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CREATE SUPPORTIVE, INCLUSIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS WITH ADL EDUCATION

By Beth C. Martinez, ADL Education Director, Albany Region



When now high school senior Emmett O’Connell was 12-years-old, he was diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder. In Emmett’s words, this had a huge impact on his life.

“Growing up with this illness, I wasn’t sure how to handle myself and I felt like my teachers didn’t understand me. My academics were failing, I had no friends, and I most certainly had no passion for anything.”

What Emmett was lacking in his school was supportive peer allies as well as a safe, inclusive school environment. He didn’t feel that he had peers to talk to and he felt like his teachers could not understand how difficult it was for him to get through

each day. While an inclusive environment did not exist for Emmett in middle school, his high school fortunately decided to invest in ADL’s Peer Training program as well as enroll in the ADL’s No Place for Hate initiative. Because the school embraced anti-bias and bullying prevention programming, this resulted in a significant change in Emmett’s life as well as an important impact for his school.

When he was in tenth grade, Emmett was invited by a teacher to participate in ADL’s A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute Peer Training Program. According to Emmett, “At first I took this opportunity because I knew I would miss school time and would be able to avoid other people. However, I soon realized that I was recommended for the program because people saw the potential in me as a leader. Participating in this three-day training and knowing that others saw me as a leader helped give me confidence that I had been lacking.” The program also provided him with a new support system of fellow peers.

The Peer Training Program that Emmett participated in was developed by ADL in 1991 and has impacted millions of students in New York State and across the country. This program consists of three full days of training for a group of 25 to 30 high school students. The students learn and discuss topics such as identity, bias, bullying, stereotypes, and allyship. They also learn to facilitate conversations with their peers around these issues. ADL believes in harnessing the power of peer-to-peer influence. The goal of the program is for students to continue having these conversations

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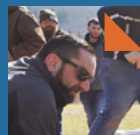
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