

A Touch of Understanding, Inc.

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Report of Activities 7/1/08-6/30/09

Mission Statement

The mission of A Touch of Understanding, Inc. is to encourage acceptance and respect for all individuals. Its educational programs are designed to enhance understanding of differences, thereby minimizing the discrimination and social isolation suffered by people who are perceived as different for any reason, but especially children and adults with disabilities.

Our Growth

This has been an important year in the life of A Touch of Understanding! We have moved into our first office, outside of home offices, in the 13 years since incorporation. The new office space has allowed us to grow in a variety of ways both programmatically and as an agency. We have increased the number of presentations provided, as well as the size of our ATOU Board of Directors and Volunteer Team. Our roster now includes 70 individuals, including many students from California State University, Sacramento and University of Phoenix. More than half of our volunteers have disabilities.

As we increased the number of school presentations, many of the students with disabilities who attended these schools have chosen to join with the ATOU Team to share their experiences with their classmates. Teachers, principals and parents are seeing how beneficial this experience is to these children and young people. Therefore, we created a youth council, which includes individuals starting at age 8, who take time from their own school day to join the ATOU Team to share their story at other locations. These energetic young people have chosen the name, **The ATOU Youth F.O.R.C.E. F.O.R.C.E. stands for Friends Offering Respect ~ Creating Empowerment.** And a formidable FORCE they are! They know, from personal experience, the importance of A Touch of Understanding on their school campuses and are growing as self-advocates and leaders.

One of the challenges on school campuses is the growing number of students with autism. Currently, 1 in 150 children is diagnosed with Autism. Because of the high population of students with this diagnosis at each school we visit, we have created an activity station that helps participants understand the challenges faced by individuals on the Autism Spectrum. The creation of this station has been accomplished through collaboration with professionals from the MIND Institute and Autism Speaks, as well as young adults with autism and parents of children with autism. This is a timely and essential component of our program.

While continuing to focus on our children and young people, we have also branched out to expand our program to include adult groups. Darlene O'Brien, former Vice President of our Board of Directors, now a consultant with ATOU, has completed the pilot project of our new adult program. This program, which was well received, is now available to all adult groups who can benefit from increased understanding among individuals, be they co-workers, patients, clients or customers. This is becoming more important with the increasing size of the senior population and the large number of disabled veterans coming home.

As you can see, we have grown both internally as an organization, and externally regarding our community outreach. It has been a very positive year for A Touch of Understanding.

Our Challenge for 2009-2010

The coming year promises to offer both challenges and opportunities. A Touch of Understanding has experienced significant growth during this past year, a year of economic turmoil and diminishing resources. ATOU has been affected by the economic downturn, as have all nonprofits. Foundations that give from their interest income have drastically cut their grant funding. Preventive programs like A Touch of Understanding have to take a 'back seat' to more crucial issues such as food, clothing and shelter. Individual donors, many in financial crisis themselves, must reduce their contributions to ATOU. Schools, being victims of budget cuts, fear they can no longer afford to pay the requested 20% of the cost of the ATOU program for their students.

This can all sound overwhelmingly negative. However, resources include more than finances. A Touch of Understanding has the benefit of dedicated human resources. Our team consists of staff and volunteers who serve the mission of acceptance and respect for all individuals with commitment and determination. As our volunteer team increases, so do our resources.

Many of us know, that along with meeting the critical needs of food, clothing and shelter, we must not lose sight of the importance of promoting respect, understanding and the value of human life, for these are the qualities that will help us endure these times of uncertainty and turmoil together.

We are confident that we will stay the course of manageable growth with the sound financial practices of ATOU, our growing team of dedicated volunteers and your continued support. Thank you for your commitment as our partner in the mission of acceptance and respect for all individuals.

Respectfully, Leslie DeDora, Executive Director

In support of our mission, A Touch of Understanding has made the 106 presentations during the past year. A total of 4,280 students in 168 classes have participated in ATOU programs this year.

Dates	Schools	Grade Level	# of classes	# of Presentations	# of Participants
7/1	Pride Industries, Roseville	1-7	1	1	25
9/11	St. Johns Notre Dame, Folsom	4-5	2	2	80
9/12	Ridgeview School, Granite Bay	5	4	3	145
9/18	Dry Creek Elementary School, Roseville	3	4	2	80
9/19	Tremont Elementary School, Dixon	6	3	2	100
9/25	Dilliard School, Wilton	6	3	2	80
9/26	Sierra Oaks School, Sacramento	4	2	2	70
10/2	Twin Oaks School, Rocklin	4	3	2	85
10/3	Heritage Oak School, Roseville	3	5	3	100
10/9	Pony Express School, Sacramento	5-6	4	3	130
10/10	Pony Express School, Sacramento	4	2	2	90
10/16&17	Ridgeview School, Granite Bay	6	5	4	150
10/23&24	Eureka School, Granite Bay	5	5	4	160
10/23&24	Avery Middle School, Avery	6	3	2	100
10/28	Hazel Fischer School, Arnold	4-5	2	2	100
10/31	El Dorado High School, Placerville	10	2	1	35
11/6	Hiram Johnson High School, Sacramento	10	1	1	40

11/7	Cobblestone School, Rocklin	4	2	2	80
11/13	Crestmont School, Roseville	4	2	2	70
11/20	St. Johns Notre Dame, Folsom	6-8	3	3	110
12/4	Olive Grove School, Antelope	3	6	3	120
12/5	Bowling Green School, Sacramento	3	5	2	100
12/11	Cirby School, Roseville	3	4	2	70
12/16	Joe Elie's Office, Rancho Cordova	adults	n/a	2	40
1/9	Cathryn Gates School, Roseville	3	5.5	3	115
1/8&15	Antelope Meadows School, Antelope	3	8	4	160
1/16	Oakhills School, Granite Bay	3	6	4	125
1/22	Weimar School, Weimar	4	6	3	130
2/5	Sargeant School, Roseville	4	1.5	1	50
2/6	Vencil Brown School, Roseville	4	3	2	90
2/19&26	Coyote Ridge School, Roseville	3	7	4	140
2/20	Loomis Basin Charter School, Loomis	2-4	5	2	105
3/4&5	Excelsior School, Roseville	6	5	4	170
3/12	Pioneer School, Davis	5-6	7	4	200
3/20	Caleb Greenwood School, Sacramento	3&6	7	3	130
3/26	Thomas Jefferson School, Roseville	5	2	1	55
3/27	Gold River Discovery Center, Gold River	3	4	2	80
4/16	Foresthill Elementary School, Foresthill	4	2	1	50
4/23&24	Quail Glen School, Roseville	3	7	4	140
4/28	Safeway Adult Program	adults	n/a	1	25
5/12	Oakhills School, Granite Bay	K	5	2	95
5/21&22	Maidu School, Roseville	2	7	4	140
5/29	Greenhills School, Granite Bay	2	7	3	120
Totals			168	106	4,280

A Sampling of /Administrators'/Teachers' Comments

Administrators:

“A Touch of Understanding has a proven record of improving social interactions for children with disabilities in the Greater Sacramento area. Children who were otherwise isolated are now more involved in activities and social groups. By providing this enlightening program, I know our students with disabilities will benefit from the increased knowledge and understanding of their peers. A Touch of Understanding helps make full inclusion a reality in our schools.” Judy Hollsinger, Executive Director, Sacramento County Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA)

Teachers:

“Having ATOU at our school really opened up so many teaching opportunities for me. My students have benefited so much from this program. They are more aware, more empathic, and kinder. Our few students who do struggle with disabilities have been more accepted, understood and welcomed because of it. Thank you!” Second grade teacher

“Every year we look forward to your wonderful presenters and activities. I believe your program will have a lasting affect on the students. I hope we can afford to invite you back next year. Thank you so much for your time and caring!” Third grade teacher

“I believe that the kindergartners will be much more understanding and empathetic when they have a student in their class with an artificial limb (coming up next year). I know this program raised their awareness and increased their comfort level in being around people with disabilities. The ATOU program also gave us an ‘opening’ to further discuss the hidden disabilities, specifically autism, which is quite common at our school. You guys are awesome!” Kindergarten teacher (Program requested because a student was due to have her leg amputated during the summer.)

Teacher Responses to Questionnaires (74 teachers completed the survey, which is 45% of teachers whose students participated.):

- 100% considered A Touch of Understanding a valuable educational experience for their students.
- 95% responded that ATOU’s message of empathy had come up in class discussions dealing with classroom or life situations.
- 91% reported improved peer interactions after their students participated in an ATOU presentation.
- 91% responded their students had an increased awareness of disabilities and sensitivity and respect for disabled individuals.
- 75% reported that interactions with students with disabilities had improved as a result of ATOU.
- 80% reported that their student(s) with special needs benefited from the presentation.
- 94% of reporting teachers would like to have ATOU provided to their incoming students.

A Sampling of Students’ Comments

“The most important thing I learned was never to be prejudiced. Not just to disabled people, but to everyone around me.” 6th grade boy

“I was really curious about their disability, a little bit more than uncomfortable. I learned that people with a disability can still do stuff they like to do and stuff I like to do which makes us do stuff together and become friends. Even though people have a disability, they still do stuff and love what they are doing.” 5th grade boy

“I was uncomfortable because I wondered about the disability but didn’t know how to find out about or ask questions without being rude. Now I’m more comfortable because I realize what they have to go through and how hard it is.” 6th grade girl

“Since you guys came, now I look at this a different way, because of A Touch of Understanding. I love how you guys go to other schools and tell them about disabilities. Now I know that other kids can have the same great experience that I had. Thank you guys.” 3rd grade boy

“I was uncomfortable because I felt pity towards them. Then I realized they don’t want my pity. They just want to be treated like normal people. I feel like I understand disabled people more now. That people are people no matter what physical condition they are in.” 6th grade boy

“Mike inspired me to go for the gold and never give up.” 4th grade boy

“I learned that people can do the same things everyone else does. Darlene, who was blind, called and texted on her cell phone. Stephanie, who had arthritis when she was little and had joint problem went sky diving.” 6th grade girl

“I can’t imagine how hard it would be for Jordan to take the STAR test. I found out how hard it is for people with a learning disability.” 2nd grade boy

“I learned it’s not funny; it’s real.” 4th grade boy

“I learned that you don’t judge from how they look but how they feel inside.” 4th grade girl

“It would be easier because now when I want to be a friend with someone who has a disability I wouldn’t get scared.” 3rd grade girl

“We need to remember we all have disabilities.” 6th grade boy

“You always have to be kind and polite to all, especially special kids in need. People are open to new friends, so do the right thing, give a smile, talk to them nicely, tell them your name and be friends.” 3rd grade girl

“I’m more comfortable because ATOU made us step into their shoes. I learned you should not call people with disability stupid or any other names.” 8th grade boy

“I’m more comfortable now because now I have more of an understanding view of what their life is like.” 4th grade boy

Responses from Students’ Questionnaires (401 students completed the survey, which is 10% of participating students.):

- 96% said they would be more comfortable with people with disabilities following A Touch of Understanding
- 99.5% responded that ATOU helped them understand more about the tools used by individuals with disabilities
- 90% said it will be easier to make friends with someone with a disability

A Sampling of Parent Comments

“It will make him more understanding of others with disabilities and interested in how they go through everyday life. **He has talked about that day to almost everyone.**” 3rd grade son

“Be kind to people with disabilities, don’t just walk past them, go over and give them a smile (quote) Wow! Thanks for teaching my son and **giving him the tools!**” 3rd grade son

“She told me about each of the people and their stories. She was so impressed with what they have overcome and how cool it was to see the technical advancements or tools that help them with everyday life. Our daughter was so impressed by all the aspects of the presentation **that I wouldn’t be surprised if she kept that experience forever.** I could see her wanting to either help or have a job helping those in need.” 6th grade daughter

“He learned so many wonderful **life skills that he will now use into his adulthood.** He shared for 1 hour during our dinnertime. It was beautiful and I graciously thank you. Please continue your mission.” 8th grade son

“My child talked most about Mike and his amazing ability to do so much despite his disability. My child certainly has more empathy and understanding of those with disabilities. Nick felt comfortable with this program because he has been through extensive cancer treatment, neuroblastoma stage IV and has been in

a wheelchair, lost all his hair and much weight and known what it feels like to have others look and wonder about his illness.” 5th grade son

“She shared the struggles that people faced with their disabilities and how it affects their everyday lives. She was amazed at how they coped and overcame their disabilities and functioned regardless of the challenges they face. She will be more aware of their feeling and their challenges. I think she will be even more sensitive; and it was a great diversity awareness for her and something she will **carry with her for the rest of her life**. Thank you.!” 6th grade daughter

“Kayla came home and said her school had a special assembly called. A Touch of Understanding and she learned how to use a wheelchair. She said there were people with special needs like her brother that had different disability. **She was glad that her classmates got to learn more about people with disabilities and hoped more kids would be nicer to her brother**. We always try to educate our children and family about autism as many people who see our son appear normal but has strange quirks and routines that make him say or mumble nonsense. It’s hard to dismiss the stares and whispers. Sometimes it’s hard on the family. But if more people were educated about autism it would help.” 4th grade daughter

“Katie was **very eager to share and did so with myself, her father, stepfather, friends and grandparents**. She was very touched by the entire presentation, especially Jeannie. (ATOU volunteer who has CP). I anticipate this leaving Katie with compassion, understanding and respect and the desire to better understand each disability, and the need to offer a helping hand. What a wonderful lesson for our children!” 3rd grade daughter

“Justin, my daughter and my husband have dyslexia. He liked that you showed everyone the famous and successful people that have it. He’s known about them, but **it gave him a confidence boost that you showed his peers**. Validation of his own self worth and compassion for others. Wonderful program! Thank you.
5th grade son

“I think it should be **offered to every grade AND PARENTS!** 7th grade daughter

“We share our opinions about this and we have a **new theme to discuss in our family!**” 5th grade son

Responses to Parent Questionnaires (362 parents responded, which is 9% of parents of elementary students who participated.):

- 92% responded that their children were eager to share about their experience with ATOU.
- 97% think A Touch of Understanding will be helpful in encouraging their child to accept and include individuals with disabilities in their life.
- 94% anticipate A Touch of Understanding leaving a positive, lasting impression on their child.

Program Sponsors/Donors

Grantors:

City of Roseville Citizen’s Benefit Fund	\$42,500.
PASCO Foundation	\$ 2,000.
Placer Community Foundation	\$ 5,000.
River Cats Foundation	\$ 2,500.
Rumsey (Yocha-De-He) Community Fund	\$10,000.
Safeway Foundation	\$ 2,500.
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Technical Assistance Coalition (TAC) of Placer County	\$ 16,993.
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