



A Touch of Understanding®, Inc.

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www.TouchOfUnderstanding.org



Report of Activities 7/1/15-6/30/16

A Stroke of Good Luck

by Nick Bratkovich



Nick in 5th grade, facilitating a Disability Dinner with Paige, Courtney and Paula

“I had a stroke, there’s no way around it. My mom tells me I’m normal but she’s wrong. I will never be normal, and I will never know what it feels like to have full capabilities in my right side. Normally I am very content with myself and who I am. But my insecurities never leave me. When I run, cut my food, dribble a ball it’s different; I’m different from the rest of my peers. Who said different was bad? Not me. I know that to stay happy with who I am and will always be, I have to stop thinking and live - we all do. Ultimately, we’re our own worst enemies, our insecurities kill us, hold us back. I think my stroke has forced me to strive and create a large amount of self-confidence making me a better person overall. When my mom found out I had a stroke, I was put into immediate therapy to see if I could get better. Although I would never be like my peers, I did get much better. As the years went by I found myself a step slower than my friends at things like sports.

Although I was a happy person I had days where I wished more than anything that I was normal for a day. Then I found ATOU.

“ATOU was the first place I felt I could be the real me.”

ATOU (A Touch of Understanding) is an organization started by Leslie DeDora, with the purpose of teaching as many people as possible about different disabilities and how to be friends with kids who have disabilities. At ATOU I blossomed as I shared my story to more and more people. ATOU was the first place I felt that I could be the real me, where I could be proud to have had a stroke. I have been fortunate enough to have great support from my friends and family, who have helped me in not letting my stroke define me, but instead owning it and becoming a good person. I found ATOU and it has made me a better person not only in owning my disability but also educating me on other people with disabilities.

I believe that everything happens for a reason, and my stroke made me a better person overall. With help, I learned to use my stroke as an advantage not a disadvantage. Surprisingly I am happy I had a stroke, because it has made me a stronger person overall, and taught me that life isn't always fair, but to make the best of every situation no matter how big or small it is.



Nick graduating from 8th Grade

Our mission is to encourage acceptance and respect for all individuals and to minimize the discrimination, bullying and misunderstanding experienced by children and adults who are perceived as different for any reason, especially those with disabilities.



20 Years of Building Empathy~Igniting Respect

This year, we celebrate the 20th Anniversary of A Touch of Understanding, Inc. (ATOU). **More than 84,000 students have experienced our character-building, disability-awareness workshops, with 10,081 students last school year alone!**

ATOU now has a five-pronged approach to disability-awareness: 1) the in-school workshops, 2) the ATOU Youth F.O.R.C.E. (Friends Offering Respect Creating Empowerment), 3) the High School ATOU Youth F.O.R.C.E. Clubs, 4) the Spirit of Inclusion training and Dark Meals for businesses and government agencies and 5) ATOUCares.org, an online hub for individuals and families affected by disabilities.

Over the years, we have received thousands of letters telling of the life-changing impact of our programs. On the following pages, please see the statistics and comments from youth, parents, teachers and adult participants.

ATOU has created a movement to assure that all children, despite disabilities or other differences, feel included, have friends, and enjoy a sense of belonging. These experiences build character and resiliency in our children and young people.

We are launching our 20 Year Anniversary Campaign, 20/20 Clear Vision For The Future. Our goal is to secure 400 new monthly donors of \$20 or more, to sustain this movement into the future.

Thank you for your investment which has allowed us to reach more than 84,000 students in the last 20 years. We look forward to partnering with you for many years to come.

With gratitude,

Lestie J. DeDora

Executive Director

“We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt
32nd president of US (1882 - 1945)

Current ATOU Board of Directors:

Joseph Blanton	Kody Fernandez	John Kennedy	David Rivello	Youth Representatives:
John DeLury	Susie Glover	Darlene O’Brien	Bob Schultz	Nick Bratkovich
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ATOU is improving the climate on school campuses in the Sacramento Region and beyond...

Calaveras County
Vallecito Union School District

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Buckeye Union School District
El Dorado Union High School District
Mother Lode Union School District
Rescue Union School District

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Building For The Future

The goal for our 20/20 Clear Vision for the Future Campaign is to gain 400 monthly donors of \$20 or more during our 20th Anniversary Year!

This will lay the foundation for the future, allowing us to focus on what we do best, improving the lives of children by Building Empathy and Igniting Respect on school campuses and beyond.



10,081 Students during 2015-2016 school year

84,326 total students in 20 years



Students participating in the ATOU school workshop.

Student Survey Responses & Comments:

- 92% said they will be more comfortable with someone with a disability after going through the ATOU workshop.
- 90% said it would be easier to make friends with someone with a disability.
- 97% said they learned more about the tools that people with disabilities use.

“I really enjoyed your message about respect and acceptance for all people. I learned that no matter who you are, everyone wants to be treated the same. Even though some of us look different on the outside, we have feelings on the inside. I plan on setting a good example to others by showing it’s ok to be friends with somebody that looks different.” -**Braden, 4th Grade**

“Thank you for coming to David Lubin and telling us about people with disabilities—or rather—abilities. I learned that even people that have disabilities have abilities too. I like knowing that I don’t have to not even look at people with disabilities, I think that instead of disability it should be—well I don’t know, but not disability. People with their arms amputated or autism—they actually can do more than we can. I think that having a disability drives them further and has a larger motive than other people.”

-**Emi, 4th Grade**

“Dear ATOU Friend, you are so special to me in my eyes because you inspire me to do things. If I’m scared, I get right back up and that’s how you touched my heart..” -**Thabinah, 4th Grade**

**These notes were addressed to Qam Hale, a 16 year old Youth F.O.R.C.E member and Workshop Speaker:*

“When you showed all that stuff about you and your autism, it inspired me to fight my OCD, and that sometimes it gives you a strength instead of all weaknesses. I feel like I shouldn’t be hiding behind this “I have no problems” curtain. I should let me be me. I feel like I could learn how to cope with it from you. Knowing someone else has a problem affecting their life, it makes me feel better. I’m not alone. No one has a reason to pick on me anymore! Thank you SO much! -**Stormy, 7th Grade**

“I thank you for teaching me about autism. When you told me about it, I realized that my cousin has it. When I realized that, I can be more open to him and not treat him differently. Talking about how there are invisible disabilities and that just because they have it doesn’t mean they are a different person. I thought that just because he’s a little different doesn’t mean he is an outcast. I should bring him close, not throw him out. So thank you Qam for teaching me to understand him and autism.” -**Spencer, 7th Grade**

Teacher Survey Responses & Comments:

- 98% said the ATOU presentation was a valuable educational experience for students.
- 96% stated that students are more accepting and respectful of peers after the ATOU workshop.
- 100% said the ATOU workshop increased their students’ sensitivity towards and awareness of children with disabilities.

“I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for the lessons you taught us during your visit to Del Dayo Elementary School last month. I want you to know that you each made a huge impact on my students and me that we will carry with us each day in the future. I was so deeply touched by each of you and your stories that I was inspired to do the follow up lessons with my students and create a bulletin board in our classroom sharing our experience with parents and classroom visitors. Each of my students has written you a letter and hand illustrated it as a small token of our appreciation. A copy of each letter is proudly displayed on our classroom bulletin board, along with pictures and our “We are Buddies not Bullies” poster.

-**Lisa Andrews, Fourth Grade Teacher, Del Dayo Elementary School**

“Thank you so much for coming out to Bannan Creek Elementary this week. I was so excited that my second graders were able to experience your workshop this school year. Following your workshop, I noticed my students not only talking kindly about the presenters and all your volunteers, but they were also being more kind to each other. I truly feel that your workshop is something all students should experience.”

-**Stacey Bryan, Second Grade Teacher, Bannan Creek Elementary**

Parent Survey Responses & Comment:

- 97% felt the ATOU experience will help their child accept and include individuals with disabilities in their life.
- 96% anticipate the workshop leaving a lasting positive impression on their child.

“I just want to let you know how meaningful the Touch of Understanding program, that the 3rd graders experienced yesterday, was for Amanda. She has been talking about it non-stop. I can tell it impacted her in a very positive way. I think bringing awareness regarding individuality, disabilities, challenges and strengths is important at this age and it sounds like this program was very well done. I hope Oak Meadow will continue to offer this program. Thank you so much for giving the students this experience.”

-Oak Meadow Elementary School Parent

“We had a great discussion about disabilities - a conversation that may not have been sparked if not for the great program.”

-Lake Forest Elementary School Parent

Sponsor Comments:

“Once you have seen A Touch of Understanding in action, you have been changed forever. ATOU left a handprint on my heart and a call to action in my life.”

-Rob Stewart, Producer, KVIE’s “Rob on the Road”

“ATOU plays an integral role in our community through the programs they provide to help people of all ages understand challenges that individuals face with disabilities. Their successful outreach in our surrounding counties is impressive and continues to grow in teaching the importance of empathy and compassion toward others. Our community is certainly a better place to live, due to the trained and dedicated ATOU staff and volunteers.”

-Carol Garcia, Senior VP of Community 1st Bank and Mayor of City of Roseville

“Kovar’s is not only thankful, but also very proud to be associated with ATOU. Although we serve our community differently, we are very much alike as well. We are both committed to putting an end to bullying and we both attempt to influence the hearts and minds of others, through education and training. We, as anyone who has worked with the team at ATOU, appreciate the value they bring to all of their relationships –in our community, in our schools and with our children - because they inspire all of us to be our best.”

-Dave Chamberlin, CEO of Kovar’s Satori Academy

Volunteer Comments & Awards:

“In an ironic twist of fate, volunteering with ATOU has helped me become more accepting of my disability.”

-Mary Herdegen, ATOU Workshop Volunteer Speaker

“I love that ATOU teaches kids that no matter your disability, you are just like other people, with hopes and dreams that can come true”.

-Marge Bladet, ATOU Workshop Volunteer

2015-2016 Ed Ennis Award Recipient

Dwight Lunkley was awarded this prestigious award for dedicated service to children through ATOU.



2015-2016 Presidential Service Awards

Our volunteers served thousands of hours for ATOU!
35 volunteers received the President’s Volunteer Service Award
(50+ hours/youth, 100+ hours/adult):

George Arrant	Pam Gehrts	Karen Parsegian
Karen Beer	Susie Glover	Sara-Kate Pirnik
Robin Boparai	Erik Greenan	Sandy Puleo
Peggy Cain	Qamdhyn Hale	Bill Richards
Jackie Callahan	Mary Herdegen	Bob Schultz
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The ATOU Youth F.O.R.C.E. and High School Clubs...

“Making a difference and having fun while doing it.”



ATOU's Youth F.O.R.C.E. (Friends Offering Respect – Creating Empowerment) is a fully inclusive group of children and young people with and without disabilities. We have been busy with our monthly events, Core Meetings, and High School Clubs. As our Youth F.O.R.C.E. continues to grow, so do the friendships that are formed. One of the many highlights of the year was our annual whitewater rafting trip in July with the organization, Environmental Traveling Companions. On this particular trip we had one of our Youth F.O.R.C.E members, Conlan, who is on the Autism Spectrum and is a Rubik's Cube master, teach another volunteer, JDD, who is blind, how to solve the Rubik's Cube. Conlan brought a Rubik's Cube that can be solved by touch, as each face has a different texture. He sat with JDD, and described each face of the cube giving directions such as, "Turn that face 90 degrees clockwise." This continued until JDD had solved the entire cube!

Monthly events included:

- July – State Fair and Whitewater Rafting
- August – Glamping (glamorous camping)
- September – Minute to Win It Challenge Night
- October – 1.6 Challenge to End Bullying
- November – Roseville Holiday Parade
- December – Showcase of Talents and Interests
- January – Star Wars Movie Day
- February – Valentine Dance
- March – Art With Friends
- April – Science Exploration Night
- May – Lion's Club Special Kids Day
- June – Disney Party



Youth F.O.R.C.E. members laughing through the rapids.

Our ATOU Youth F.O.R.C.E continued to expand its Granite Bay High School Club. This club meets every other week, and helps the ATOU Youth F.O.R.C.E with each of their events. They provide support for planning and decorations, as well as serving as buddies at each event. As the club at Granite Bay High School has continued to thrive, students from other local schools have reached out to form their own clubs. We look forward to several new high school clubs in the coming year.



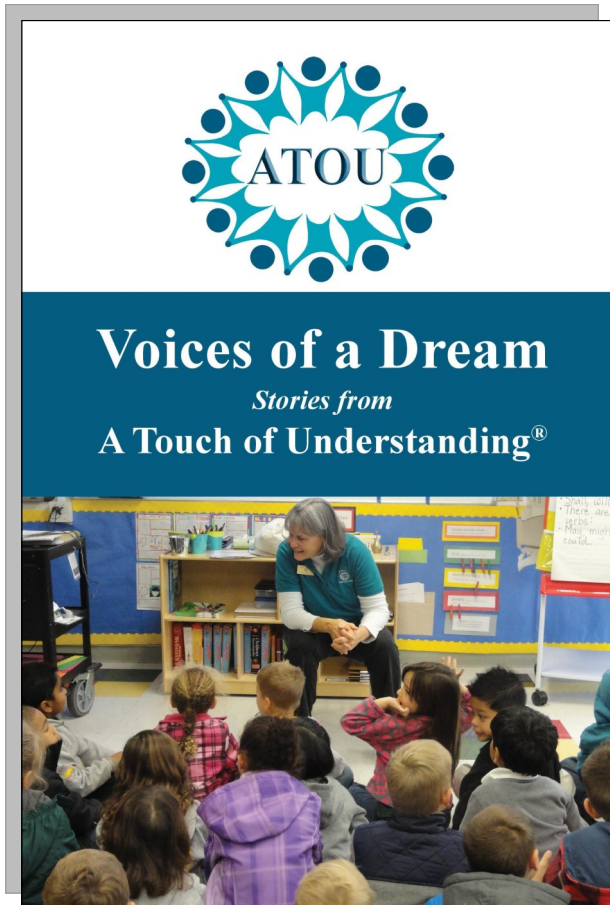
Having fun at the Youth F.O.R.C.E. Valentine Dance.



We are excited to welcome Debbie Harrell and Nolan Nguyen to our ATOU staff. Debbie is our new Development Director, and Nolan is our Youth F.O.R.C.E Coordinator. Both come with rich backgrounds, a wealth of experience, and are true assets to our ATOU Family.

Our first book, *Voices of a Dream*, has been published!

Enjoy 64 inspiring stories written by members of the ATOU Family.



Do you remember when you were a child in school? Can you picture that one student who was always teased or bullied because he or she seemed "different?" It may have been the way she walked, or the way he struggled to read. He may have had emotional outbursts. She may have used a wheelchair. There was at least one student who was teased or bullied for being different. You may have seen it happen. You may have been the one teased or bullied. Or, you may have been the bully. Everyone has been touched by this destructive cycle.

A Touch of Understanding (ATOU) works every day to help children who are the victims of teasing and bullying, along with those who witness the incidents and the children who do the teasing and bullying. *Voices of a Dream* introduces the ATOU Team members who helped one woman turn her dream into a movement to promote genuine inclusion of all children in school and community settings—a movement touching thousands of lives each year, breaking down the walls of misunderstanding and abuse, and building bridges of friendship.

Read about an aerobatic pilot who uses two myoelectric hands, a young woman with autism who stretched beyond her comfort zone and is now in film school, and a survivor of a tragic drunk driving accident who was the impetus for this book. Learn about the many people who come together to share their stories to educate and inspire a new generation to welcome those who seem "different" for any reason.

"I was one of the first students to participate in ATOU's workshops many years ago. I was a second grader at the time, and I remember being so intrigued by the workshop. It opened my eyes to things I had never thought about before. Now, many years later, I have come to appreciate ATOU even more. In fact, I have become a special education teacher..." —Stacie Ohara



Published by
A Touch of Understanding®
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Find *Voices of a Dream* on Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com

Available in paperback, Nook, and Kindle.

Remember to choose A Touch of Understanding when shopping with Amazon Smile.

You Are Cordially Invited to

the 4th Annual
Art from the Heart
A fundraiser benefiting:
A Touch of Understanding®

Friday, Feb 10, 2017 6:30 - 9:30 pm

♥ *Bring Your Valentine!* ♥

Tickets \$50 each - 2 for \$90 - \$75 at the door

Blue Goose Event Center - 3550 Taylor Rd, Loomis, CA
Tickets & Info: www.ATOUArtFromTheHeart.org, 916-791-4146

Art * Wine * Appetizers * Live Music * Auctions * Raffles

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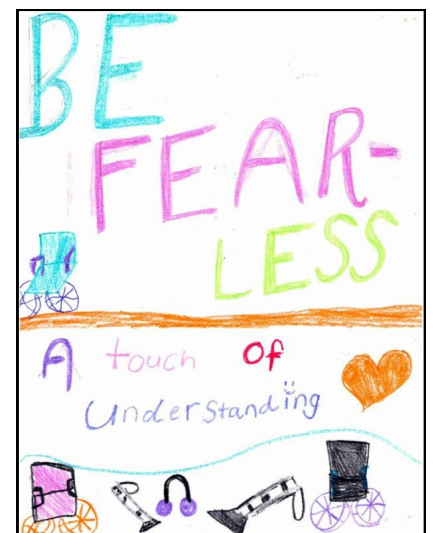
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The ATOU Legacy Circle—The Gift of a Lifetime



George Arrant is a member of the ATOU Legacy Circle. He shares his story here.

My journey to become an ATOU volunteer began long before the existence of ATOU. In 1962 at the age of 12, my sister Carol was stricken with spinal carcinoma. The ravages of this disease required radical surgery which left her debilitated; she could no longer walk.

My mother provided the nursing and nurturing care Carol needed. Carol continued her study at home and received her diploma with her graduating class of McClatchy High School. She also developed handiwork skills such as knitting, art work and

Plexiglas casting. About four years prior to her passing at the age of 28, her physical condition worsened and she could no longer use her hands.

My memories of her are of a vivacious and interesting person. My most vivid memories are of comfortable summer nights when Carol would sit outside in front of our house with her Cocker Spaniel, Blondie, talking with our neighbor about the day's events. Our two trips to Disneyland were highlights in her life as well. Her courageous spirit, her love for other persons, her concern for education, her appreciation of the good and her youthful insight into spiritual things, made me want to grow inwardly.



Carol in Disneyland, 1968

In late December of 2011, I received a phone call from a friend and ATOU volunteer, Mike Penketh, inviting me to attend an ATOU workshop. At once I knew this organization was the right fit for me.

I believe in the values and the friendships I have found through ATOU. I find joy in working alongside these volunteers who remind me of my sister's spirit. I want to do my part, with my time and my monetary ability, to help ATOU continue. I chose to include ATOU in my estate planning because I want these programs to be available for years to come.

My involvement with ATOU gives me positive memories of Carol. It is as if I have come full circle in this journey.

Please Consider Joining the ATOU Legacy Circle

A planned gift to A Touch of Understanding, Inc. will allow you to continue to make a difference in the lives of children for years to come. Please consult your financial advisor to explore how a gift to ATOU will fit into your financial and estate planning goals.

Financial Statements

Statement of Income

July 2015-June 2016

Balance Sheet

June 30, 2016

INCOME

Lynn Marie Scholarship Fund	400.
Corporate Donations	2,557.
Fundraising	38,582.
Contributions Income	65,125.
Government Grant	9,000.
Grants	86,210.
United Way Contributions	600.
Program Fees	137,274.
Interest/Dividend Income	96.
TOTAL INCOME	<u>\$339,845.</u>

EXPENSE

Youth Force Program	1,838.
Copy/Duplication/Printing	17,870.
Depreciation	191.
Dues and Subscriptions	3,470.
Equipment / Furniture	676.
Insurance	8,789.
Licenses/Filing Fees	221.
Payroll Expenses	235,956.
Postage and Delivery	524.
Professional Fees	8,262.
Rent/Utilities	15,293.
Service Charges	411.
Supplies	7,803.
Travel & Meals	13,483.
Workshops/Membership	1,900.
TOTAL EXPENSE	<u>\$316,687.</u>

NET INCOME

\$23,157.

ASSETS

Current Assets	
Total Checking/Savings	177,100.
Total Accounts Receivable	7,370.
Total Current Assets	184,470.
Total Fixed Assets	<u>3,927.</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>\$188,397</u>

LIABILITIES & EQUITY

Total Current Liabilities	<u>5,330</u>
Equity	
Unrestricted Net Assets	159,910
Net Income	<u>23,157</u>
Total Equity	<u>183,067</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	<u>\$188,397</u>