



Actively Caring: A Youth Program of the Cor Foundation



In the aftermath of the April 16th, 2007 Virginia Tech (VT) campus shootings, we initiated the *Actively Caring* movement to recognize people for being kind. We passed out 2,000 green "Actively Caring" wristbands to people for their compassion.

Since then, we have had one goal – transform this simple idea of recognizing kindness into a research-based *Actively Caring* program for students at school.

In 2009, we developed a program for elementary students using the same green wristbands that we passed out on the VT campus to inspire students to observe kind actions and share stories with their peers and teachers (McCarty, McCutchen, Teie & Geller, 2016). In 2011, we developed a middle school curriculum, which was taught by 35+ undergraduate students as part of a research-based, service-learning course (McCarty, Danna & Brusseau, 2015). From 2012 to 2014, we developed partnerships with community-based organizations to provide school-based programming for middle and high schools in Northern Virginia, New Orleans, Cleveland, and Columbus. Most notably, we provided continuous trauma-informed prosocial leadership to Chardon High School in the aftermath of their 2012 school shooting (Teie, McCarty & Cea, 2013). In 2015, we started a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, the Cor Foundation, to empower youth to create positive, compassionate cultures.



School Climate Goals

Is your school struggling because of aggression and bullying, drug abuse, mental health issues, or a lack a sense of connection? Schools use clubs (e.g., Student Council, Friends of Rachel, anti-bullying) and classes (e.g., leadership, marketing) to empower students to address school problems. But, most clubs and classes lack a research-based curricula for students to develop developmental competencies.

Program Goals

The *Actively Caring* program empowers students to solve school climate problems by reducing risk factors and building assets among peers at school. For students to effectively support others, they need a curriculum to build: 1) prosocial, 2) cultural, and 3) leadership competencies.



PROSOCIAL

Developing prosocial competence requires a shift from self-centric to other-centric thinking and acting



CULTURAL

Developing cultural humility requires people to move from cultural awareness to advocacy of multi-cultural practice



LEADERSHIP

Developing leadership competence requires people to move from destructive to constructive-prosocial leadership styles



Starting the Program

Throughout a decade of collaboration with schools in OH, CT, LA, and VA, our team has learned an important lesson – every school is unique. Thus, the program is customized to fit each school’s capacity and climate goals. An effective program is delivered based on four steps:

1. **Assess** the climate by reviewing data, holding student focus groups & interviewing adults
2. **Recommend** Actively Caring workshops, evidence-based programs and promising practices
3. **Customize** the program and implementation for student participants in a club or class
4. **Empower** staff & college students to deliver workshops to students for climate change



The Prosocial Problem-Solving Program

Students complete a brief psychological questionnaire to assess their goal orientation toward promotion or prevention thinking. Students are divided into two groups: a prevention group to prevent harm and address climate problems (e.g., mental health, drugs, bullying, social media abuse) and a promotion group to achieve school climate aspirations (e.g., lack of connection and empathy). Each group receives workshops on key topics to build prosocial, cultural and leadership competencies:

- Challenging yourself and others to actively care
- Scanning the school climate
- Thinking preferences and empathy
- Analyzing problems and aspirations
- Servant leadership
- Upstanding to help others
- Leadership and followership

The Impact

Students across Ohio have developed their own initiatives to improve school climate by posting positive sticky notes on lockers, holding a teacher appreciation breakfast, creating a day of recognition for the Principal, teaching the middle school students about caring, holding a mix-it-up day to promote new relationships, and empowering freshmen to voice their concerns about school.

Involvement in Actively Caring can transform a student as evidenced by the words of Kaylynn Hill (Chardon High School, Class of 2014), “Actively Caring was the most impactful experience in high school. I have grown into a more inclusive, proactive, and empathic leader. It has given me a voice to create lasting impact on the cultures within my own community and the world.”

Our Initiative

Ten years after the Virginia Tech shooting, we will honor each of the 32 victims of the tragedy by partnering with 32 middle and high schools during the 2017-2018 school year. The program may help support an existing club or class, or it could even initiate a new club at your school.

Contact Us

Contact us to learn more: Shane McCarty, Ph.D., *Executive Director*, shane@corfoundation.us.