

**STATEMENT OF MR. STEVE RIACH
FOUNDER AND BOARD MEMBER
HEART OF A CHAMPION FOUNDATION**

**BEFORE A JOINT MEETING
OF THE HOUSE EDUCATION AND LABOR SUBCOMMITTEES ON
EARLY CHILDHOOD, ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
AND
HEALTHY FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES**

**STRENGTHENING SCHOOL SAFETY THROUGH PREVENTION OF
BULLYING**

July 8, 2009

Chairwoman McCarthy, Chairman Kildee, Ranking Members Platts and Castle, and distinguished members of the Committee: It is an honor for me to provide testimony to you today on our very successful character development program called "Heart of a Champion". I wish to commend each of the Members for spending your time today on the topic of strengthening school safety which is vitally important to our children and the future of our nation.

I was asked to testify today because the Heart of a Champion program is applicable to and proven to be equally successful in school environments, after-school programs, and juvenile justice settings. It has a proven record of success whose results have been independently verified and qualitatively measured. It is my view that bullying in our nation's schools can only effectively be minimized by addressing all of the underlying factors that a comprehensive character development program like Heart of a Champion identifies.

Heart of a Champion Foundation is a nonprofit organization founded in 1997 by a group of business leaders and sports team owners who shared a common concern for the nation's youth and sought to find a way to make a positive impact on their culture. As we began to conduct extensive research, it became apparent that one of the most significant areas of need was for quality, effective character development programs that would instill character and ethics into young people.

Our board and staff spent nearly four years researching and collaborating with educators from across the country, the Department of Education, and other agencies, to understand the landscape of character education in the U.S. These efforts provided us with answers to questions of efficacy regarding content, presentation and delivery of a successful character program. We came to the following five conclusions:

- 1) In terms of demographics, the greatest area of need is at the middle school and junior high level. This was confirmed by the vast majority of educators with whom we worked, as well as the three-year study conducted by the United States Secret Service in the aftermath of the rash of school shootings in the late 1990's.
- 2) Most character education programs lack the ability to engage students, particularly with this generation that we have called the "sight and sound" generation.
- 3) Most programs lack substantive content – content that would not only teach concepts, but also teach application of those concepts in a relevant way.
- 4) Most programs lack a delivery model that was consistent and deployment that was long-term.
- 5) Most programs have no mechanism to determine their efficacy.

The Under Secretary of the Department of Education at that time made it clear to us that any program which could effectively address these deficiencies had a substantial chance to be successful in actually producing behavioral change.

In 2001, following those guidelines after nearly four years in research and development, we launched the Heart of a Champion program in Plano, Texas and Brooklyn, New York, with two very diverse populations. One involved upper middle class students while the other involved underserved and predominantly minority students. The results in both cases were nearly identical in terms of attitudinal and behavioral change. The data validated that we had indeed achieved what had been asked to deliver.

Since 2001, we have deployed the program to 23 states, with similar measurable results.

What does this have to do with school safety issues? A lot, actually.

At the genesis of our program we collaborated with two Members of Congress in our home state of Texas on Safe School Summits. At each of these summits 500 secondary school students convened to discuss school safety issues. The data derived from the students amazed even the Members.

At both of these Safe School Summits, the students told us that when they go to school on a daily basis, they don't feel physically unsafe. The vast majority were not fearful of a Columbine incident, or of being accosted in the restroom. However, the vast majority did express feelings of emotional insecurity. Many felt there was no one they could trust, that they were not

accepted, of that they couldn't connect. It was clear that greater safety issues were from emotional rather than physical concerns.

When students were asked what elements would make them feel safer on campus, their answers corresponded to this revelation. When asked about security guards, hall monitors, surveillance cameras, and metal detectors 11-23% of students said each of these items would make them feel safer. Yet, when they were asked about the consistent deployment of a character program on campus, 74% of these students said this would make them feel safer.

In post-survey focus groups, students summarized issues addressed at the Safe School Summit by explaining that only by changing the heart of the student sitting beside them could you create a safe school. Thus, the impetus for us to create the Heart of a Champion character development program.

It was clear to us that students recognized that the heart of the problem was itself a heart problem. Physical safety is a byproduct of emotional safety.

Much has been said and written about social and emotional intelligence over the past few years, but based on our work over the past 8 years, we believe that this is clearly the key to safer schools. Rather than focus on symptoms, the focus of programs must be on root cause behaviors to create any substantive and enduring change. We have seen this play out from the program's inception.

Our assessments have produced empirical data which demonstrates that students who participate in the Heart of a Champion program realize significant attitudinal and behavioral change. In addition, our data also demonstrates a decrease in violent behavior, a decrease in drug and alcohol use, a decrease in referrals and in bullying incidents, and an increase in grade point averages. In addressing root cause issues and providing training in social and emotional intelligence, we are seeing proven, measureable change which we believe to be profound.

The Heart of a Champion program is a comprehensive three-year curriculum, designed for implementation throughout a student's entire middle or junior high school experience. The program is taught throughout each nine-month school year, focusing on nine different core character traits each month: Commitment, Leadership, Perseverance, Teamwork, Respect, Integrity, Responsibility, Self Control or Compassion.

Under each of these traits the curriculum highlights real people who have exemplified these attributes, and details the consequences of their actions. Rather than telling students what not to do, the Heart of a Champion program provides them with examples – or role models if you will – of those who have made good choices, and allows them to learn about, and discover first-hand, the results of such choices. The curriculum includes some

recognizable individuals from sports and entertainment industries, such as Indianapolis Colts head coach Tony Dungy and musician Bono from the band U2. Some lesser known individuals, like Louis Daniels – a homeless student who ended up receiving a scholarship to Yale – are also highlighted in the program. There are even a few members of Congress in our materials.

The men and women profiled in the program serve as models for the students and give them an ideal to shoot for and an idea of what they themselves can achieve. One of those role models has chosen to join me this morning and she is sitting right behind me. Anne Abernathy is a 6-time Olympian known fondly as “Grandma Luge” she is the only female to compete in 6 Olympics and is the oldest female Olympic competitor in the history of the Games. Her story as an overcomer has captivated many students. She has beaten cancer once and has overcome 12 knee surgeries and several broken bones. She is now in the process of overcoming cancer a second time. She has joined me this morning in support of character education and in particular Heart of a Champion as a solution to the problem of school safety. Anne, thank you for being here.

In the Heart of a Champion program, during each month, students work through a curriculum workbook focusing on one of the specific trait mentioned earlier. Each workbook contains weekly lessons delving deeply into a different aspect of that trait. With video segments, posters, online applications, critical thinking and decision-making exercises, and rewards and reinforcement elements being utilized on a weekly – and sometimes daily basis – students learn about character with the same frequency they do in any of their core subjects. With this degree of emphasis and consistency, students intuitively see that society values their depth of character as much their level of performance in the classroom.

Heart of a Champion directly trains and certifies teachers, helping them to deliver the program as a normal part of their daily classroom activities, and proving to enhance the relationships that teachers have with students. Many have said, “I feel like I am more than just a teacher now, I feel like I am making a greater impact in my students’ lives.”

The program’s impact is not only seen through such anecdotal data such as this, but also through empirical data derived through pre and post program assessments. Beyond ROI, a leader in diagnostic and measurement services with organizations across the U.S., provides complete pre and post measurements and data reports. The data demonstrates significant attitudinal and behavioral change in students participating in the program. Moreover, the program is also proven to deliver critical measurable results such as reduced referrals, reduced alcohol and drug use (as much as 40%), 92% increase in self-esteem, decreased violent behaviors including bullying, and increased grade averages – as much as 47%.

What has been so exciting for us is that we are not only seeing these results in public schools in the 23 states we now deploy the program, but also in after-school outlets such as the Boys & Girls Clubs, and in juvenile justice facilities such as Rikers Island prison in New York, a maximum security facility that houses the most violent teen offenders in New York, ages 16-18. Heart of a Champion is also deployed to the Gainesville State School in North Texas, another maximum security facility which houses the most violent teen offenders ages 13-19. In fact, Warden Edmund Duffy at Rikers Island emailed me a couple of weeks ago to tell me that the guards who oversee the unit where the Heart of a Champion program is deployed recently asked him "what have you done to these kids? They are changing."

Regardless of the population – schools, after school or juvenile justice - the program continues to produce similar results. It is changing the "hearts" of the students. As it changes the "heart", changes in attitude, behavior and performance result. We are seeing what the students of those Safe School Summits suggested – if you change the heart of the student in the desk next to me, you will create a safer environment at our school.

We have seen that this approach works to create change – change that is demonstrated, measurable and sustained. When schools deploy such an approach, they see the school culture change. The school becomes a safer and better place.

Heart of a Champion has been labeled a model program. For that we are appreciative. However, we are most grateful that it is working. We are also grateful for the partners who have provided for such results.

Because funding for education has been tight in the majority of schools and school districts we serve, and because character education funding specifically has been zeroed in this year's federal budget, we have developed a series of successful private-public partnerships to generate funding for the program. We have great corporate partners in NFL teams like the Kansas City Chiefs and the Houston Texans, whose owners (The Hunt and McNair families) are completely committed to impacting the lives of kids. Another example is Express Employment Professionals, whose owner Bob Funk shares the same passion. In other areas we have partners like Coca-Cola, energy companies, and private foundations to assure students can benefit from the program.

We even have caring individuals who have stepped in to make sure students can receive the program. Working with Major League Baseball All-Star Torii Hunter of the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim California, we created the Torii Hunter Project. Torii personally underwrites the cost of the program for every middle school student in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, where Torii grew up, as well as students in Orange County, California – where the Angels match Torii's contributions. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Las Vegas, Nevada, we have partnered with the Andre Agassi Preparatory Academy.

In all of these locations, as in a total of 23 States, we are privileged to work with schools and other locations to deploy the program and we continue to see measurable positive change. From the poorest schools of New York City, to more affluent ones in Orange County, California. From inner city Philadelphia to Grand Rapids, Michigan. From Chesapeake, Virginia to Mesa, Arizona. From San Antonio to Houston to Lubbock to Dallas. From Brooklyn to Las Vegas to Tacoma, Washington. Urban or rural, upper class or underserved, east or west, male or female, school or prison – the data demonstrates this program works to create heart change no matter the population. And when heart change occurs, a culture is transformed.

This is why Heart of a Champion exists – to change culture. It is successful because of the focus on root-cause issues rather than symptoms. Heart of a Champion has learned that if we truly wish to see results – in creating safer schools and safer kids – then we must change the heart. We are grateful to have the opportunity to see that change occur.

Again, I thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to come and share with you this morning what we have learned. I would be happy to discuss with any of the Members or your staff how the Heart of a Champion program can be used in schools and juvenile facilities in your Congressional Districts or States, or to provide advice on what actions could be taken through future legislation to make it easier for school districts and juvenile facilities to adopt effective character development programs like Heart of a Champion.

Thank you.



Educators Comments on Heart of a Champion

We are thrilled with the response from our members who are going through the Heart of a Champion program at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Dallas! It provides a consistent message that all kids need to hear as much as possible; and that is the importance of good character and personal responsibility.

Misti Potter
VP, Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Dallas

As an educator for over 45 years, I believe the Heart of a Champion Foundation has truly created a quiet revolution wherever it is given an opportunity to support young people in thinking about their lives and how they want to live out their dreams.

Pat Orlowski
Kansas City Public Schools

I've been in public education for 37 years now, and I've seen every character program available. This is the very best character program I have seen.

Marilyn Brooks
Assistant Superintendent, Plano ISD

What an awesome way to impact students in the things that matter most in life – building good citizens for our society.

Sara Bonser
Principal, Hendrick Middle School

The teachers were by the fourth or fifth week coming to me and saying, 'This is good. I like this,' and were having fun with it. They were starting to learn a lot about their kids that they would have never learned just through their normal classes.

Charles Pickitt
Principal, North Junior High

The program is very useful because of the lifelike situations that our members can use to keep them out of trouble but also empower them to be responsible citizens.

Kevin Foster
Boys and Girls Clubs of Tarrant County



Sponsor Comments on Heart of a Champion



Heart of a Champion has proven themselves to be an invaluable partner in our community program. The curriculum they provide is first rate, not only in terms of content, but also in terms of the way the materials are delivered. The professionalism of HOC has also manifested itself in the construction of collateral materials supporting our program, and in the framework they customized that enables the execution of our program. HOC is a crucial and respected partner in one of our most strategic and important initiatives.

Ben Lawson
Director of Bottler Sales and Marketing
Coca-Cola North America - Southwest Region



We consider Heart of a Champion to be our flagship program in character development. The Heart of a Champion material is perhaps the most substantive program in character education and we are proud to serve the Houston community in this manner."

Robert McNair
Chairman, Houston Texans



We consider Heart of a Champion's character education program to be a significant investment in the children of the communities we serve. HOC engages this critical generation of young people by providing valuable lessons about integrity, perseverance, commitment and teamwork. We have been honored to bring this unique and effective program to Kansas City.

Clark Hunt
Owner, Kansas City Chiefs



We believe in the ability of the Heart of a Champion Foundation to positively and powerfully impact America's youth. Together, we can develop and influence positive character traits that will enrich their future.

Robert A. Funk
Chairman & CEO, Express Employment Pros

Teamwork for Excellence



October 19, 2004

To Whom It May Concern:

Many character education programs come to me through direct mail, email, and telephone solicitations. I've reviewed more than a dozen during the past few years without finding one which truly met my expectations for a character education program for Plano ISD middle school students.

Heart of a Champion caught my attention at once with both presentation and content. After sharing the program with our district middle school principals, who shared my enthusiasm, we began using the program three years ago.

The program is well-planned and attractively packaged to appeal to both teachers and students. It is a valuable addition to our middle school instruction.

Because of the modular components, each school has been able to tailor the program to fit its scheduling and staffing. Schools use the colorful Heart of a Champion posters and other materials to keep strong character education messages in front of their students.

Working with the Heart of a Champion organization is a delight. They have taken feedback from teachers and administrators and continued to improve the content of an already strong program.

In my opinion, Heart of a Champion is the best character education program I have seen. The people associated with the program are easy to work with and responsive to our needs. They are committed to young people and to working with educators to provide a quality character education program for our children.

I'm proud that Plano ISD middle school principals have chosen to embrace and support Heart of a Champion.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Brooks,
Associate Superintendent
For Curriculum and Instruction

**Arizona**

East Valley High School (Mesa)
Chino Valley High School

Arkansas

Pine Bluff Schools
Watson Chapel School District
Dollarway Public Schools
Whitehall Public Schools

California

Miracles Program (San Diego)
Miracles Program (San Jose)
University Charter Middle School (Camarillo)
South Junior High (Anaheim)
Savannah Schools (Anaheim)

Florida

Lely High School (Naples)
Nova Middle School (Davie)
Broward County Public Schools

Georgia

Miracles Program (Atlanta)

Idaho

Midway Middle School (Rigby)

Illinois

Miracles Program (Chicago)

Kansas

Youth Leadership Foundation (Manhattan)
Central Middle School (Kansas City)
Regional Prevention Center of Kansas (Girard)

Maryland

Hope Worldwide (Baltimore)
Newport Mill Middle School (Kensington)

Michigan

CA Frost Middle School (Grand Rapids)
Grand Rapids Montessori
Martin Luther King Middle School (Grand Rapids)
Sherwood Middle School (Grand Rapids)
Southwest Community (Grand Rapids)
Alger Middle School (Grand Rapids)
Burton Middle School (Grand Rapids)
Ford Middle School (Grand Rapids)
Harrison Middle School (Grand Rapids)
Riverside Middle School (Grand Rapids)
Westwood Middle School (Grand Rapids)
West Junior High (Traverse City)
East Junior High (Traverse City)

Minnesota

Saint Paul Public Schools

Missouri

Belton High School (Belton)
Center Middle School (Kansas City)
Campbell Middle School (Lee's Summit)
Grandview Middle School
Pleasant Lea Middle School (Lee's Summit)
Summit Lakes Middle School (Lee's Summit)
Smith-Cotton High School (Sedalia)

Nevada

Andre Agassi Preparatory Academy (Las Vegas, NV)

New York

Grace Faith Church (NYC)
IS 152 (NYC)
City College Academy of the Arts (NYC)
Riker's Island (NYC)

Oklahoma

Belle Isle Middle School (OKC)
Jackson Middle School (OKC)
Jefferson Middle School (OKC)
Rogers Middle School (OKC)
Roosevelt Middle School (OKC)
Webster Middle School (OKC)
Classen Middle School (OKC)
Taft Middle School (OKC)
Douglas Middle School (OKC)
John Marshall Middle School (OKC)
Centennial High School (OKC)
Northeast Middle School (OKC)
SeeWorth Academy (OKC)
About Face Academy (OKC)
Western Heights Middle School (OKC)
Independence Charter Middle School (OKC)
Millwood Middle School (OKC)
Crutcho Middle School

Pennsylvania

Wissahickon Middle School (Ambler)

Texas

Thomas Middle School (Houston)
EO Smith Middle School (Houston)
Woodson Middle School (Houston)
Welch Middle School (Houston)
Dowling Middle School (Houston)
Cullen Middle School (Houston)
Morton Ranch Junior High (Katy)
Beckendorff Junior High (Katy)
Rescue Youth Mentoring Program (Humble)
Boys and Girls Clubs of Houston
The Briarwood School (Houston)

Wunderlich Intermediate School (Klein)
Parkview Intermediate School (Pasadena)
Tannahill Intermediate School (White Settlement)
Rockwall Independent School District
Tarrant County Juvenile Justice Program
Fossil Hill Middle School (Keller)
Lorena Alternative School
Parkhill Junior High (Richardson)
Union Bower Center for Learning (Irving)
Royse City Middle School (Texas)
Murphy Middle School (Plano)
Mabank Middle School
Miracles Program (San Antonio)
Miracles Program (Dallas)
Mansfield Select Athletics
Highland Park Middle School (Dallas)
Gainesville State School
Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Dallas
Boys and Girls Clubs of Fort Worth
Lena Pope Home (Fort Worth)
OL Slaton Middle School (Lubbock)
Dunbar Middle School (Lubbock)
Atkins Middle School (Lubbock)
Burnet Middle School (Burnet)

Virginia

Chesapeake Alternative School
Norfolk Christian (Norfolk)
Smith High School (Chesapeake)

Washington

Mcllvaigh Middle School (Tacoma)
Kopachuck Middle School (Gig Harbor)
Harbor Ridge Middle School (Gig Harbor)

