how does that sound? The six pillars of character are what we use everyday. Without them we would all be rude, not loving, cheating and never giving back to the community. SO ALWAYS USE THE SIX PILLARS OF CHARACTER!

Alexa Segura
Dr. David L. Anderson Middle School

Alexa Segura
Dr. David L. Anderson Middle School

I think that the meaning of each Character Counts pillar has helped me in many ways. The six pillars of character have encouraged me in many ways that make me feel good about myself and other around me. I thank you for this nomination. I think it counts to take care of all the people who have helped me in life to achieve the possible and the impossible towards all of my accomplishments and all of my goals that are ahead of me in life.

The six pillars of Character Counts are: character, citizenship, trustworthiness, respect, responsibility and careness.

The meaning of character is the act towards others or the evaluation of person's moral qualities. This pillar is what shows me way to treat others the way I would like to be treated. If you follow what you believe is true about yourself then you will be given a chance to do what is right and what is wrong if you choose. If you were to go off and follow the right path set for you to do and chose the way you would like to live and then follow your dreams. There is one more path that can lead you in the wrong direction. Ask yourself these questions, what is the right thing to do? Would you go left or would you go right or would you take the wrong or right path? If you choose the left, you are headed on your way towards a good and peaceful life. But if you go right, I would feel bad for you because you chose the wrong path to go down. The right side of the path would lead you to a very disgraceful life ahead of you. If I had a decision, I would go left and not go right. If I was to go right, things would not go the way that would be better for me. The path that is the wrong path would not be so wonderful as if you were to go down the right path. I am living in this world mostly because of these six pillars. This will be a great way to follow the rules and guidelines that are set for you and me.

The meaning of citizenship is the act of following the way to help out the community and the people in the community. What would you do to find the right way to help out the community and the people that live in the community with you? If you were to help out those that needed help the most, for example, the handicapped or disabled that have been living most of their live in a wheelchair or are having troubles and need help by you or me. If you were to take something nice and place it in the same place with something bad, what do you think would happen with one of the two? Why should you take a chance to make the wrong decision yours?

To me I think it would be nice if you would think that I am a very trustworthy person. The meaning of trustworthiness to me is having trust in yourself and others having trust in you. If you had a chance to make someone really have the chance to have trust in you, then you need to do the right thing. To do things that will make a person have trust in you is the same way that you should make yourself feel and have trust in yourself. If someone had a lot of trust, they would have no problems that you would have. You would also have a great connection with that person in your life that would think you were trustworthy.

Respect is one of the things that not all people have with other. If you were to have a lot of respect towards others and yourself, then you would have a great life and feel great about yourself. Respect is how you follow the way that lets you treat others they would like to be treated. Respect is something that is earned, not given to you.

These are my feelings about four of the pillars of Character Counts. I feel that if a person does all that they can do, to be a good citizen, a good character, be trustworthy and have respect for others, they will go a long way in this life.

Molly Bradfield
Hidden Oaks Middle School

Molly Bradfield
Hidden Oaks Middle School

There are many traits a human can possess. Some of these traits can be beneficial, and others can be your downfall as a person. The most important traits are the Six Pillars of Character. My favorites of these Pillars are Trustworthiness, Caring and Citizenship. They have played an essential role in my life.

The first Pillar I find significant is Trustworthiness. This can help you get further into employment, or it can help your friends have more confidence in confiding to you all their private feelings. Once, I was at a sleepover with my friends and we were telling secrets to each other. However, one of the girls at the sleepover had had problems with keeping our feelings to herself, so we were all wary about telling her our secrets. If no one can trust you, they won't want to tell you anything about themselves. This is what makes trustworthiness so significant.

The second Pillar I see to be important is Caring. If you aren't caring, then people will begin to see you as a rude, self-centered person. Caring for the feelings of other people shows them that you are a true friend and should be valued as one. I once had a friend and all she did was put me down and treat me like I was the dirt beneath her shoes. I eventually got sick of it and told her she had to care about me for us to be friends. She didn't change, though, and started putting down all my other friends. I cared about how they felt, and I helped us get through it. My family says I am a very caring person, and that is why my friends like to spend time with me. This is why caring for others is important.

The final Pillar, and the one I find most meaningful, is Citizenship. This shows you care for people in your community you might not even be acquainted with. I am a member of Builder's Cub, and we do many things like canned food drives and beach cleanups to help the environment and raise money for the poor. I remember once I was talking to a man who had raised one thousand dollars for a charity. He said he was walking down a street and a homeless lady came up to him and thanked him for his caring and citizenship. He was shocked, but said it was the right thing to do. Citizenship can bring people out of poverty and assist them in affording meals, clothes, a warm home, and a good education for their children. Citizenship is an extremely meaningful Pillar of Character.

To sum all this up, my favorites of the Six Pillars of Character are Trustworthiness, Caring, and Citizenship. I feel that if everyone had at least a little bit of these traits in their hearts, the world would be a much better place.

Teilor Wagner
Hidden Oaks Middle School

Teilor Wagner
Hidden Oaks Middle School

"A man's kindness chooses his fate," Greek philosopher, Heraclitus has once said. Caring is one of the Six Pillars of Character that plays a role in a person's everyday life. Though Caring is an important pillar, the three pillars that have had played the most crucial roles in my life are Citizenship, Respect, and Trustworthiness.

To start off, one of the Six Pillars of Character that I have applied in my life is Citizenship. One thing to prove this is that I do my share at school and help students. In the fifth grade, I use to give up my recess time to be a peer pal and help the people that learn slower than others. A peer pal's job was to walk around the classroom and help the students by teaching fun ways to learn different things. I remember when my friends and I would help the students by making up rhyming cards to help them out with math. To help them get better at reading, we would let them read the books to us and then my friends and I would quiz the little ones with tiny tests and reward them little gifts, such as candy. Some of the students used the school's programs on the computers to help them learn easier. I would usually help them out by taking them step-by-step on how to do the problems. When about half an hour goes by, the peer pals would say bye and would leave to their classroom.

Another pillar that I have applied in my life is Respect. As I got older, I find that the more respect you give to people, the more respect you get. If I give respect to teachers and elders, I feel more mature and proud. If you respect yourself, you get that small sense that you did the right thing. If my friends feel blue or depressed, I usually ask them what is wrong and then take what they are feeling and put it under consideration. While they tell me what is wrong, I try not to interrupt them and give them some useful and positive feedback. I also help them feel better by telling them that I was under that situation, too. At the end I tell them what I did to feel better and cheer up.

Lastly, the pillar I have applied the most in my life is trustworthiness. When I know my parents trust me, it gives me more freedom and confidence. When my friends and others can trust me, it can build a strong relationship and can let me have a better life. Whenever my parents say they have to go out and I have to watch my sister, it's like they are saying "I trust you." Usually, if my parents see how responsible I have been, they can let me do more things on my own or going out with friends because they know I'll be fine on my own. This makes me happy because now I have more free time to spend with my friends and will now let me go out anywhere I want to go.

Many of the pillars have affected other people's life in every way possible. The Six Pillars of Character- Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship-have affected my life crucially. Some of the pillars I have applied in my life are Citizenship, Respect, and Trustworthiness.

Teresa Domingo
Indiantown Middle School

Teresa Domingo
Indiantown Middle School

The main Pillars of Character that I exhibit are trustworthiness, respect, and most importantly citizenship. So sit back and enjoy the journey of a Character Counts Student.

To begin with, everyone should be trustworthy, right? Well, I am because I'm always honest with my fellow classmates. I show this by being by them when they need me. One time one of my friends told me that had a big fight with her parents. She immediately came to me because she knew I always show I'm caring by saying the right things, and the right words. So being trustworthy is one of the Six Pillars of Character that friends or family members know that makes them trust me with their problems.

Next, "Respect, Respect, Respect!" You hear me I'm not speaking in a drone voice. Being respectful is an important Pillar of Character that explains me as a very well rounded girl. I'm always considerate of the feelings of other people am respectful everywhere I go. Last time I remember using this attribute was when an old woman was walking toward the front door of JC Penny's. I kindly opened the door for her and she said thank you for doing what's right. I don't get it! Why can't people re respectful? It is so easy to do and cost nothing.

Finally, citizenship is the most important pillar of character that explains me the most. I'm always involved in community and service activities. I am a member of the National Junior Honor Society. I'm a girl that goads others to share their ideas to make Indiantown Middle School a better school and thus Indiantown a better community. I went to the Everglades, and I saw kids throwing their soda can on the ground and into the water. I was surprised! Why can't people just obey the rules and be a good citizen? Being the good citizen that I am, I explained why littering was wrong.

To sum it up, all the Pillars of Character explain who I am. Being trustworthy, respectful and most importantly being a good citizen are why kids look at me as a role model and a great guiding example.

**Dean Mazariegos
Indiantown Middle School**

Dean Mazariegos
Indiantown Middle School

"Trustworthiness and Respect" are only two of the Six Pillars of Character that to me are a directional tool that allows me to make good decisions. I don't have any one favorite Character Count's characteristic, but I use most of them every day.

First, every day I wake up and go to school and try to gain the respect of my peers. I do this by saying "hello" and sometimes I shake their hand. If they ever need to talk to someone, then they can talk to me and I will listen. That is one way I show I am caring. I don't only show I am caring to my peers, I also show that I am caring to my teachers by learning in my work, being on time, and always putting back materials I use. I also show that I am caring by volunteering my time to benefit the school. When I show that I am fair, I don't judge people by the way they look or by their heritage because I know we are all equal. Our soccer team won the district championship, and I think one reason was that we let everybody play and did not hog the ball. We always made sure that everyone got to take a chance. When I show that I am responsible, I always turn in my projects, keep my word, and I try my best in whatever I am doing. By using respect, responsibility, fairness, and caring people know that they can trust me by the judgments I make at school government meetings that affect the entire school.

I use much of my time volunteering at school through National Junior Honor Society collecting food for the needy, at my church I teach kids about the ways of God, at Warfield Elementary I translate for Spanish speaking parents at conference night, and in the community I am able to help people learn about recycling and keeping the environment clean. Staying involved in my community, and by joining clubs benefits the Indiantown community. I use all Six Pillar of Character; especially citizenship while being involved in these activities. I am member of the school's National Junior Honor Society, and we are doing a yard sale where part of the profits goes to a family that is in a tight situation. Good citizens don't just sit and watch; no they are helping other citizens. All of these pillars I use everyday and I plan to use them in the future where it will help me find a job, start a family, and help me in my run for President of the United States. Good citizens not only improve the world, but they change it as well.

Kaileigh Bates
Murray Middle School

Kaileigh Bates
Murray Middle School

Everyday I feel it is my responsibility to use some of the character counts traits. I am completely honored by the fact that I was nominated for the 2008-2009 Joe Kordick Youth Character Award! Each day I see people getting made fun of, being disrespectful, and untrustworthy. I don't believe that it is a good way to be known. In this essay I will explain how three of the Six Pillars of Character, Caring, Respect, and Trustworthiness play an important role in my everyday life.

As I said, I use at least those three traits in my everyday life, but right now I'm going to explain how I use caring in my everyday life. For example, I remember not to long ago I grabbed a big garbage bag, went out side, walked across the street to the canal, and started picking up trash. I was flabbergasted at the amount of trash there was. For another example, it really bugs me to see some of my friends at lunch forget their lunch money and not eat anything. I would hate to sit there and eat in front of them while they just sit there. Usually if I see that happen, I would buy them either a lunch, or if they are stubborn I will get them a muffin, rice crispies treat, and something to drink. I know when it happens to me, and they help me, it makes me feel good. So why not share the love. Right?

In addition, respect is a big issue now a days. It really irks me when people disrespect each other. Usually, it is the younger generation who disrespects the older generation. Though at the dance studio I attend, that's not usually the case. There has been a lot of cases where the teachers really disrespect the students. If it happens to me, I just take it and treat the teacher with respect then I vent my feelings to my mom on the ride home. At school, in my gym class, we are playing flag football. I try to be nice and respectful to the other team. After every play, whether it benefits to our team or the opposing team, I feel its necessary for me to applaud the other team on a nice play. At the end of every game I always tell the other team that it was a good game.

Nevertheless, you cant forget trustworthiness. It upsets me to walk into my school and hear all of these rumors being spread around. Some of which is why my boyfriend and I split up. I've learned that there are only certain people I can trust. Though everyone knows that I am one of the most trustworthy people you will ever meet. If you tell me something, and I'm the only one who knows, no one will ever find out. There are some days coming home from the studio, after I'm done venting about my day, my mom vents about hers. When she says, none of this leaves your mouth, she knows that I won't say a single word about it.

In short, everyday I like to make every one of the Six Pillars of Character a part of my everyday life. But I felt that I wouldn't bore you and just explain only my three favorite. To be completely honest, if it weren't for these important traits, I believe that our world would be completely chaotic. Thank you so very much for informing me on the exciting news that I have been nominated for such an amazing award. Hopefully I will be chosen, and even if I am not, congrats to the lucky winner!

Laurie Scott
Murray Middle School

Laurie Scott
Murray Middle School

The six pillars of Character Counts play a huge role in my life. I use them every day, whether at school, home, or in my community. They are very important parts of me that define my character. I display Trustworthiness when I am honest and reliable to my family, when I have courage to do the right thing, and when I am loyal to others by keeping my word. I demonstrate the pillar of Respect when I use good manners, when I am tolerant and patient with people who are different from me, and when I am considerate of others. Responsibility is shown when I persevere to do my best, I have self-control and self-discipline, when I think before I act, and when I hold myself accountable. Playing by the rules, sharing, always having an open-mind, listening, and not blaming or taking advantage of others are all ways I demonstrate Fairness. I am Caring when I am kind, compassionate, express gratitude, forgive, and help those in need. Citizenship can be described when I make my school and community better by protecting the environment, respecting the rules and authorities, being a good neighbor, and by being involved and staying informed.

A major pillar in my life is Citizenship. I am involved as a leader in many organizations at school, and in my community. In all the clubs and groups I participate in I show citizenship. Currently I am the President for Student Council and the Builders Club, head property manager for the band, a youth leader for my youth group at 1st United Methodist Church of Hobe Sound, and captain for the Murray soccer and basketball teams. I am also a member of the Hobe Sound Strikers soccer team, the Port St. Lucie Mako State Cup team, the Schultz Super Y soccer team that is going to Nationals in a few weeks, and I have just been selected for the '95 Olympic Development Region A soccer team. Citizenship is important in each and every one of these organizations. For example, as captain of the soccer and basketball teams I listen to my Coach, and always make sure we are working together as a team. In Student Council, we do many things for our School. We just finished Red Ribbon Week, which supports kids to not do drugs. With National Junior Honor Society, we directly help out the Murray Families in need. This November we are having our annual Thanksgiving Food Drive so that everyone can enjoy the holidays. All these clubs, and Builder's Club, work together for one week to recognize our outstanding teachers. Everyday we give them a gift, and at the end of the week we provide a breakfast and lunch for them. We do this to show how much we appreciate them. In my youth group, I am a youth leader, so I try to set a good example. Whenever a homeless person shows up on our doorstep, we invite them in and give them something to eat. Seeing the gratitude on their faces is humbling. Builder's Club is also another great example of Citizenship. We are a service club that loves to help out our community. Every year we do our annual nature cleanup at the Hobe Sound Nature Center. This is all on a volunteer basis. We also love to help out Sister Dooley at Hope Rural School out in Indiantown. At Christmas we send shoeboxes full of toys, so that these children can celebrate Christmas. Just this year we gave them much needed money so they could receive a new athletic program dealing with health and fitness. The Builder's Club also heavily supports March-of-Dimes. Another thing we do during the month of October is spend time at the civic center across the street from Murray. We bring over pumpkins for each child, and decorate them with the children. We all have a blast! Those are just a few of the ways I use the pillar of Citizenship in my life.

Caring is also a major part of my character. It contributes to my huge heart. For one thing I am surrounded by people who care about me, and I care about them. When I go on mission trips with my youth group, I really show how much I care. Last summer we went to Cleveland, Georgia to a trailer park that was predominantly Hispanic. Our youth group was the largest one there, so we worked on two trailers. We washed the trailers, gave them a new coat of paint, two porches, and some new landscaping. But its not the work that matters, it is the people. Even though they didn't have much, the mother gave us what she could. She made all twenty-five of us lunch almost every day to show how grateful she was. She couldn't even speak English, but her face said it all. Her son and nephew were also very grateful. They would come outside and help us paint or build or whatever we were doing at the moment. By the end of the week, they were like one of us. We became so attached we decided to get them a gift. We gave the mother plants to put in her garden bed, and we gave Eddie and Jose work shirts, like ours with their name on them. Then Jose said something I will never forget. He simply asked, "Can we go home with you and join your youth group?" This made me realize that my actions and words don't just affect me; they rub off on others too. It also made me realize how lucky I am to have people who care so much about me that they would go to the end of the earth for me, and I am willing to do the same.

The six pillars of character are only something your character should be. They aren't really a part of your character until you put them to use, and affect others. That's what I'm all about!

Hannah Borchelt
Stuart Middle School

Hannah Borchelt
Stuart Middle School

The Six Pillars of Character play a very considerable role in my life and in the community. To me, respect is the most important pillar. Caring goes hand in hand with citizenship, for you cannot have citizenship without some amount of caring. Responsibility for yourself as well as for other people is equally important. All the pillars play a role in my life, but I have selected respect, citizenship, caring, and responsibility because I feel they are the biggest part of it.

Respect is critical to have in any circumstance. If you respect your teachers, peers, and other authoritative figures they will respect your back. Respecting your teachers is when you do not speak while they are speaking. Simply being nice is respect towards your peers. Authoritative figures deserve respect, for they are the ones looking after you, caring for you. Without respect the world would be very unpleasant.

Citizenship and caring are the basis of any relationship. When a community can help one another it is both caring and in good citizenship. Showing citizenship is when you help out your fellow neighbors; maybe you pick up a pencil if your friend dropped it or you noticed your friend did not bring paper to school so you lend him a piece. As I mentioned before, you cannot have citizenship without caring. Your friend trips and you ask if they are all right or you see someone being bullied and you go stand up for him; those are both acts of caring. Two of my favorite Pillars of Character are caring and citizenship.

Responsibility whether it is for yourself, your community, or for someone else is of great significance. Volunteering for a community cleanup is showing responsibility for your community. Showing up to a school clean, on time, and with your homework done is responsibility for yourself. Babysitting your siblings and making sure they are safe is responsibility for someone else. Accountability, dependability, conscientiousness, whatever you call it responsibility is key in a meaningful life.

I use the Six Pillars of Character in my everyday life. Respect of your neighbors is vital. I show caring and citizenship when I am school, at home, and the community. Personal experience has told me that responsibility is excellent to have and use daily. The Six Pillars of Character govern my life and I am not afraid to shout it from the mountaintops, or rather beach dunes.

Michael Torounian
Stuart Middle School

Michael Torounian
Stuart Middle School

Most middle school students volunteer because they need hours. I volunteer for several reasons, therefore utilizing many of the Character Counts Pillars. Although I try to keep them constant in my life, I believe helping others, improving my community, and being a productive citizen are the most important.

To begin with, I volunteer to help others. When I help others it gives me a sense of satisfaction and achievement. Helping others gives me a feeling as if I have accomplished a major task in my life. Whether I am volunteering at a specific location or I am out at a store, whenever I see someone who needs help I go out of my way to assist that person. For instance, if an elderly person has a ton of grocery bags or their hands are full, I offer to open the door or carry some bags for them. My parents tell me I have been doing this since I was little.

Working on improving my community takes respect and responsibility. I demonstrate each of these traits or pillars by volunteering at many schools within the Martin County School District. The jobs I have done are many and I am given various responsibilities in doing these jobs. My favorite place is Camp Invention at Felix A. Williams Elementary. I have worked at this camp for the past two summers. Boy is it tough! I have a new respect for teachers and parents who have children under the age of ten! Additionally, I have volunteered at Jensen Beach High School, Stuart Middle School and Felix A. Williams Elementary School unpacking and delivering textbooks during the summer months. While at these schools, I have also assisted teachers with any tasks that need to be completed. Helping the school communities of Martin County is important and is an example of how I respect my community.

In being a responsible person, I exhibit numerous examples of the Caring Pillar. I participate in many fundraising and walk-a-thon causes. In the past two years, I have raised money for organizations such as the JDRF, ALS and the American Cancer Society. I took part in these events because I care about the people and families these diseases effect and I want to see research find an end to these illnesses. I raised over \$450 in the Relay for Life event last May in honor of my grandfather and uncle who both died of lung cancer.

In addition to showing respect and responsibility, I also try to be a productive citizen. I volunteer at many places in Martin County. The Environmental Studies Center is one of my favorite places to work. There are many activities at the ESC in which I participate when I am there. For example, I spend a few Saturday mornings a year cleaning and preparing the center for its' special events. Another would be when the center is open to the public. During these occasions, I have to make sure that no one touches or puts their hands in the tanks or pets the fragile items such as fish or turtle bones. Also, I give tours around the center and explain to the guests what they are seeing and a little background about each exhibit. Another activity in which I participate is the beach clean ups. I think cleaning the beaches is a great way to become a productive citizen because you improve the environment and the appearance of the community. I wish to continue my examples of good citizenship in high school by joining various organizations like the American Red Cross.

In conclusion, I feel all of the pillars are connected, therefore are a part of my daily ways in being a caring, responsible and respectful good citizen. That is who I am as a middle school student and will continue to be as a young adult in the community. As I mature, these habits I have learned will continue to be with me for the rest of my life.

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