

PEER MEDIATION YOUTH AWARDS – AN UNFORGETTABLE EVENING OF RECOGNITION

By Jill Cheeks

We recently had the opportunity to honor youth in our community who are working to make a difference in their schools each day. On the evening of Wednesday, April 25 at Woodville Tompkins Technical & Career High School, over 300 peer mediators, Mediation Center staff members and volunteers came together with the friends and family of these youths to honor their diligent efforts. These students truly make a tremendous impact both in the community and as role models in their schools by helping their peers navigate conflict, develop conversation skills, and facilitate differences peacefully. It was truly a remarkable evening.

We were honored to have WSAV news anchor Kim Gusby serve as the emcee for the evening, and Savannah-Chatham County Public School System Superintendent Dr. Ann Levett graciously gave the keynote address. Our Director of Youth Programs Crystal Commodore, who we're very fortunate to have on staff leading the Peer Mediation program, also addressed the audience.

It is so important to our organization that these peer mediators, who are committed to making their school a peaceful place to learn, are recognized. These students go through intensive training in communication, problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills before becoming peer mediators and it's vital that we acknowledge their hard work and accomplishments.

Our Peer Mediation Program has trained students in over 35 schools and the training is open to children from second to 12th grade. Studies have shown that 62 percent of school-related behavioral incidents and conflicts occur in the classroom, taking away from valuable instruction time. We have been privileged to work with school coordinators who have supported these Peer Mediators as they mediated over 300 disputes during the 2016-2017 school year, with a staggering 97 percent resulting in students reaching an agreement, and 92 percent of agreements remaining effective one-month post mediation.

It was enlightening to watch these students beaming with pride as they were called onto the stage during the awards ceremony and thanked for their hard work. Our peer mediators are truly going above and beyond to ensure a peaceful learning environment for their fellow students and the community.