

# kids with character

ACCEPTANCE BRAVERY CARING CITIZENSHIP  
COOPERATION COURAGE EXCELLENCE FAIRNESS  
GENEROSITY HELPFULNESS HONESTY KINDNESS

PERSEVERANCE RESPECT RESPONSIBILITY SELF-CONTROL SENSITIVITY THOUGHTFULNESS TRUSTWORTHINESS

Celebrating the spirit and determination of mainstream students everywhere!  
Meet our 2010 Kids with Character honorees:



**Steven** AGE 18  
California  
Nominated by Ron Richardson, Itinerant Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Mr. Richardson sent us an acrostic poem that outlines why Steven exemplifies perseverance. Thank you for your clever submission!

**P**olite & urbane  
**E**arnestness  
**R**espectful of diversity  
**S**crupulous of others' feelings  
**E**ngages in LIFE  
**V**irtuous by example  
**E**ducationally focused  
**R**esponsible & reliable  
**A**ctively overcomes barriers  
**N**aturally creative  
**C**onfident in his future  
**E**steemed by many



**Wil** AGE 6  
Massachusetts  
Nominated by Laurie Frye, Kindergarten Teacher and Audrey Morse, Speech and Language Pathologist

Wil is a kind and caring little boy who approaches his day with enthusiasm and curiosity. He wears receivers on his hearing aids so that he can hear teachers and friends through an FM unit. As the year has progressed, Wil has become a wonderful advocate for himself. He raises his hand and politely lets others know if he did not hear something. He will ask for the FM to be placed near speakers for morning announcements, near the CD player to hear music, near the cassette player to hear books on tape. He generously talks about his hearing loss to his friends and because of this they have become empathic to his needs and often will not speak until they have the FM in their hand. Wil loves to listen to stories and has the vocabulary of a child much older. He makes predictions and observes details in children's books that most others do not notice. He thinks about stories and offers thoughtful insight as to what the author may have been thinking, or what a character may do. He's interested in illustrations and often comments on different styles and techniques that different artists use. These honest, respectful and sensitive discussions are such an asset to our class and everyone has been inspired by and has learned so much from Wil.

Wil likes to do so many things with his friends at school like sing songs, recite poems, build big structures in the block area, run at recess, and write about his favorite Rescue Heroes in Writers Workshop. He is curious about the world and asks great questions throughout the day about all sorts of things! Wil loves school and does his very best each and every day.



**Michellene** AGE 15  
New Jersey  
Nominated by Courtney Zelenak, Teacher of the Deaf

I am nominating Michellene, a ninth-grade cochlear implant user, as a Kid with Character. Overcoming the debilitating effects of a progressive hearing loss, Michellene exemplifies perseverance within all aspects of her life. Whether it's overcoming difficulties that are posed to her being a member of her high school's Color Guard or striving forward despite the academic challenges in her mainstream setting, Michellene always persists, instilled with great motivation, confidence and the earnest desire to succeed. On one occasion, while participating in a Color Guard competition, Michellene's processer fell off during a performance. She continued on, using compensatory skills she has acquired over time to assist her in this situation.

She is an inspiration to anyone who has the privilege of meeting her. I am astounded daily by her effervescence and incentive to succeed no matter how great the challenge may be. As her teacher and friend, I am so proud of her and am thankful that I get to see her perseverance first hand. For those who doubt if Michellene can, she proves she can and will.

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**Jala** AGE 11  
Pennsylvania

Nominated by Jeannine McCoy, Itinerant Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Jala is a fourth-grade student who always has a smile and is eager to learn. She is the type of student every teacher wants to have. She is hard working, conscientious and kind. Her perseverance and her strong sense of motivation are most refreshing. Jala does not let her hearing loss prevent her from accomplishing anything. She plays basketball for her elementary school team and recently was selected to be part of her school musical. Jala always brightens my day with her enormous smile that she has for me each time I stop in her classroom. Jala is an amazing student with outstanding character!



**Amanda** AGE 15  
Pennsylvania

Nominated by Jeannine McCoy, Itinerant Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Amanda displays several character traits worth mentioning but the one that stands out the most is excellence. She has a strong work ethic and is very conscientious with all her courses. She currently has a very demanding course load with two honors courses and French. She voluntarily stays after school to meet with her teachers to review course content and her assignments. Amanda is a very focused young woman who would like to attend college to major in the medical field. Currently, she is pursuing the opportunity to volunteer at the local hospital. Amanda is truly a young woman with character!



## A Former “Kid with Character” Shares His Story

While each student’s journey with hearing loss is unique, there is no question that each brings forth strength of character. In 2005, Ben was recognized in our very first group of “Kids with Character.” Now a senior in high school, he shared his college essay with us. We hope Ben’s story encourages other students to celebrate and document their own journeys in some way. Best wishes to Ben and mainstream students everywhere who are graduating this year!

*I love music.*

*I love to listen to the relaxing piano melodies of Jim Brickman.*

*I love to listen to the symphonic sounds of Elton John.*

*I love to listen to the heavily laden percussion refrains of Phil Collins.*

*I love to listen to it on my iPod while working out or studying.*

*I love to play music on the piano for my own pleasure and relaxation.*

*I love music, like most teenagers, except unlike most teenagers...I am deaf!*

I am the third of four boys, and the only one with a hearing loss. For the first seven years of my life, I heard very little, and what I did hear was inconsistent due to fluctuations in my hearing. By the time I was two, I had undergone a number of surgeries in an attempt to stabilize my hearing. With a severe to profound hearing loss, I began my education in an oral program for hearing-impaired and deaf students. When I was seven years old, I had minimal hearing left, and qualified for a cochlear implant. Although I did very well with the implant which resulted in my transfer to a mainstream school for third grade, unfortunately one year after its placement and one month into third grade I developed a severe infection of the implant due to a surgical error, and not only lost this device, but all of the hearing in my left ear. I spent the next three years in my mainstream school without hearing. By age eleven, my hearing was non-existent, so my parents sought help from Dr. Daniel Lee, who implanted my other ear. Although Dr. Lee made sure I understood the risks of surgery on my remaining ear (total deafness), he also spoke with me about the benefits of hearing sound again. With the support of my parents, I made the decision to take this risk. Happily, the procedure was successful, and with a Cochlear Freedom processor, I can now hear sound which, combined with lip-reading, allow me to access information. Most importantly, I can hear music once again!

Music has always played an important role in my life, although some of my interaction with it is anecdotal. Apparently, when I was two years old, my parents purchased an upright piano. When the piano tuner arrived, I was fascinated. With the top of the piano open, I watched as the lower keys were struck, produced sound, and visually vibrated the piano wires. As the upper keys were hit, the wire was visually vibrating, but there was no sound. When the piano

tuner turned away, I placed my hand on the side of the piano, struck the lower key, and then the upper key. It was my “eureka” moment when I learned that I could not hear some sounds. Looking back, it also seems to me to be the first moment I bonded with the piano, and that bond would become stronger with time.

By age five, I was driven to learn to play the piano. My two older brothers, Andy and Matt, were banging away, producing some interesting sounds, and it seemed to be fun. Most importantly, whatever Andy and Matt did, I did, too. Mr. Hillard, a piano teacher with the patience of Job, came to our house. Over the course of thirteen years, he worked with me through periods where I had some hearing, no hearing, and finally a cochlear implant. When I had minimal hearing, I could hear some of the lower notes of the piano supplemented by the vibrations I could feel through my fingers. When I lost all my hearing, I was only able to feel the music through vibrations. With the advent of the second cochlear implant, I was able to hear the tunes again. Through all these years, Mr. Hillard’s eternal patience moved me (and my family) from my painful melodies to enjoyable renditions of Jim Brickman and Elton John! I was finally able to find peace and relaxation from the stress of functioning in a hearing world through music. The words are not important to me—I actually cannot hear them. It is the melodies I can hear and enjoy—and I love to hear them and to play them.

Deafness is not an all or nothing phenomenon. Sound does not just get softer, and turning up the volume does not cure deafness. Because different letters are heard at different frequencies with some frequencies easier to hear, some letters disappear from the text. One analogy would be to consider writing with a keyboard which is missing certain letters. There would be spaces interspersed in the text, and you would need to determine by context what is being written. When this concept is applied to speaking, pitch, volume, distance from the source, and context all impact on comprehension. Because intact words are not heard, they cannot be duplicated. Babies speak because they hear their parents speak. I did not hear my parents until I was one year old when I received my first hearing aids, and then I did not hear them intelligibly. My ability to speak, then, was a learned process, where speech and language pathologists as well as teachers of the deaf taught me words and sound production. I learned to speak over many years of working with some exceptionally patient and gifted teachers. With the carrot of my brothers, who never let me think that I could not do whatever they could do, I achieved success, winning two public speaking contests in middle school, and continuing to speak at conferences in front

of my classmates and friends. Interestingly, studies done in Russia have shown that music improves the clarity of speech even more than articulation by adding rhythm and rate. I know that, without music and the assistance of my family and many wonderful teachers, I may never have learned to speak so well.

As much as I love music, I recognize that there can be issues associated with listening to it. Loud sounds cause damage to the hair cells in the cochlea, which are responsible for the transmission of sound to the auditory nerve. As a culture, Americans not only are exposed to noise, but we are living longer, increasing the potential for hearing loss by both expanse and duration of exposure. One of our greatest risks for hearing loss comes from loud music played on iPods and speaker systems. My grandfather always said, “If life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” As someone who has a hearing loss and has experienced the painful times of being without hearing, I believe I am in a good position to speak with peers about these risks, and the very real consequences they face now or as they become older. For my senior project, I am currently working with Worcester Academy to develop a module of the Health and Wellness curriculum which will address hearing loss and its prevention. It is hard to understand the risk if you have never lived in total silence. Hopefully, with a greater awareness, people will take the necessary steps to turn down the volume in order to prevent their own hearing loss. Ironically, my iPod is gated by my Freedom processor so that it cannot get too loud. Sadly, this technology is not incorporated into all audio equipment.

Music has always been an important part of my life. It has allowed me to develop my speech to a high performance level. It also helps me relax when I need a break from studying and working all day. Enduring the painful surgeries, working hard to learn to speak and to acquire language, focusing on my piano, and experiencing new sounds—especially music—has developed my character making me a gentleman, a hard-worker, and a person with a dream of becoming a cochlear implant surgeon, one day developing major breakthroughs for the non-hearing community. My favorite quote, which is framed and hung on my wall, always inspires me to do my best and to venture into new areas of study or to embrace new experiences:

**“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experiences of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”**

—HELEN KELLER