

Being a leader is not easy, it involves standing up for what you believe in without worrying about what others are saying. My transition from middle school to high school was a stressful time for me. I was worried about if I was going to fit in at the high school. I was worried about continuing to excel as a student, and I was focused on living a successful life. After my freshmen year in high school, I realized you don't succeed by fitting in; you succeed by standing out and being recognized.

I am the type of person who likes to be involved in my school and help make a difference in my social environment. Since my freshmen year of high school, I have been a member of Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD); and being a part of this club has taught me how to deal with uncomfortable situations in regards to the behaviors of others. I have learned to speak my mind in critical moments, and prior to potential life-changing events. I have learned to teach others to speak up as well. I was vice president of this club for my sophomore and junior years, and I now proudly serve as president.

Receiving and invitation to attend Schenectady County Embraces Diversity (SCED) at Union College, and become a part of the Diversity Club at my school was an honor. This workshop was an opportunity to meet with students from other schools and discuss different methods of promoting diversity in high schools. This was very helpful and taught me the true meaning of diversity, and the joy behind celebrating the differences of others. Making an overt effort to promote diversity in my school has not been easy, however, being a catalyst for social change is a goal of mine, and helping to create a school atmosphere of mutual respect feels wonderful. Throughout the SCED program, I learned how to demonstrate leadership skills as a spokesperson for equality. I thought to myself how can I take what I have learned and bring it back to my school? I can still remember my first conversation last year with my guidance counselor about starting a peer mediation club. The thought of helping my peers resolve their differences was thrilling! I could already envision myself in the facilitator role, and I was overcome with passion and determination. After recruiting other potential student leaders to make a club, the next step was training. We went through two months of training, and I observed as my peers began to catch my excitement and enthusiasm. Then it was time to test out our skills, and methodology, and begin to assist with problem-solving in the middle school. One of the peer mediation club trained mediators, as well as myself (as president) were both assigned to a case. I led the mediation and it was a success. This experience has given me the courage to not only be able to stand up for what I believe in, but to also be able to help solve problems that require thoughtfulness, discussion, and reflection in order to be resolved.

I was also selected to participate in the Student's Together Opposing Prejudice (STOP) workshop at Siena College, which was another engaging and inspiring experience. I left that workshop brainstorming ways to bring students together to create a more evolved Schalmont High School.

Now that I had experienced the joy behind a successful experience in regards to leading a mediation to help promote positive change and conflict resolution, I decided to also become a student facilitator at the SCED workshops this year (2009-2010) at Union College. My goal in becoming a student facilitator is to help teach other students about diversity, and inform others about the discrimination that takes place not only in our high schools, but in the broader realm of today's society. I strongly feel that discrimination needs to come to an end, and more people need to learn how to celebrate the differences between individuals, and make peace where there has been conflict.