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### **Students and Seniors: Pairing for Character**

By **Ellen Almeida**

To develop good character, students need various opportunities to learn and practice core ethical values. Character development programs are most beneficial when they involve students in activities that allow them to practice their values. Special-needs students at **Vance Village School**, New Britain, Connecticut, are practicing the values of care and responsibility by serving local senior citizens.

The students at Vance are involved in a program called Adopt-A-Grandparent. This experience-based program promotes the development of strong and supportive relationships with senior citizens at the local Andrew House Healthcare facility. **Robin Handleman**, a special needs teacher at Vance, has noted the caring attachment her students have formed with seniors. These positive relationships have increased the students motivation to be caring and responsible.

Encouraged by the potential to interact with their new friends, Ms. Handleman has noted that students perform better academically. Specifically, she has seen improvement in the areas of reading and writing and a marked increase in students' desire to learn. "Students tell me all the time that they want to read for their grandparents," stated Ms. Handleman. Students strive for higher achievement when completing school assignments so that they can share test grades and other accomplishments with seniors. Upon returning from the visits, Ms. Handleman noted, "students have so much to write about because they use their experience with the seniors as motivation."

Ms. Handleman, has developed this proactive approach to help students with special

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### **Bolton Teaches Personal and Social Responsibility**

The staff of **Bolton Center School** (K-8), Bolton, CT has developed award-winning programs to teach personal and social responsibility. In 1998, **Susan Stillman**, Bolton's school counselor, was the recipient of the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) award for her program, *On Being Responsible*. Following this recognition Mrs. Hoisington, a Bolton fifth grade teacher, received the 1999 CAS award for her program, *Character in Action*. These awards recognized the joint efforts of Bolton Center School administration, counselors and teachers to launch a **Personal and Social Responsibility Program**.

Bolton's Personal and Social Responsibility Program is led by Susan Stillman, Betty O'Brien, and Beth Calderoni with assistance from Kathryn Buth, a UCONN intern. The program includes several teaching and program strategies such as developmental guidance and health curriculum lessons, class meetings, teaching social/emotional skills, integrating character education into various subject areas, an eighth grade peer support group program, and a school-wide program in kindness and justice.

Lessons in character and social/emotional skills are encouraged during class meetings and throughout the curriculum. The school staff has agreed to highlight character traits such as respect, honesty, caring, perseverance, responsibility, cooperation, and motivation. Teachers involved in this program are working to increase the awareness of social/emotional skills and the benefits of positive character. They reinforce monthly character themes by creating activities that emphasize a specific character trait. Teachers and students have decorated Bolton's hallways and bulletin boards to illustrate the character themes such as caring and compassion. In addition, through teacher and counselor collaboration, students in all grade levels receive conflict resolution and anti-harassment lessons. Teacher in-

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## 2000 CALENDAR

Jan 21-22	University of Bridgeport, Ethics Seminar
Jan 26	Olivet College, Olivet, Michigan
Jan 29	LEAP, Service-Learning Workshop, New Haven, CT
Feb	University of Bridgeport, Conflict Resolution Class, Bridgeport
Feb 14	Teacher Professional Development, Norwalk Public Schools
Mar 9	C.A.R.E. Learning Community, SCSU, New Haven, CT
Mar 15-16	National Service-Learning Conference, Rhode Island
Mar 29	New England League at Middle Schools, Rhode Island
Apr 12-13	Connecticut's Assets-Based Character Education Conference

## Essential Ingredients for Character Education

by David B. Wangaard, Ed.D.

Supporters of modern character education are learning about the essential ingredients of successful program development. As noted by experts in school change, essential ingredients to advance character education include: 1. Defining the process of comprehensive character education clearly, 2. Studying multiple examples of successful character education programs, and 3. Developing an active site-based leadership team.

The national **Character Education Partnership (CEP)** is working hard to help address the first two essentials by defining excellent process and publishing the stories of successful schools and districts. **CEP's Eleven Principles** offer a clear definition of how schools can develop their character education initiative. The Eleven Principles recognize that— 1. Character education promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character; 2. Character is comprehensively defined to include thinking, feeling, and behavior; 3. Effective programs are intentional, proactive, and comprehensive; 4. The school is a caring community; 5. The school provides students opportunities for moral action; 6. The school supports a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners; 7. Intrinsic rewards are recognized as superior motivators for character development; 8. All school staff share responsibility for character education; 9. Staff and students demonstrate moral leadership; 10. The school recruits parents and community members as full partners in character building; and 11. There is an ongoing evaluation of character education practices and outcomes.

The CEP Eleven Principles provide an excellent framework for schools to construct their definition of good practice. The CEP also publishes the stories of schools successfully demonstrating the Eleven Principles. For more information you can visit the CEP web site at [www.character.org](http://www.character.org) or call (800) 988-8081.

A site-based leadership team is the third essential ingredient for successful character education. Team membership may vary, but often include staff, students, parents, and other community members. The existence of a functioning leadership team is one of the best predictors of long-term success for a character education initiative. **The School for Ethical Education** is working with the **Connecticut Assets Network (CAN)** to provide a series of workshops for school and community teams to design their own local program. The workshop series is called the **C.A.R.E. Learning Community** (see calendar) and includes registration for the second annual Connecticut's Asset's Based Character Education Conference. For more information you may visit the CAN web site at [www.ctassets.org](http://www.ctassets.org) or call (800) 991-8463.

Supporters of character education are wise to focus on the three essential ingredients while advancing a school or district-wide initiative. The C.A.R.E. Learning Community is designed to help leadership teams address all three essentials. C.A.R.E. provides schools or communities an opportunity to organize a leadership team, study success stories from other locations and define their own strategic plan. We welcome you to join us this spring to help put *ethics in action* with C.A.R.E..

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needs grow personally and academically. The program effectively integrates cooperative- and service- learning with authentic social experience. Students are paired with seniors at Andrew House for monthly activities. Each activity provides a variety of structured opportunities for students to develop and apply core values such as kindness, responsibility, concern, and respect. Students practice these values with their senior partner by developing a positive relationship. By placing a high value on relationships, students gain interpersonal skills and learn to work cooperatively. Volunteering their time and service to relate to seniors plays an important role in helping students value and care about other people. When third-grader David was asked why he participates in the program, he stated, "Because I care about them [the seniors]."

For the seniors, the time spent with students allows them to share activities and stories, and bond with a younger generation. The seniors and students look forward to each meeting. During the summer, third grader, Chelsea, wanted to visit her "grandmother" all the time. Chelsea's mother commented that Chelsea counted the days until she could see her "grandma" again.

Vance Village School has developed Adopt-A-Grandparent as a program that helps their students practice excellent character. Additionally, the program provides students and seniors the opportunity to bridge the generations and create positive relationships. These relationships are healthy connections for members of both age groups. We commend Robin Handleman and the staff of Andrew House for creating and supporting this program that helps place **ethics in action!**

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*Bolton continued from pg. 1*

involvement has increased as the positive outcomes of the Personal and Social Responsibility program become evident throughout the school.

An important aspect of Bolton's program is the contribution made by Bolton's eighth grade Peer Support group. These students demonstrate positive character and serve as role models. They provide individual and group peer mediation and conflict resolution. They often attend class meetings to assist teachers and counselors with issues of inclusion, caring, cooperation and discussion about character. Ms. Stillman, along with a team of students, presented a workshop on Class Meetings at the 1999 Connecticut's Assets-Based Character Education Conference. One participant noted, "This is a great way to get kids talking to one another."

While the **Personal and Social Responsibility Program** focuses on positive character and social/emotional skills, students are also encouraged to develop responsibility for their schoolwork, cooperate with others, and focus on skills necessary for a successful life. Bolton Center School teachers believe the introduction of a personal and social responsibility program has had a dramatic effect on students' behavior and citizenship. **SEE** applauds the staff and students at Bolton Center School for their award winning efforts.



SAVE THIS DATE – APRIL 13, 2000

# Connecticut's Assets-Based CHARACTER EDUCATION CONFERENCE

The Second Annual **Connecticut's Assets-Based Character Education Conference** will be held on April 13, 2000 in New Britain, CT. Come learn about strategies that help youth live successful and resilient lives and celebrate positive character. Find out how you can weave character education into the fabric of normal school life. Explore the activities and programs that help youth to make positive behavior choices. Our keynote speaker is **Dr. Kevin Ryan**, Professor and Director Emeritus of Boston University's Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character.

Educators, psychologists, parents and students are encouraged to attend. Watch your mailboxes for further information or visit *SEE's* website for registration information.

**For further information about SEE visit our website at [www.ethicsed.org](http://www.ethicsed.org).**

From our website you may also subscribe to this newsletter, learn more about the comprehensive approach to character education, identify character education publishers and consultants and stay informed about upcoming events.



## CHARACTER IN PRINT

Titles referenced by *Books that Build Character: A Guide to Teaching Your Child Moral Values Through Stories* by William Kilpatrick and Gregory and Suzanne M. Wolfe, Simon & Schuster: New York (1994).

**Grades 5-8**

### **Onion John**

**Joseph Krumgold (Harper Trophy, 1984)**

An unusual friendship develops between Andy Rusch and a man who spends his time going through the dump. Andy's father extends control over his son's future, including the friendship with the man. Andy has to do something if he wants to help them both.

**Traits: courage, compassion, responsibility**

### **The Dark is Rising**

**Susan Cooper (Aladdin, 1987)**

Will Stanton discovers he has been chosen to stand against the great forces of the Dark. He is warned, "the Walker is abroad" and then given a mysterious iron ring to wear. Will meets a wizard and becomes one of the greatest warriors of the Light.

**Traits: loyalty, truthfulness, courage**

### **Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry**

**Mildred D. Taylor (Puffin, 1991)**

Cassie Logan is a young girl growing up in Mississippi during the Depression and feels the pain of the inequality that exists for black people. It is the loving context of her tightly knit family that saves her from ultimate despair. Cassie's parents teach her that it is the value of the human person that counts, and not the color of one's skin.

**Traits: honesty, integrity, perseverance, justice**

## Character Educators Suggest . . .

Over two hundred character educators have been asked to respond to the question "**What leadership will I see to guide and promote the school's Character Education mission?**" Here are some of their responses:

- A Character Education Committee develops curriculum guides that integrate character education into every aspect of school life.
- Facilitators are available who are knowledgeable about successful character education programs and can help connect teachers and parents to available resources.
- Students lead initiatives with faculty assistance.
- Parents participate in character education development by reinforcing and recognizing student success.
- An active and positive administration leads the development of character education values.
- Students serve as peer mediators, cross-age tutors, and in the student government.
- Staff professional development is ongoing in character education topics such as integrating values into lessons, service-learning, and decision making.
- The staff evaluates character education programs and searches for opportunities for improvement.
- All adults, including teachers, coaches, administrators, custodians, and secretaries, share the responsibility to help character education progress.



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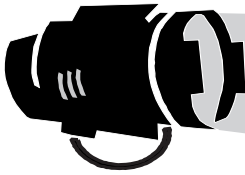
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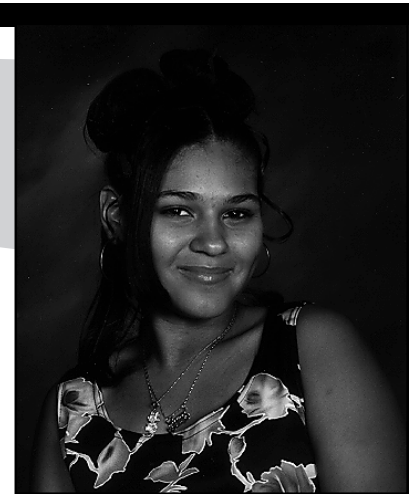
Health Teacher

Counselor/Social Worker



## Character Spotlight

### Mary Maritza Gomez



**Mary Maritza Gomez** is a junior at **Middletown High School**. Mary grew up in the Bellvue Square Housing Project in Hartford, CT, where each day was a day of survival. Mary had to face and fight a hostile, drug-infested environment. Mary is resilient and has been able to stay clear of negative behavior despite pervasive, anti-social messages from adults, the media, and other youth. Mary showed determination not to be victimized by her surroundings. Bolstered by a belief in the importance of God and family, Mary has been able to respond in a positive manner to challenges posed by stressful situations. At Middletown High School, Mary is able to maintain her academics, coupled with holding the position of Vice President of "Youth Helping Youth," a peer mentoring/education program sponsored by the Rushford Center, Inc. Mary is a facilitator and mentor in the program. The program focuses on training youth to make responsible decisions, handle conflict productively, commit to service in their local community, and build self-esteem. Participants focus on social activities that promote positive fun and demonstrate commitment to the community by providing direct service to other community agencies and schools.

Mary is also President of Middletown High School's Alianza Latina, a self-awareness organization. She has served on the Middletown Youth Center's Advisory counsel, and has been involved in building assets in her community by attending Character Assets Resiliency Education Workshops sponsored by the Connecticut Assets Network. Mary truly exemplifies the qualities of a person of character!

## CHARACTER CATALYSTS

### Attention Secondary Teachers!

Teachers in grades 7-12 who are interested in administering an **Ethics Essay Contest** are encouraged to contact **SEE** for contest information. Student winners will be recognized at our Connecticut Assets-Based Character Education Conference in April. For further information, please contact **SEE** Tel: (203) 330-5340 Fax: (203) 330-5036 E-Mail: [ethics@wisi.com](mailto:ethics@wisi.com).

### C.A.R.E. Learning Community 2000

The **Character, Assets, and Resiliency Education (C.A.R.E.) Learning Community** is designed to help schools and communities organize a leadership team, study success stories from other locations, and define their own C.A.R.E. strategic plan. Participants in learning community activities are invited to study and experience the strategies and outcome goals of C.A.R.E. methods. For further information, please contact, Gregory Ryan, (800)991-8463, [www.ctassets.org](http://www.ctassets.org), at Connecticut Assets Network.

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