



Sam Harris, Ilana Gilovich, Lucy Rose Davidoff, Danitra Lee, Jan Nigro, Jonathan Reed, Tess Harrison, Chris Frank, Anali Fuchs, Jesse Dong

## The Many Faces of Vitamin L

**T**he Vitamin L community is a smaller version of our global community. Songs like "Some Rights in this World" and "Family Feeling" remind the audience of that in each concert. Among our new members this year, we greet families that hail from Indonesia, Egypt, France, Germany, South Africa, China, Turkey, Canada, Korea, Denmark and the United States!

At each concert we see Vitamin L chorus members in performance. Besides the chance to perform, Vitamin L offers other opportunities for youth development including leadership experience.

- *In the world of media, Vitamin L is the focus of some creative student projects: Ithaca High student Dylan Stayman, a Learning Web intern at the*

*Photosynthesis film company, is creating a new promotional piece for Vitamin L.*

- *Graphic arts students in Marisa Richards Visual Communication class at TST BOCES have worked on flyers, bookmarks and logos for Vitamin L.*
- *Vitamin L's advisory board currently includes 5 youth board members.*
- *Long-term Vitamin L chorus members have the opportunity to assist in training new chorus members each year.*

We extend a warm welcome to our twenty-eight new members and their families, and a thank you to all the youth and the many volunteers working behind the scenes to help Vitamin L!

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***Dear friends of Vitamin L, As we enter our 17th year with Vitamin L, we remain grateful for the chance to work with the youth in our chorus and to reach out to our audiences with messages of love and hope.***

***Janice Nigro - director,  
Jan Nigro - songwriter/performer***

## From an alumni...



**“Practically overnight, my onstage persona transformed from that of a terrified nine-year old with serious stage-fright and a frozen smile into that of a singing, swirling nine-year old with a lot to smile about.”**

**T**he night of my first performance as a member of the Vitamin L Chorus was also the night that our group had the largest audience that it had faced, to date. The concert was in a football stadium and had 2,000 people in attendance, all of whom were there for the opening ceremonies of the New York State Special Olympics. As a shy nine-year old, the prospect of performing before so many people terrified me and I nearly turned around and went home before the show even started. Thankfully, at the moment that our group ran onstage, waving and smiling at the crowd, Johanna Zesserson gave my hand an empathetic squeeze and Jhakeem Haltom winked at me supportively. Throughout the concert, each member of the group made some effort to acknowledge and assuage my anxiety, and in response to their kindness, my stage fright quickly dissipated. From the group’s show of support that I received onstage, I learned that, at any given moment during a Vitamin L show, the members of the group are always attending to two concurrent relationships – one with the audience, and one with each other. This was the group model that Jan and Janice inspired us to follow and this is the model that I have internalized and since aspired to replicate on college sports teams, as a teacher in high school classroom settings, and as an organizer for various political advocacy projects.

Following the performance

at the Special Olympics, a wonderful young woman from the audience, only a few years older than myself approached us with some very helpful suggestions about how to improve our use of American Sign Language during the song “Family Feeling.” Having been born deaf, this young woman was thrilled that we had interpreted one of Vitamin L’s songs using Sign and she spoke warmly and enthusiastically about the performance, a performance that she had loved even though she had not been able to hear it. This woman’s response to Vitamin L on the night of my nerve-racking debut demonstrated that Jan and Janice’s musical project had the ability to delight and involve its listeners in both a personal and an intimate way, despite the challenges of anonymous settings such as large audiences, and even physiological barriers such as hearing impairment. Vitamin L’s vibrant music powered an infectious message of camaraderie and celebration that warmed its performers and listeners alike by radiating joy. Anyone present could connect to the unabashed, pure enthusiasm of the group.

Practically overnight, my onstage persona transformed from that of a terrified nine-year old with serious stage-fright and a frozen smile into that of a singing, swirling nine-year old with a lot to smile about. It was several years before the extroverted confidence that I learned to portray onstage translated seamlessly to my offstage persona but I have no doubt that,

in the same infectious way that Vitamin L’s performance resonated with its audiences at the Special Olympics and beyond, having the opportunity to participate in Vitamin L infused me with a particular ability to embrace and convey enthusiasm in a way that has greatly enriched my experiences since.

Last June, I graduated from Harvard College and I now live in New York City. Over the course of the past year, I began developing plans to found a non-profit organization that would give teenagers the tools and templates they need to politically mobilize themselves and their peers for reforms relevant to the needs of their communities. After one particularly long meeting during which we discussed how best to publicize the project, I left the meeting humming the Vitamin L song “Every Moment.” Within half an hour, I had visualized an entire music video of organized high schoolers, all inspired by the song’s upbeat rhythm and rallying lyrics. This organization is a long way from having the attentive audience that Vitamin L enjoys, but with the benefit of the tools that I have learned, and the support that I have had from Jan, Janice and my many Vitamin L friends, I am working to make my dreams a reality.

I hope that someday the programs we are working on for a teen audience will have an influence on individual kids, and will reach kids who haven’t had the good fortune of knowing Vitamin L.

— Vanessa Fajans-Turner

## Dear Vitamin L...

**A**s a teacher, the end of August means winding down the summer, and gearing up for the kids. Since the summer of 2000, that has been a slightly different process for me. That Summer I was introduced to "Vitamin L" at a summer conference, and things have been very different in my classroom ever since.

I have always understood the power of music in the classroom, but "Vitamin L" gave me a whole new way to let music teach my students.

That year we had "Vitamin L" come to the school to perform for us. The music teacher taught some of the music to our students ahead of time, and, since I loved the music, I learned the songs, also. That is when the magic started to happen in my classroom.

It started with the song "WALK A MILE IN MY SHOES". That song teaches a powerful lesson about the way we treat others. The kids liked the song, and as they continued to sing it, the words started to sink into their brains. One day, as we were walking in the hall to go to lunch, I started to see some negative behavior coming from the front of the line. I normally would have gone to the front and had a conversation with the students about their behavior. Instead, I just started humming the tune to "WALK A MILE IN MY SHOES". Those students around me started to do the same thing, and soon the entire class was humming the song and the negative behavior stopped. I didn't have to say a word. The tune made them think of the words, and the words made them think of the behaviors they were displaying, and the behaviors stopped.

What a powerful tool I had just found to use in my classroom. I have used it ever since, along with other Vitamin L songs such as "IT WAS A MISTAKE", "SOME RIGHTS IN THIS WORLD" and "MAYBE WE CAN DO THE SAME", to name just a few.

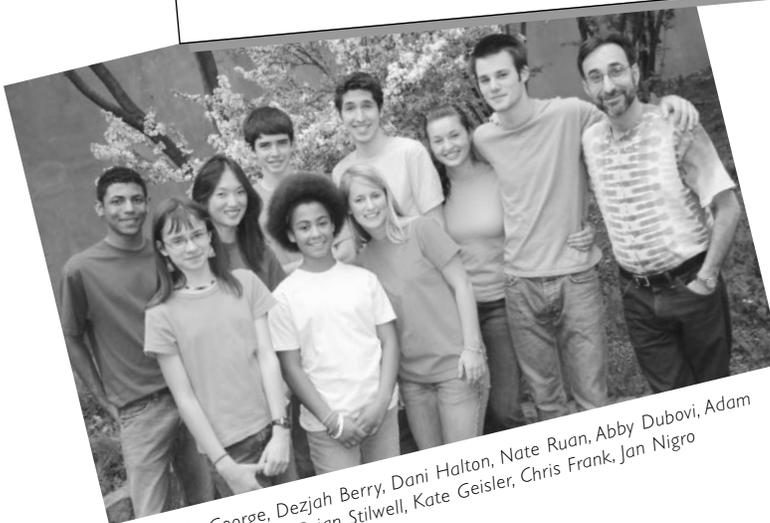
Something from "Vitamin L" is playing every morning as the students enter the classroom. It sets the tone for the day.

Thanks, "Vitamin L". Keep up the good work. Spread your message wherever you can.

Sincerely,  
Sharon Schied, 4th Grade Teacher, Bath, NY



Something from "Vitamin L" is playing every morning as the students enter the classroom. It sets the tone for the day.



Beale St. George, Dezhah Berry, Dani Halton, Nate Ruan, Abby Dubovi, Adam Beckwith, Brian Stilwell, Kate Geisler, Chris Frank, Jan Nigro



Ava Sullivan, Tim Fuchs, Gabe Mendola, Kalila Booker-Cassano, Jan Nigro, Nate Ruan, Cassie Burkhauser, Brandon Ellis, Nikki Page, Tess Harrison

## From a Vitamin L member...



**“Speak to a child after the show. Ask them what they learned. You’d be surprised what sorts of inspiring answers can come even from the youngest child in the room.”**

I began singing with Vitamin L seven years ago. I think about these last seven years—so many changes in the world, new wars, new leaders, new technology—and yet the need for Vitamin L has always been constant.

Now a Senior at Cornell University, my role in the group has changed. I’m not just a 13 year-old kid singing to other kids. I’m a leader. As part of my scholarship program, I do paid administrative work for Vitamin L, help train new members, and work on fundraising efforts. As the need for Vitamin L in this society has remained constant, Vitamin L has also remained one of the constant, positive aspects of my own life.

My friends used to think I was just singing catchy songs to little kids. I guess with age comes a little more insight, because now my friends all nod their heads and say “yeah, we really need things like that in this day and age.” They understand the wonderful messages these kids are getting about topics as complicated as diversity, empathy, and acceptance, or as simple as making mistakes or meeting new friends.

While my peers all agree that what we “Vitamins” try to do is truly amazing, I think it’s hard for someone who isn’t part of the group to

understand what kind of difference we make, one child at a time. We cannot prevent every war, but we can certainly teach about peace. We cannot stop every prejudice, but we can teach about tolerance. My friends tease me that they get Vitamin L songs stuck in their head. I laugh and say “great!” because I know it means these same songs are stuck in the heads of a lot of little children. They hear these lyrics over and over and the messages become a part of their daily routine in a way in which no other medium could succeed.

I could keep going on about why I love Vitamin L, the amazing friends I’ve made within the group over these past seven years, and individual experiences I’ve had, but I don’t have the space here to do it and I have a much better idea. If you are a member of Vitamin L, you already know what it’s like. But if you are a parent or donor or other type of supporter, the best way for you to understand what we’re doing is to come see a concert when we come to a town near you. Parents especially will notice almost immediately how great the experience is for their child, smiling and singing their heart out on that stage. But it may not be as natural for that parent to look further.

Look into the eyes of the children in the audience. Watch their faces at the beginning. See how enlivened they are by the end. Speak to a child after the show. Ask them what they learned. You’d be surprised what sorts of inspiring answers can come even from the youngest child in the room. It’s that part of the Vitamin L project that I think some adults never get a chance to experience the way we do. These kids come up to us after the show as if we’re both their favorite pop star and their best friend. They tell us stories that relate to the songs, and what the concert means to them. It’s the best high we could ask for.

I love the fact that my peers don’t look at Vitamin L as just a bunch of catchy songs anymore. We can and do make a difference with this project. So I guess what I’m asking is for you parents and other adults out there reading this to stop just thinking how proud you are of us kids and the Nigro family for trying to make a positive impact on the youth of tomorrow. We ARE making that impact. Come “Walk a Mile in our shoes,” by seeing a concert and feeling the energy, too. Come be a part of the action!

— *Melissa Bergman*

### *The Gratitude Report*

In the last six months The Vitamin L project gratefully received numerous individual donations, and a \$5,000 grant from a foundation that wishes to remain anonymous, a \$10,000 grant from The John Ben Snow Memorial Trust for performance subsidies for public schools, and a \$1,500 grant from Target Stores.

**A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR SUPPORTERS AND VOLUNTEERS!**

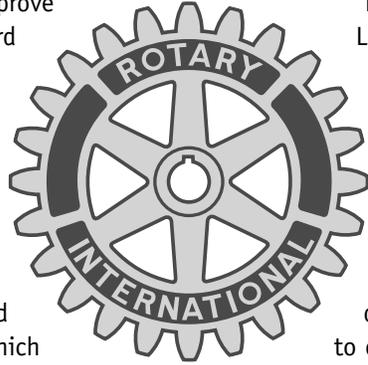
# Vitamin L Members Attend Leadership Conference

**A**t the beginning of the summer, three of us from Vitamin L, Nikki Page, Lauren Meador, and "yours truly" were picked by our schools and local Rotary Clubs to attend the 23rd annual Rotary Youth Leaders Conference at Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York. The purpose of this event was to enhance and improve our leadership skills. We heard motivational speakers and participated in a lot of activities including a self directed choir that used the leadership and musical skills of Nikki and Lauren. Most importantly, we got to know so many new people and make so many new friends, which alone, made it worth our while.

The speech I most enjoyed was about school violence, delivered by Gary Kuch, in which he gave a reenactment of a student expressing signs of violence and despair. He sent shivers up my spine when he acted as a detrimental kid, cussing at the top of his lungs and stating ideas of homicide, and even suicide. The greatest part of this whole thing was that we got to ask Gary, as the kid, questions on this topic. He answered as the kid would have and at the end he left with a quote stating: "You never have no effect upon a person."

This idea is so important in Vitamin L and should be more important throughout the world. It applies to the way we convey our-

selves. We, being performers who perform for youth, have to set a positive example for them because they look up to us. So it's extremely important that we portray positive demeanors throughout our performances and even elsewhere, because you never know who knows you.



Throughout the week Nikki, Lauren, and I grew tremendously as individuals and as leaders. It was a memorable experience.

In some ways I broke the boundary of my comfort zones, mainly in our small groups, during which we talked about issues that we've dealt with. I really had a chance to open up and express my ideas

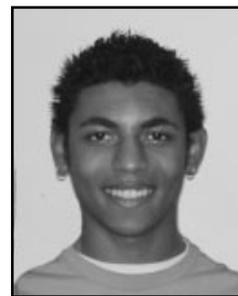
with a great variety of kids and understand that some of them were going through the exact same thing that I was. In conclusion, I gained a better understanding of who I was and became more confident to express my ideas among the many.

- Nate Ruan

**"I really had a chance to open up and express my ideas with a great variety of kids and understand that some of them were going through the exact same thing that I was."**



Lauren Meador



Nate Ruan



Nikki Page

## In 2004, Vitamin L :

- performed 49 concerts
- reached 12,000 youth and 4,000 adults in concerts
- performed at 26 schools, 1 education conference, community events, festivals, and camps
- visited numerous classrooms
- gave leadership and performing opportunities to our 70 chorus members

**Please support our unique outreach, service, and leadership work by making a tax-deductible donation to:**

**"THE VITAMIN L PROJECT," • 105 KING ST., ITHACA, NY 14850 • THANK YOU!**



*Ilana Gilovich, Lucy Rose Davidoff, Jan Nigro, Danitra Lee, Jesse Dong, Jonathan Reed, Tess Harrison, Chris Frank, Anali Fuchs, Sam Harris*

### **Mission Statement**

The purpose of the Vitamin L project is to encourage positive character development through music, by uplifting and inspiring young people with lessons that are meaningful in their daily lives. Our goal is that young listeners absorb the lessons of confidence, kindness, persistence, cooperation and forgiveness presented in the songs, and weave those concepts into the fabric of their character in ways that help them make positive choices and have healthy relationships with their families, friends and the world around them. Our goal is to reach and positively influence as many children as possible.

CRESP

## **The Vitamin L Project**

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**"The Vitamin L Chorus is terrific.  
The hit of the show. I hope it won't be long  
before the whole country hears and sees them."  
— Pete Seeger**

**We're on the Web!  
[www.vitaminL.org](http://www.vitaminL.org)**

The Vitamin L Project is an official non-profit project of CRESP (Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy) at Cornell University.