

## From Bystanders to Upstanders

Bystander behavior is a complicated subject. We learn from current media reports and from history about situations in which bystanders stood passive and silent while witnessing injustice, abuse, or bullying. The new Vitamin L song by Jan Nigro, "Step Up! Speak Out!" addresses this important topic. The song encourages us to care enough to take action when we witness something happening that we know is wrong.

Many universities have programming in place to teach their students about bystander behavior and to encourage them to be proactive in helping others. Vitamin L is working to instill this upstander ideal much earlier, in elementary school, and through this song, influence children to have the courage and awareness to do their part in creating a safe and caring community.

In response to the abuse that occurred at Penn State, President Obama said "You can't just rely on bureaucracy and systems in these kinds of situations. People have to step forward; they have to be tapping into their core decency... All of us have to step up. We don't leave it to somebody else to take responsibility."

Last summer in Steubenville, Ohio, two high school football players

assaulted a teenage girl. Other teens not only stood by and let it happen, but also took photos and footage of the abuse, some of which was later posted on Facebook and other social media. There are too many examples like this in our current world and in our global history. It may be close to home; someone dear to you may have suffered with bystanders looking on.

Educator Alan D. Berkowitz, Ph.D. wrote: "The role that bystanders can play in addressing health and social justice issues is receiving increasing attention. Bystanders have the potential to intervene to prevent violence against women, hazing, when observing prejudicial remarks and behavior, and when individuals engage in behaviors damaging to personal health and well being. Bystander intervention approaches encourage us to trust the voice within that senses when a wrong is being committed and to overcome the barriers that keep us from acting on our concern."

These 3 thought-provoking quotes from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speak eloquently on the concept of bystander/upstander behavior:

"He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against

it is really cooperating with it."

"Never, never be afraid to do what's right, especially if the well-being of a person or animal is at stake. Society's punishments are small compared to the wounds we inflict on our soul when we look the other way."

"The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But...the good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'"

Thankfully, there are many dedicated organizations and individuals working on efforts to create a culture of upstanders. The "Step Up! Speak Out!" Vitamin L song is our contribution to these efforts. We hope to produce a music video of the song. In the meantime, we have been thrilled to go to schools for Vitamin L concerts and experience hundreds of children singing along to this song.

"Step Up! Speak Out!" is available in download form on CD Baby or iTunes, or on the "Sing for Dr. King! Vitamin L Songs for a Beloved Community" CD, available at [www.vitaminL.org](http://www.vitaminL.org). The song lyrics are on the website.

- Janice Nigro, Director, The Vitamin L Project



"Dear Vitamin L,  
Thank you for sharing your  
knowledge of fairness.  
Your songs teach me a lot  
in an awesome way."  
-From Rachel Galet, 5th grade  
Tioga Hills Elementary,  
Apalachin, NY



"The message  
that Vitamin L sends  
regarding character  
education and about  
appreciating diversity and simply  
enjoying being yourself and  
celebrating each other  
is amazing."  
-Lori Andreine,  
Cohen Elementary,  
Elmira Heights, NY



## From an alumnus...



**"Vitamin L provided some of the most positive, dynamic, and formative experiences of my childhood and adolescence."**

This winter break, I wanted to be in a Vitamin L concert with my brother, Luke. He is a senior at Ithaca High and I am a junior at Harvard University. When I found out that Luke was scheduled for a concert during my stay in Ithaca, I quickly contacted Janice and asked her if I could join the crew headed to the B.O.C.E.S. School in Binghamton. Janice was, of course, thrilled by my call and, before you could utter the words "Walk a Mile," I was in the show!

I then told my mother about the concert and she immediately verified that she could make it on January 17th. After all, it was a rare treat that her two boys were going to be in a Vitamin L concert together. I didn't even need to ask her if she wanted to drive.

I knew that my mother would be overjoyed to wake up early with Luke and I and to make us delicious egg-and-cheese sandwiches with a hearty squirting of ketchup. After wrapping them in tinfoil, she tossed them to us as we crammed out the door.

During my seven years as a Vitamin L member, I worked hard to keep it a priority in my life despite my commitments to schoolwork, and to playing hockey, lacrosse, and the trumpet. I remember that at a couple of points when I was growing up, my father suggested that I stop "doing" Vitamin L in order to lighten my load. I knew that I would never quit Vitamin L, but I always humored him with a conversation. Every time, my father ended up feeling foolish for even suggesting that I stop such an incredible form of community service.

I made it a priority to consistently participate in concerts. After each one, I felt that Vitamin L was, without a doubt, the most meaningful, rewarding, and fun part my life. Vitamin L is so meaningful because it is volunteer work. It takes dedication, goodwill, and effort to go to rehearsal on Saturday morning or to participate in the Crop Walk or to miss school for a concert; I felt proud of the time I dedicated to Vitamin L. It was especially rewarding because I got to

make a difference with my peers at such a young age. Perhaps the most fun aspect of Vitamin L was getting to act like a rock star. The fact that Vitamin L concerts generate such enthusiasm will never cease to be heartwarming.

The older I got, the more I learned how Vitamin L contributed to the person I am today. Time and time again, I chose to discuss the Vitamin L Project's message and what it means to me in interviews, college applications, job applications, resumes, and cover letters. In fact, reflecting on my experiences as a Vitamin L member and describing the Vitamin L Project to potential employers has really made me appreciate the Vitamin L project and the impact it has had and continues to have on my life. Reflecting has inspired me to become a more active alumnus and to rekindle my involvement in the Vitamin L Project.

Vitamin L provided some of the most positive, dynamic, and formative experiences of my childhood and adolescence. I feel extremely lucky to have a long history with the Vitamin L Project that began at such a young age. And, yes, all of the Vitamin L CDs are still in the family van.

*-Gabe Mendola,  
Junior, Harvard University*



**Gabe Mendola at a Harvard Lacrosse Game**

### THE GRATITUDE REPORT

In the last six months The Vitamin L Project has been very grateful to receive contributions from numerous individuals and groups, including the Park Foundation, The John Ben Snow Memorial Trust, The Triad Foundation, The Middlecott Foundation, The Butler Family Foundation, and the Vector Magnetics Fund of the Community Foundation of Tompkins County.

The Savage Club of Ithaca, Audrey Edelmann Realty USA, Alternatives Federal Credit Union, Karen Eldredge, Licensed Associate Real Estate Broker and several individuals contributed to a matching grant opportunity from The John Ben Snow Memorial Trust that raised funds to provide partial scholarships for Vitamin L concerts at financially challenged schools.

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

**Please support our unique outreach, service, and leadership work by making a tax-deductible donation online at [vitaminL.org](http://vitaminL.org) or to:  
The Vitamin L Project  
105 King St. Ithaca, NY 14850  
Thank You!**



## From Audience Member to Music Teacher



When I was a student at Dryden Elementary School, we were visited by Vitamin L. In the weeks leading up to the visit, I remember that we worked very hard in our music classes to learn the songs so we could sing along. There was quite a bit of excitement building throughout our school. When the day arrived, we filled up the gym for the performance. It was great! I still remember the way it sounded when everyone

in the school joined in to sing my favorite song, "Walk a Mile." I was always a musical kid, and seeing the kids in the group singing and performing made me want to do the same thing!

Fast-forward many years to today, and I am now a music teacher at the very same school in Dryden. I knew when I started teaching that I wanted to bring fun and educational performances to my school. In February of this year, with the support of the Dryden Youth Opportunity Fund, I was able to invite Vitamin L to come back to Dryden to share their music and message with us.

The visit coincided with our Character Education theme of compassion for the month of February. Throughout the month, students strove to show compassion to their schoolmates and community members through small and large acts alike, from helping a classmate carry a heavy backpack to collecting almost 1,000 canned goods to donate to the local food pantry. The Vitamin L songs fit right in with our theme, and helped us in our exploration of being compassionate, thoughtful human beings. In particular, the students focused on the messages in "Walk a Mile" and "Family Feeling."

In "Walk a Mile," the students discussed what it means to put yourself in someone else's shoes. While learning "Family Feeling" the students decided that treating each other like members of our family will make our school a better place to learn and have fun!

On the day of our concert, I again felt the excitement coursing through the school. This time, I was the teacher, watching as my students sang together on "Walk a Mile." There were many smiles to go along with the singing and dancing. The students shared many feelings about the music during the concert. One student even told a teacher how happy he feels when listening to Vitamin L, whereas many days he struggles with his emotions of anger and sadness. He felt joy just closing his eyes and being happy for the moment listening, instead of worrying about his problems. My hope is that each of those students brought home a little of the concert experience, whether it's stopping to think about what another person is feeling before speaking, or being inspired to take part in a musical activity like I was all those years ago.

- Kelly Weaver,  
music teacher, Dryden Elementary



At the 2/18/13 CD Release Concert for "Sing for Dr. King! Vitamin L Songs for a Beloved Community"





From left: Rachel Mitchell, Kyra Umrigler, Jewell Payne, Ben Earles, Geoff Peterson, Lisa Podulka, Adrian Bauchner, Jan Nigro, Ashley Vann, Emma Eldredge



**“Sing for Dr. King! Vitamin L Songs for a Beloved Community”** received a Parents’ Choice Recommended Award from the national Parents’ Choice Foundation.

**Vitamin L  
Ithaca Festival Concert  
Saturday June 1st  
3:00 - 3:45  
at Dewitt Park.**

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**The Vitamin L Project**  
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**Inspiring children since 1989!**

**for concert schedule  
and more info:  
[www.vitaminL.org](http://www.vitaminL.org)**

The Vitamin L Project is a Project of The Center for Transformative Action in Ithaca, New York