

How do you measure integrity?

We must all work together to make our communities stronger and build character. Alan Heisterkamp, from Sioux City, serves as an education consultant and researcher with the Waitt Institute for Violence Prevention. He focuses on understanding attitudes and behaviors of students in order to prevent violence and bullying. Here are some of his thoughts...

What we think and believe about those who are different from ourselves, how we act and behave towards others in times of triumph or defeat, and what we say or do to lift up or tear down others, speaks directly about the quality of our character and the measure of our integrity.

I support the mission and focus of Character Counts In Iowa because I believe in the importance of investing in the moral and ethical development of Iowa's youth and citizenry. Individuals, young and old alike, are constantly faced with the challenge of practicing and exercising good judgment, positive expressions and words of kindness, acts of fairness, responsible citizenship, and respect for all. Yet, we recognize the undeniable truth that we are all capable of falling short in reaching and maintaining these expectations with peers, family members, strangers, and co-workers.

While none of us are "finished products" and remain vulnerable to committing mistakes along the way, we all have the responsibility of working together to make relationships, families, schools, and communities safe, healthy, and respectful. CHARACTER COUNTS! reminds all of us that living up to the expectations as defined by the Six Pillars of Character is a choice we make – everyday, with everyone, in every situation.

How's your New Year's resolution going?

We're willing to bet no matter what your resolution was, your success will depend on your character.

Good character is taking a bigger role in athletics

Good character in athletics is fairly common, as Lisa Brinkmeyer has begun to notice. Is this because of heavier implementation of character development in schools?

Being on staff with the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union, I have the privilege to attend state tournaments year-round. We start with the State Cross Country Meet at the end of October and continue through July at the State Softball Tourney. It is encouraging and refreshing to watch good sportsmanship happen on the playing fields, tracks, courts, courses, pools and bowling alleys. It is apparent students are benefiting from the character education they have received. Rarely does a game go by without a member from one team helping up a team member from another. Also, it is not uncommon to see a state participant telling their opponent "nice shot" or "great race." Reflecting back on my playing days, there was no higher compliment than those that came from an opponent. To see it happening time and time again is extremely encouraging.

High school is not where the learning should begin or end. The Six Pillars of Character can be a great lesson on character education or at least a reminder for all ages. I think young people involved in the learning process can pass along valuable information to their parents and fans. Believe it or not, the loudest “grumbling” we hear at our state events comes from the stands, not the court or field. Even my 2-year old son is exposed to character education at his daycare. The Pillars are displayed at the entrance of our daycare, highlighting six students’ pictures and a brief write-up honoring each child’s behavior. There is no doubt the Pillars have made me more attentive to my actions by being exposed to character education through my son and my occupation.

Similarly to many young people in Iowa, the foundation of character education was instilled in my upbringing by my parents and the small community where I grew up, Hubbard, IA. Being related to a third of the town provided many watchful eyes that kept me accountable for my actions, which continuously built on my character as well. We are fortunate to have a program available like CHARACTER COUNTS! to compliment the guidance we receive from family, teachers and community members.

The CHARACTER COUNTS! program is crucial for educating young people with the skills essential to becoming well-rounded and respectful individuals. After all, it teaches the importance of the Six Pillars: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship. It is comforting to know that the Six Pillars are helping thousands of young people become *pillars* of their communities.

Campaigns with character

Let's look at a few scenarios that get people talking about character during the election process. Maybe they have even happen to you.

Bringing warmth in New Hampton

What are simple ways to implement the Six Pillars of Character? Linda Kennedy, principal at New Hampton Elementary, shares how much her community values character in everyday life and what her school is doing to show that.

When something goes terribly wrong, people in this community often say,

"We are a CHARACTER COUNTS! community. This should not be happening here."

A community needs laws and rules by which citizens can live and thrive. A community needs a framework such as the Six Pillars of Character to help young people develop civic values that are important in not just living, but thriving. This framework can also have amazing effects on adults as well.

I believe that many people in our community value good character and thus, are more likely to be happy and fulfilled. I believe a person of good character delights in the good and therefore, finds happiness in doing the good. However, the person of bad character delights in the bad and probably finds happiness in doing the bad. So perhaps we could say that the

person of character is more likely to bring happiness to others in seeking fulfillment for their own lives. The person without good character is less likely to bring happiness to others in seeking fulfillment for their own lives. They are less likely to be significant to others.

CHARACTER COUNTS! in New Hampton has offered our young people a clear set of values that tell our kids what is worthy of value. In order to preach this to our young, we have to practice it. And that is what makes New Hampton a great place to live.

During December of 2011, our New Hampton Elementary students focused on the caring pillar and participated in a service project. The seventeen K – 4 classrooms made 34 fleece blankets and delivered them to personnel at Mercy Hospital along with many get-well cards. These blankets and cards will be distributed to patients at the hospital in need of a little extra comfort a soft and warm fleece blanket might afford throughout 2012. That project is only one of many that happen on a daily basis in New Hampton where character does count!