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## **Whitehall, NY, students recognize Bullying Prevention Month with Sweethearts & Heroes**

**WHITEHALL, NY** — October is National Bullying Prevention Month, and local students recognized it with an amazing duo of superheroes without capes, learning how to activate compassion, empathy and HOPE in their classrooms — and beyond.

Pat Fish and Josiah McKeon, of Sweethearts & Heroes, were in the Whitehall Central School District on Thursday, Oct. 24 and Friday, Oct. 25. Sweethearts & Heroes aims to prevent hopelessness, bullying and suicide by providing dynamic, inspiring content that centers on the human interaction skills necessary for schools and other organizations to change all aspects of their culture — skills such as empathy, compassion and teamwork.

Sweethearts & Heroes offers a profound, engaging signature presentation that calls for HOPE (Hold On, Possibilities Exist), Empathy and Action; Circle, which is built on the ancient ritual of communicating in a circle to build compassion and empathy; and the BRAVE Youth Leadership Program, which trains older students in bully drills that they, in turn, teach to students in lower grades, thus creating a sustainable, student-directed initiative that can spill into local communities.

During this school year, Sweethearts & Heroes started offering Train the Trainer, which teaches current educators how to weave their own Circle trainings for future hires; and STEP (the Student Teacher Empathy Program), which teaches high school students how to present Sweethearts & Heroes' signature assemblies for students in grades K-2 and 3-5.

Sweethearts & Heroes' central team of traveling presenters includes: Tom Murphy, Director and Founder, of St. Albans, VT; Ret. U.S. Army Sgt. Rick Yarosh, a HOPE expert, Purple Heart recipient and motivational speaker from New York who was burned severely while serving in Iraq; and Pat Fish, BRAVE Program Director & Circle Specialist, also of New York.

Murphy and Yarosh made their presentations in the Whitehall CSD during the 2023-2024 school year. While in Whitehall last week, Fish and McKeon weaved Circles with students and educators — a natural follow-up to the assemblies from last year. Sweethearts & Heroes will continue Circles in Whitehall in early 2025.

Fish said, "Circle is an opportunity for amazing stories to be shared and heard. Amazing isn't good or bad. Some amazing stories I've heard are heartbreaking, others are heartwarming, and others are downright hilarious. But every single one of us has an amazing story, because we all

have unique experiences. Circle allows everyone a chance to share those stories and, more importantly, practice listening so that we can learn others' amazing stories. Also, everyone practices various social-emotional skills in Circle. What sets us apart? We make it fun! Everywhere we go, there's a thirst for Circle from students of all ages, social groups and backgrounds. They want to connect further with people around them. Circle is a vehicle for that."

## **SCHOOL OFFICIAL'S COMMENTS HERE**

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to Pat and Josiah for their presence over the two days they spent with the students and teachers at Whitehall Elementary School. The energy, bravery, and transparency I witnessed from all were truly inspiring. I deeply appreciate the way we connected with our students under the intimacy of Circle; this experience is vital to the work we do for students every day. We can't wait for them to return in January!

For more than 16 years, Sweethearts & Heroes has presented what Murphy calls "'the 'stop, drop and roll' of bullying" to more than 2.5 million students in school districts from New England to Hawaii and north into Canada. Sweethearts & Heroes also tailors its presentations and workshops for businesses, non-profits and civic groups. Murphy said, "We go where we're needed. That's what heroes do."

In mid-September, about 140 students from seven Upstate New York schools attended Sweethearts & Heroes' first three-day — and phone-free — Youth Leadership Summit with Spartan Race at Killington Resort in Vermont.

Sweethearts & Heroes has also created The HOPE Classroom, a digital subscription service designed for various grade levels and different school sizes. This value-packed offering can allow Sweethearts & Heroes to be in every school in the U.S.

Last spring, Sweethearts & Heroes released Boredom School: For Those Bored in School, a collection of captivating, humorous and thought-provoking poems by Pat Fish. The book offers a unique perspective on the monotonous trials of school and the students who yearn for change.

Sweethearts & Heroes' first book, 13 Pillows For Affective Teachers, is a novel that covers the themes of HOPE, Empathy and Action in the Sweethearts & Heroes curriculum. *13 Pillows* is also based on real students and teachers that Sweethearts & Heroes has encountered. Murphy cowrote the book with Brian McKeon, of New York.

For more on Sweethearts & Heroes, [find them here on social media](#).

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