

My name is Linda Hibbs. I am the parent of three Huron and Clague students, and I am also a Clague staff member. I am here today to advocate for the Challenge Day program and urge you to back the efforts of the many Ann Arbor middle and high schools that are bringing Challenge Day workshops and follow up activities to their campuses throughout this year.

To demonstrate first hand the powerful potential Challenge Day events have to encourage people to open up and connect with each other, I will share a short activity called “If You Really Knew Me...” that is done during each Challenge Day workshop. It goes something like this:

If you really knew me, you would know that ever since I was in elementary school I have been terrified of speaking in front of large groups of people.

If you really knew me, you would know that when I get nervous I get a blotchy rash all over my chest, neck and face, I sweat profusely, my body shakes, my voice cracks, and if I get upset tears often well up in my eyes and roll down my cheeks before I am able to push them back. I was teased about this extensively during my elementary, middle, and high school years and was labeled a “cry baby”. I desperately wanted to hide from this debilitating title, but I couldn’t because I was so transparent. I hated not having a mask to put on to cover up my feelings like everyone else did.

If you really knew me, you would know that it’s a real stretch for me to be standing up here right now speaking into this microphone, but I’m challenging myself to work through my fear because I care so deeply about the future of each and every child in this school district.

If you really knew me, you would know that after participating in two Challenge Day events at Huron High school I was completely blown away by the potential this program has to change lives. Last weekend I attended an intensive three day workshop at the Challenge Day center in California, taught by its co-founders Rich and Yvonne St. John-Dutra. Rich and Yvonne are incredibly gifted leaders who teach love and acceptance with every fiber of their being. They are completely genuine, absolutely the real thing.

If you really knew me, you would know that in the presence of Rich and Yvonne and the amazing passion they bring to their life’s work, for the first time in my life I was inspired to believe that world peace is truly a possibility!

The Challenge Day program will be featured on the Oprah Winfrey show tomorrow, Thursday November 9, at 4 pm. I strongly encourage you to watch this program and see for yourself what Challenge Day is all about. I also urge you to clear your schedules on December 11 and come to Huron High School’s next Challenge Day workshop to authentically share the love that’s in your hearts and encourage our students to do the same. Working together, we really can make a difference in our community!

Thank you.

Text from the Next Step Community Workshop handbook, pp. 4-6:

“Challenge Day programs are designed to help stop the violence and alienation that is such a deeply ingrained part of the school experience for millions of young people every day. People of all ages, races, creeds and cultures come together in hopes of making positive changes in young lives. Challenge Day programs tear down the walls of separation and inspire participants to live, study and work in an environment of forgiveness, acceptance and compassion.

These experiential programs are heart opening, educational, transformational, and fun, and demonstrate the power of acceptance and love. By promoting self-acceptance and respect for others, our programs help to ignite participants’ individual passions and inspire them to take their position as positive leaders of change. Our primary goal is to instill a promise of hope and possibility for young people, families, organizations and communities all over the world...

Challenge Day, a one-day workshop for high school or middle school age youth, teachers, parents, administrators, counselors and community members, successfully addresses the issues of violence, racism, teasing, stereotypes, tobacco, drugs and alcohol within the context of teen life. Through a series of games, activities and group discussions, Challenge Day breaks down the barriers that separate us as human beings, allowing young people to open their hearts and learn to trust, love, and support each other in becoming the natural leaders they are born to be. Throughout the nation, communities have witnessed dramatic and positive changes in schools and families as a result of Challenge Days and have committed to stopping the violence, abuse, alienation and isolation that so profoundly affect the youth of our world.”