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One senior decides to 'Mix it Up at Lunch'

Friendship-building exercise modeled after tolerance program

By Matt Calamia

Write The Author

Village Beacon Record
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Motivated by her experience being bullied in middle school, Shoreham-Wading River High School senior Jacqueline Godfrey introduced a friendship-building and stereotype-breaking program to students in the school's cafeteria last week, Nov. 14 through 18.



Jacqueline Godfrey, a senior at Shoreham-Wading River High School, said a magazine and her mom gave her inspiration to start the program. Photo by Matt Calamia

Godfrey, 17, went to the Board of Education for permission to bring the Mix it Up at Lunch program to the school to help dissolve cliques and introduce students to people they might not normally be willing to engage with.

"There's a lot of camaraderie [within] the cliques in our school," Godfrey said. "The sports kids sit with the sports kids, and the theater kids sit with the theater kids, but no one really meshes as well as I would have liked."

Godfrey left the district after middle school to attend McGann-Mercy High School in Riverhead. After two years, she returned to SWR High School, but had difficulty making friends. She said the Mix it Up at Lunch program helps people meet new people around the school while also taking steps toward preventing bullying.

"When I started this, I had the idea that people would be learning more about each other," Godfrey said. "It's really a prevention of bullying, this program."

Godfrey said Teaching Tolerance magazine, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, started the Mix it Up at Lunch program in 2002 and, according to www.tolerance.org, 2,473 schools had committed to this year's nationwide event, held Oct. 18. But Godfrey wanted to take the concept a step further and make it last an entire week at Shoreham-Wading River.

"Every period we've been down here all week," Godfrey said on Friday, "and we've been playing games. It's all about positive reinforcement."

The group of about 10 student volunteers that take part in the lunch program

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play character-building games to get to know one another. One activity saw the group divided into small subgroups of four, with each member being from a different grade level. The objective of the exercise was to find something in common with each person in the group.

Although the program is at the school thanks to Godfrey's effort, she has received support from the faculty, including her English teacher, John Mitchell, who helped her write proposals to present to the school board.

"It's great to see her step up and do something like that, especially because not everyone does that," Mitchell said. "It took a lot of effort on her part. She had to put up with a lot of people who were like, 'This is silly, this is dumb, we don't really need it,' and just worked and persevered through all that and was willing to be the face of that."

Godfrey received help inside the cafeteria from Carol Giordano, a math teacher who said this type of program could benefit any high school.

"I don't think everyone is going to hang out on a Friday night, and I don't think that's the goal of it," Giordano said. "But one possible goal of it might be when you see someone coming down the hall, instead of looking down at your shoes, maybe you'll do a quick little 'Hello' or eye contact."

Making a difference runs in Godfrey's family.

She said her mother, Janet, donates supplies to troops around the world. Her mom also has a saying that Godfrey tries to live by each day and inspired her to bring the Mix it Up at Lunch program to her school: "See a need, fill a need."

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