



# Beyond differences

Inspiring youth to end social isolation



## Annual Report 2014-2015



Inspired by the life and memory of Lili Smith  
1994-2009

Lili wasn't bullied or teased, but was often treated as if she were invisible. She suffered from social isolation but never gave up believing in herself.

# WHO WE ARE

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## Dear friends,

We all can remember a time in middle school when we, or someone in our class, were excluded, socially isolated, taunted or even bullied. Yet as a society our attitude towards middle school years, has been, **“Middle school is just a lousy experience—so suck it up.”**

At Beyond Differences, we are working to usher in a new day in which all youth feel included, valued, respected and accepted by their peers.

Our organization experienced tremendous growth during fiscal year 2014-15—the time period covered by this report—as we expanded from a small Marin-based nonprofit to a national organization. Our national programs, which you will read about in this report, are expanding to serve more schools and communities.

With funding from the Marin Community Foundation, we compiled and are circulating a growing body of research and evidence showing the profound effects of social isolation on youth:

**Depression and Anxiety.** Social isolation is correlated with more sleep disturbances and suicidal behaviors, with an increased risk of attempted suicide. These findings are especially poignant given that suicide is the third-leading cause of death among teens from 15 to 19.

**Substance Abuse.** Adolescent social isolation is associated with an increased risk of substance use.

### Connectedness in School is Critical for Academic Success.

Students who report lower connectedness at school tend to feel less motivated and less satisfied at school, have worse attendance records, perform worse on high school exit exams, have a lower likelihood of completing school, and tend to perform lower on measures of student achievement for which schools are held accountable.

**Worse Physical Health and Well-Being.** Social isolation during adolescence significantly increases the risk for fair or poor health in young adults. In fact, one study predicted a greater risk for high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and obesity in young adulthood.

We believe that developing youth leadership in our schools is the best route to change. Just a few years ago, we started out with a small group of teen leaders and began holding school assemblies at middle schools in Marin County. Today that small group has grown into many hundreds of teens and pre-teen students in communities all across America working to create schools where all youth feel included.

We were thrilled that our 2015 National No One Eats Alone Day was celebrated in more than 700 schools across 38 states. Thank you for helping us achieve such phenomenal growth in our programs, enabling us to transform the culture of middle school. We are grateful for the many partners we have working with this on this crucially important issue.

With appreciation,  
*Laura Talmus and Ace Smith*  
Co-Founders





# Beyond Differences in the Schools

Changing the culture of middle school and creating teen leaders is at the heart of Beyond Differences' work. To expand our reach, this year we created and distributed Beyond Differences curricula to schools interested in replicating our model. We are excited to have 11 schools utilizing this resource and heartened by the positive feedback we have heard. We provided schools with a three-ring binder containing:

- The 52-page "Student Leadership Program Curriculum Guide," designed for 7th and 8th grade middle school teachers and administrators
- The 14-page "Understanding Social Isolation in Schools," a unit lesson plan for 6th grade teachers and middle school administrators
- A thumb drive with templates and reproducible materials
- Beyond Differences swag, such as a beach ball to use in community building games and over 30 fun and engaging activity cards



Beyond Differences' teen leaders are the heart and soul of our organization.

by a faculty advisor, learn leadership skills, public speaking, event planning, and have the chance to meet other student leaders from across the country. They learn how to bring No One Eats Alone, Be Kind Online and Be The One to their school.

**Beyond Differences clubs** in Marin middle schools help create an atmosphere at school where everyone feels welcome and where student leaders implemented No One Eats Alone™, Be Kind Online and Be The One™ programs.

## Looking Toward the Future

Through our growing relationship with the Superintendent of the Portland Public Schools and our developing relationships in our neighboring counties of Contra Costa, Alameda and San Francisco, Beyond Differences is expanding beyond our home base of Marin County. The success of No One Eats Alone and Be Kind Online in the Portland schools this year is just a taste of what's to come. We are looking forward to even more programming and more establishment of relationships during the next school year.



Students at Portland's Grant High School were among the thousands who pledged to Be Kind Online.



Middle school students love learning leadership skills from their high school mentors.

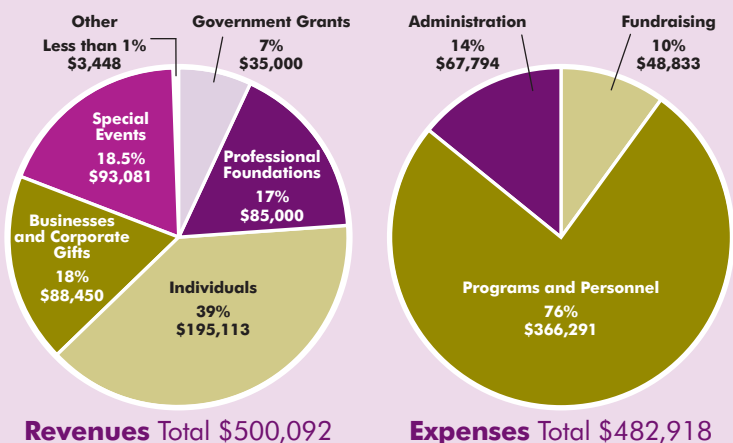
## Our Student Leaders

Coming together from all over the San Francisco Bay Area, the 52 members of Beyond Differences' **Teen Board of Directors** are full-time students attending 9th–12th grades in various school districts. By dedicating themselves to Beyond Differences, they are becoming leaders, inspiring their friends, teachers and parents to end social isolation. In just this past year, our teen leaders presented 16 assemblies to local middle schools, impacting more than 3,000 students. Since our founding, our Teen Board members have presented more than 50 assemblies to over 20,000 students!

The Beyond Differences **Leadership Academy Training Program (LATP)** empowered more than 160 middle school students as leaders and activists. Seventh and 8th graders, guided

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## Financials 2014-2015





# Beyond Differences' National



Lt. Governor Gavin Newsom launched the Be Kind Online campaign on October 5, 2014 at a press conference with Beyond Differences teen leaders.

## BE KIND ONLINE DAY

OCTOBER 23, 2014



We know that these days youth live 24 hours a day online. We understand that social isolation doesn't end when the school day is over. This knowledge made it incumbent on Beyond Differences to grow in the online space.

Be Kind Online was developed to build strong, inclusive communities in schools and online.

This social media campaign asked teens to "take the pledge" to stop anonymous posting and be kind online. Millions of people saw and tweeted about this important issue, including Kelly Osbourne, California Lt. Governor Gavin Newsom, San Francisco 49er's legend Joe Montana, and Anderson Cooper.



Beyond Differences @BeyondDiff · Oct 18

Hey! Look who took the #ImInPledge this week! Anderson Cooper @AC360. Join us at [ImInPledge.com](http://ImInPledge.com)!



Anderson Cooper 360° @AC360

Be happy. Be kind. Take the pledge to be nice to everyone online and in person at [ImInPledge.com](http://ImInPledge.com) #ImInPledge



Kelly Osbourne @kellyosbourne

Be happy. Be kind. Take the pledge to be nice to everyone online and in person at [ImInPledge.com](http://ImInPledge.com) #ImInPledge



**I'M IN! ARE YOU IN?**  
Take the pledge to be kind online TAKE THE PLEDGE!

"I pledge to be kind online, not to post anonymously and commit to building and maintaining healthy relationships online and in person."

Thousands of people across the country took the Be Kind Online pledge before October 23, 2014, National Be Kind Online Day.

Parents joined together on the evening of National Be Kind Online Day to listen and learn about online privacy at an event Beyond Differences organized with Facebook.

## BE THE ONE DAY

APRIL 24, 2015

**BE THE ONE**

On Be The One Day, hundreds of young people in nine middle schools throughout the San Francisco Bay committed to ending social isolation through their own actions.

That evening, more than 100 middle school students joined together for "Dance, Dance Inclusion" held in the gym at Terra Linda High School. With the theme "everybody is included," the

dance brought the crowd together in a happy and communal group atmosphere. High school mentors helped ensure that everyone was included and had a great time.

Be The One builds awareness around social isolation and inspires teens to act. Teens learn to notice when others are feeling left out and reach out to them with random acts of kindness.

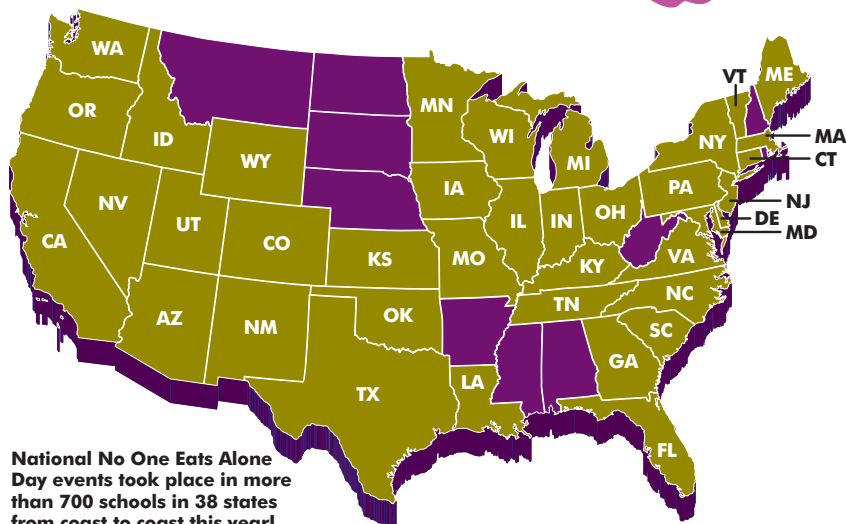


Everyone felt welcome on the dance floor during Beyond Differences' Dance, Dance Inclusion event, held on Be The One Day.

# Campaigns and Special Events

## NATIONAL NO ONE EATS ALONE DAY FEBRUARY 13, 2015

NO ONE eats alone™



National No One Eats Alone Day events took place in more than 700 schools in 38 states from coast to coast this year!

RESOLUTIONS RECOGNIZING NATIONAL NO ONE EATS ALONE DAY WERE PASSED BY THE SANTA CLARA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, SACRAMENTO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS, LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT AND SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT.

**HERE'S WHAT MIDDLE SCHOOLERS SAID:** This isn't going to be easy to forget because we don't usually have lunches like this.

- There are a lot of kids who have trouble making friends and I feel like today is a day to help them out just a little.
- I have learned there are some other people you might have something in common with and if you just reach out to find new friends, you can find them.
- If you see someone who is sitting alone, you should go up to them and ask them if it's okay to sit with them and be nice to them.
- **THIS IS NOT GOING TO END HERE.**

Lunch time can be the longest hour of the day for those who feel invisible at school. That's why we are so proud of National No One Eats Alone (NOEA), a student-led program that encourages middle school students to engage with one another through games and icebreakers and activities during lunchtime.

Timed to coincide with Valentine's Day, National No One Eats Alone Day 2015 saw more than 400,000 teens in over 700 schools in 38 states make their school lunchtime a place of inclusion and welcome. Beyond Differences provided a backpack—filled with all the supplies to create a single day where no one feels isolated at lunch—to the 700 schools that participated in NOEA 2015. **This was a 20-fold increase beyond the 35 schools in 2014.** NOEA empowers our youth to be personally involved in making changes to their schools and their communities. Most importantly, young people are in charge.

More than 100 news stories ran across the country, including NBC's Today Show.



This is just one of the hundreds of middle schoolers who stepped through a balloon arch on Be The One Day to signify the behaviors they are leaving behind as they work to be the one to be inclusive.

## How will you Be The One?

**HERE'S WHAT MIDDLE SCHOOLERS SAID:** I will befriend a kid who is alone. • I will say hi to anyone who looks like they're not having a great day. • I will sit with someone new tomorrow. • I will invite someone sitting alone to join us in an activity. • I will stand up for myself and others. • I will compliment people, especially if they are sad.



# Rigorous Research Guides Beyond

Beyond Differences engaged two notable education researchers to conduct an implementation study of our programs in the 2014–15 school year. Dabney Ingram, Ph.D. and Rebecca London, Ph.D. examined how our programs operate, what constitutes success, and how key stakeholders believe our work is changing their perceptions and experiences.

Thanks to funding from the Marin Community Foundation and its president Dr. Tom Peters, and with support from the Marin County Office of Education, under the leadership of Superintendent Mary Jane Burke, the study was published in October 2015. Here's a sneak peak of the study and its findings which will provide a road map as we continue to expand nationally.

## The Study

### Data Collection and Research Questions



## RESEARCHERS



Dabney Ingram, Ph.D., focuses on education research, consulting and evaluation. Dr. Ingram holds a Ph.D. in Developmental and Psychological Science from the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University, an M.S. degree in social psychology from The London School of Economics and Political Science, and a B.A. in Psychology and Spanish from Amherst College.



Rebecca London, Ph.D., is Research Professor at the Center for Collaborative Research for an Equitable California at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Dr. London holds a Ph.D. in human development and social policy from Northwestern University's School of Education and Social Policy, an M.A. in economics, also from Northwestern, and a B.A. in economics from the University of Michigan.

# Differences into the Future

## The Challenge

**Social isolation and loneliness in adults is strongly linked to poor health and mortality.** A substantial body of scientific research shows that social isolation is a risk factor for death that is comparable to or even exceeds other well-established and well-publicized risk factors for mortality, including smoking, obesity, lack of exercise, high cholesterol, and air pollution.

**Social isolation in children and adolescents is linked to worse physical and mental health outcomes.** A growing but less abundant set of studies has focused on social isolation during childhood and adolescence.

## Summary of the Mental Health and Physical Health Effects of Social Isolation During Adolescence

Mental health effects	Physical health effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Depression</li><li>• Increased anxiety</li><li>• Lower self-esteem</li><li>• Sleep disturbances</li><li>• Suicidal tendencies (attempts; ideation)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased risk of substance abuse</li><li>• Headache, stomach ache</li><li>• Worse physical health</li><li>• Higher cholesterol in young adulthood</li><li>• Higher blood pressure in young adulthood</li><li>• Obesity in young adulthood</li><li>• Higher risk of poor cardiovascular health in young adulthood</li></ul>

## Academic Effects of Lower Sense of Belonging or Connectedness in Schools

- Feel less motivated and put forth less effort
- Feel less satisfied with school
- Are less engaged in class
- Participate less in class
- Show a decrease in attendance rates
- Perform worse on high school exit exams
- Lower likelihood of completing high school
- Perform lower on measures of student achievement

## The Findings

A school-wide intervention approach is supported by research. And the distressing and damaging effects on young people of social isolation and feeling like they don't belong in school are clear. This is a social and dynamic issue that can be addressed through thoughtfully crafted strategies and interventions, such as Beyond Differences.

**Some of the Researcher's Findings about the Effects of Beyond Differences:** Beyond Differences programming is producing substantial and fairly consistent youth development benefits for student participants.

**Students reported gaining leadership skills from Beyond Differences.** Middle school students reported enhanced leadership as the strongest effect of the program. Almost 70% strongly agreed with the statement, "Because I have been involved with Beyond Differences, I am more of a leader." Two-thirds of Teen Board members also strongly agreed they had gained leadership skills, and also felt strongly that they were role models for younger students.

**Students also felt they gained in social awareness and other skills.** Both middle and high school students reported being more aware of the problem of social isolation and more confident in their abilities to help combat it. Students felt empowered by their role—that they could make a difference with their actions. Both groups reported gaining life skills, such as public speaking and planning skills, as well as having a place to belong.

## Looking Forward

Beyond Differences, a young and flexible organization, is dedicated to continuous improvement in our ability to have a deeper impact. This research showed us what we're doing really well and also gave us some great input from the young people we serve on how we can best grow. We look forward to sharing with you in next year's annual report the progress we have made.

## Community Recognition

January 15, 2015 was a red-letter day for Beyond Differences as Laura Talmus, our co-founder, was recognized with the Jefferson Award for Public Service.

Founded in 1972 by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Senator Robert Taft Jr., and Sam Beard, the Jefferson Awards National Ceremonies are the country's longest standing and most prestigious celebration of public service. Laura is among more than 60,000 local "Unsung Heroes" who have been recognized, alongside hundreds of notable national figures including Walter Cronkite, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elie Wiesel.

"I'm thrilled and honored to be recognized alongside such other amazing community leaders," said Laura. "It's such an affirmation of the work that our teen leaders are doing and the critical importance of ending social isolation."



Beyond Differences' co-founder Laura Talmus (left) with Hillary Beard Schafer, Jefferson Awards Executive Director

## Financial Friends

We want to thank the following individuals, companies and foundations who have supported Beyond Differences and invested in our student leaders. This list reflects contributions received between June 1, 2014 and May 31, 2015.

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The Brackpool Family Foundation  
Centene Corporation  
Susan and Todd Christman  
Ronald Conway  
Barbara and Eric Dobkin  
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Susan Lowenberg and Joyce Newstat, Fund of Horizons  
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Marin Community Foundation  
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San Francisco Giants  
Jennifer Siebel Newsom and Lt. Governor Gavin Newsom  
Jacqueline Neuwirth Swire and Stephen Swire  
Jay and Carolyn Paxton Fund  
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Ingrid Tauber, PhD  
Diane and Howard Zack

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