

## Acadia Hospital in the Community

**Challenge Day:** Acadia Hospital has been underwriting and coordinating Challenge Days for participating Maine high schools for nearly 15 years as part of our youth wellness focus. We have helped bring this special program to thousands of Maine high school students during this time, with schools such as Mt. Ararat (Topsham), Biddeford, Hampden, Hermon, Old Town, Stearns (Millinocket), and Searsport participating at some point over the years. This past year we helped bring Challenge Days to Mt. Ararat in Topsham on December 8 and 9, Hermon High School on December 10 and Stearns High School on December 11.



Following is a sample of the feedback received from participating students over the past few years:

*How have your perceptions/actions/attitudes changed? What specifically have you done differently?*

- I have started to look inside at people instead of looking at their appearance. I have given lots of hugs and I have been taking advantage of the time I have with the people around me. Challenge Day definitely gave me a different outlook on life and a different

outlook on others, whether it be my friends or those who I've never talked to. I've tried to get to know people who I've overlooked before, and not judge anyone by their appearance. Challenge Day has made me defend people when they're being made fun of or judged because I know that they are as equally beautiful as everyone else. I hope everyone else that attended the Day was impacted as much as I was.

- Challenge Day was awesome. I learned a lot. I learned that other people are going through the same things that I am when I thought I was the only one that was going through it. You shouldn't judge people by what they look like, the clothes they wear, the color of their skin, etc. because that's just their appearance.
- Challenge Day had a lasting effect on me. It was awesome. It helped me to look past people's labels and see them for who they are. I hugged people that I never thought I would. I stand up for things I see wrong.
- The day has taught me that I am not alone, and that I don't have to go home every day not knowing where to turn. I have made friends that I did not know even existed and I feel that I know can share what's inside of me. In some ways it has saved my life.

**High school teachers involved in the day had the following comments:**

- "It is so inspiring to see so many students taking responsibility for themselves and caring about each other. Our school has seen many mini miracles happen every year that we host the day, and we have embedded the day as part of our culture. It has become our sophomore "rite of passage" and we will continue throughout the year with activities that solidify the lessons of the day. Students and staff truly want to make our school an environment of acceptance, love and support. We feel we are well on our way!"
- "Once again, Challenge Day provided students at Hermon High School an opportunity to realize that essentially everyone is the same and even though many people go through difficulties in life, there is hope for the future that someone will be there to lend support and encouragement."