

# Notre Dame Academy spreads kindness with video

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Staff Reporter

There is something going around at South Buffalo's Notre Dame Academy – and the students are spreading it. Kindness is contagious and the student council wants everyone to catch it.

The four-member student council attended a Champions for Change conference presented by Character Council WNY earlier this year where they saw a video demonstrating a chain reaction of good deeds started by a small random act of kindness. The student council then decided to bring that message to their elementary school by creating their own video through the school's Our Lady Media production team.

“During the conference we learned different ways to spread kindness throughout our school, not just by doing one thing or the other, but by a bunch of different ways,” explained Jenna, student council vice president. “They taught us how to be better in our own communities and how to spread

that message. Next year we want the next group of kids to go to that conference, so that it can keep going throughout our school.”

Our Lady Media started last year when former television producer Paula DeAngelis-Stein was hired as advancement director. Using a couple seventh-graders as a camera crew and DeAngelis-Stein as an editor, the student council made a two-minute video that shows how one small act of kindness can spread, from helping someone in need, to consoling the bereaved, to tending to the injured.

“In the (Character Council) video, we saw a chain link of kindness, but it was taken place outside of the school,” said Jenna. “We wanted to take that and do it inside of the school, in a bunch of different ways to show that kindness isn't just picking up someone's books. Kindness is being there for one another, helping each other when you're not having a great day. So, we wanted to take the same message but make it into our own NDA school thing.”

Madelyn, president of the student council, hopes that once the message spreads through the school, it will find

a wider audience.

“With the chain reaction, we're



DAN CAPPELLAZZO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Motivational speaker Julia Harris delivers her message “License 2 Smile,” to Notre Dame students during an assembly in the chapel. Harris, who suffered a brain injury at a young age retrained herself to walk and talk, now delivers the power message of positive thinking.

hoping that when you bring the kindness to the community, then those people bring it out to other communities. Over time it spreads all over the place,” she said.

The video, which is available on Notre Dame's Facebook page and YouTube channel, was produced and directed by the student council, and shot by seventh-graders Taylor and Kenny, who had shot the graduation Mass last spring. They were all pleased with what they saw as the final product.

“It turned out really good,” said Brogan, student council secretary.

“(Taylor and Kenny) are what, 12, 13? And they're doing it almost professionally. I don't recall a time when there was a problem with the cameras,” said Riley, student council treasurer.

The video debuted at a Kindness Assembly at the school on Nov. 26, where the students met motivational speaker Julia Harris.



DAN CAPPELLAZZO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Students at Notre Dame Academy focus on motivational speaker Julia Harris and her inspirational story.

At the age of 9, Harris suffered a brain injury which left her with significant physical and cognitive

disabilities. She had to relearn the simple tasks of how to eat, talk and walk again. For the past 18 years,

she has gone to therapy each day with a smile. Her contagious smile reflects her positive attitude, courage and persistent determination. She encouraged all the students at Notre Dame Academy to start off every day with a positive attitude and a smile.

“As you can see, I'm just a little different from most of you,” Harris told the kids while seated in her wheelchair “I am different, but we are all different. Which makes us all special.”

She outlined the four keys to earning a license to smile – believe in yourself, be positive, have hope, and persevere.

“We can make the world a better place for ourselves and others if we can all learn to smile more,” she said.

The kids at Notre Dame Academy followed up the assembly with #NDAKindnessChallenge, a Facebook challenge held over Thanksgiving weekend that encouraged people to perform a new act of kindness for another person.