



THE FOUNDATION FOR APPALACHIAN OHIO

The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio (FAO) is a regional 501(c)(3) community foundation serving the 32 counties of Appalachian Ohio to enhance quality of life. FAO fulfills this mission by fostering access to opportunities through three unique strategies of: nurturing philanthropy; creating access to educational opportunities; and promoting the region's expectations for success. FAO has created tremendous opportunity by developing tools and partnerships to overcome challenges and unleash the potential of our region's citizens and communities. Since its inception, FAO has invested over \$1.3 million in grants and scholarships throughout the region, creating opportunities in the areas of: education, community & economic development, leadership, arts & culture, health & human services and conservation.

Now celebrating ten years of success, FAO is beginning a new chapter in serving Appalachian Ohio by focusing efforts to help the region create unprecedented access to educational opportunities and quality of life improvements. FAO has a strategic organizational plan to initiate and support long-awaited transformations in the region's educational attainment, community capacity and pride using our experience, vision, tactical ability and the leverage of many partnerships developed over the years.

The Foundation's *I'm a Child of Appalachia*® essay contest, part of the Foundation's broader *I'm a Child of Appalachia*® program, works to help our region overcome barriers to educational opportunities and annually encourages thousands of students to reflect on their ability to succeed in educational and community endeavors. The contest leverages multiple benefits, including: learning opportunities for students; grants to current teachers to support creative curriculum development efforts; and classroom field trips. Through the *I'm Child of Appalachia* initiative, Appalachian Ohio is strategically investing to accelerate the region's educational attainment and create the building blocks necessary for long-term prosperity.

The Foundation hopes you enjoy reading these inspiring essays from our region's youth, and they remind you – as they do us, what a difference we can make when we invest in improving the lives of others. To learn more about the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio, please visit www.appalachianohio.org or call 740.753.1111.

Recognition and Appreciation

In September 2006, the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio sponsored the first *I'm a Child of Appalachia*® Essay Contest, part of a broader *I'm a Child of Appalachia* program, in an effort to encourage Appalachian children to begin considering the strengths of the geographic region they call home. FAO's essay contest asks students to consider what it means to grow up in Appalachian Ohio and is intended to help students appreciate the people, beauty and benefits of living in the region. This year's contest prompted students to write about the people who have been positive influences in their lives and how they hope to have a similar impact on others. The Foundation received an overwhelming response from over 2,600 students – nearly triple the number of entries in 2007.

The Foundation wishes to thank Muskingum College faculty and students for their time and commitment to the review process of over 2,600 essays. A special and hearty thanks to Dr. Barbara Hansen, FAO Trustee and Dave Longaberger Professor of Teaching and Learning, whose vision and leadership continues to make the essay contest a resounding success.

Additionally, the Foundation expresses sincere thanks to the following 2008 sponsors whose generous support enabled the essay contest: Edward Jones – Athens, Newark and Lancaster; AEP Ohio; Muskingum College; The Longaberger Foundation; and The John and Annie Glenn Historic Site and Exploration Center.

The Foundation also extends appreciation for sponsorship of winning essay contest students, teachers and families attendance at the FAO's 2008 annual event, including: Greg and Eileen Adams; Matt Elli and Dawnell Graham; Lawrence County Economic Development; Ohio Aggregates and Minerals Association Resource Systems.



Winners and their families attended the Foundation's 2008 *I'm a Child of Appalachia* Celebration for special recognition on Saturday, November 15th at the Ohio Governor's Residence and Heritage Center, current home of Gov. Ted Strickland and First Lady of Ohio Frances Strickland, the Foundation's 2008 *Child of Appalachia* honorees.



This year, all classrooms participating in the contest were entered to win a free field trip to the John and Annie Glenn Historic Site and Exploration Center in New Concord, Ohio. The 7th grade English class of Mrs. Adams from Huntington Middle School in Ross County is this year's winning classroom.

Thanks Also To:

Special Assistance: Paula Caudill, database entry of essay submissions; Mrs. Cora Garrison, essay reader/high school English teacher; Mr. Joshua Eno, essay reader / graduate assistant; Mr. Drew Hansen, essay reader / guidance counselor; Paul Reichardt, Vice President for Academic Affairs – Muskingum College, whose idea began the creation and printing of the essay booklets to honor student achievement; Danielle White, Secretary to Dr. Reichardt, who unselfishly typed the book for the first two years

Muskingum College Faculty: Kathy Brown; Marjorie Pickworth; Ky Davis; Marianne Huey; Joy Cowdery; and Barbara Hansen

Muskingum College Students: Nick Soltis; Lindsey Cox; Paula Lehman; Bryce Allen; and Sean Schultz

Winners

FOURTH GRADE - Pg. 6

1st Place

Adam Daugherty	Coshocton County	Keene Elementary
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Finalists

David Esselburn	Coshocton County	Keene Elementary
Paul Sylvester Hill	Ross County	Bishop Flaget School
Nate Marcum	Scioto County	Wheelersburg Middle School
Veronica Thompson	Ross County	Buckskin Elementary

Honorable Mentions

Dalton Cowgill	Noble County	Shenandoah Elementary
Dominick Holding	Scioto County	Bloom Vernon Elementary
Carly McCloy	Ross County	Bishop Flaget School
Leah Shephard	Scioto County	Valley Elementary School
Allison Ward	Lawrence County	Fairland West Elementary

FIFTH GRADE - Pg. 16

1st Place

Abigail Siders	Jackson County	Southview Elementary
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Finalists

Pooja Dayal	Gallia County	Washington Elementary
Tori Hatfield	Scioto County	Northwest Elementary
Whitney Jenkins	Scioto County	Northwest Elementary
Von Wooding	Belmont County	Union Local Elementary

Honorable Mentions

Hope Anderson	Ross County	Huntington Elementary
Taylor Helderbrand	Highland County	Rainsboro Elementary
Anniedale Johns	Tuscarawas County	Ridgewood Middle School
Jeffrey Mathews	Ross County	Buckskin School
Isabelle Smith	Tuscarawas County	East Elementary
Molly Pierce	Jackson County	Westview Elementary

SIXTH GRADE - Pg. 27

1st Place

Matt McComas	Lawrence County	Fairland Middle School
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Finalists

Alexis Burris	Guernsey County	Buckeye Trail Middle School
Emily Conzett	Lawrence County	Fairland Middle School
D. J. Madison	Hocking County	Logan Hocking Middle School
Lexi Petrie	Lawrence County	Fairland Middle School

(Sixth Grade cont.)

Honorable Mentions

Mallory Jenkins	Highland County	Greenfield Middle School
Robert Johnen	Belmont County	Union Local Middle School
Mia Lambert	Muskingum County	W. Muskingum Middle School
Ellen Hinshaw	Lawrence County	Fairland Middle School

SEVENTH GRADE - Pg. 36

1st Place

Gabrielle Moore	Belmont County	Union Local Middle School
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Finalists

Alicia Hopkins	Ross County	Huntington Middle School
Savannah Nelson	Lawrence County	Fairland Middle School
Wade Nelson	Guernsey County	Buckeye Trail Middle School
Hunter Schenewark	Lawrence County	Fairland Middle School

Honorable Mentions

Rebecca Grunder	Carroll County	Bell-Herron Middle School
Samantha McKim	Guernsey County	Buckeye Trail Middle School
Hannah Pagano	Belmont County	Union Local Middle School
Austin Scarberry	Hocking County	Logan Hocking Middle School
Jonna Shimko	Athens County	Alexander Middle School

EIGHTH GRADE - Pg.46

1st Place

Zach Maenz	Columbiana County	Salem Junior High School
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Finalists

Addison Coldren	Gallia County	River Valley Middle School
Ashley Thompkins	Morgan County	Morgan Junior High
Julia Wu	Lawrence County	Fairland Middle School
McKenzie Woodburn	Morgan County	Morgan Junior High

Honorable Mentions

Dustin Duffy	Morgan County	Morgan Junior High
Andrew Gregory	Logan County	Logan-Hocking Middle School
Kodi Hesson	Guernsey County	Meadowbrook Middle School
Kevin Hwang	Athens County	Athens Middle School
Kris Zimmerman	Ross County	Bishop Flaget School

4th Grade

Adam Daugherty - First Place

Dr. Jacobstein has inspired me to live a healthy life. He is my heart doctor at Akron Children's Hospital. When I was born my heart wasn't working like it should. I had to have open heart surgery. I'm ten now but I still go to see Dr. Jacobstein every year. He talks to me about my heart valves. Every five years I have to have surgery to make my heart valves bigger so the blood can flow through. Sometimes it scares me to have heart surgeries.

I hope to inspire other people by talking to kids who have heart problems. When I go to the doctor, I can talk to kids in the waiting room. I would also like to be part of the heart support group at Akron Children's Hospital. Sometimes I feel like I'm the only one I know with heart problems. By joining this group I can talk to other kids my age about heart problems and how it affects our lives. I hope I can show others that even though you have heart problems, you can still live a normal life. My heart condition hasn't slowed me down. I enjoy swimming, playing soccer at recess, and 4-H.

Dr. Jacobstein has been an important part of my life. I hope to also inspire others. Even though you have a medical condition you can still live a normal, active life.

David Esselburn - Finalist

One person who has inspired me the most is my mom. She has always been there for me. She taught me to be kind to everyone and be brave. I have had seven surgeries in my lifetime. My mom was always there I woke from each surgery. Seeing my mom always made me feel happy. As I was getting better she was always was there when I needed something. After my Cleft Palate surgery, I didn't want to eat because it hurt! But my mom made me eat soft foods like applesauce and ice cream. That inspired me to eat so that I could get better. My mom has also inspired me to be nice to everyone. She said you can't have too many friends.

I inspire kids at school by just being nice to them. I like to make them feel good and liked. I know what it feels like to feel sad when kids aren't nice. It makes me feel bad on the inside. So I don't want kids to feel that way. I want to inspire kids to feel good and not alone.

Paul Sylvester Hill - Finalist

When I grow up I will help influence other children by sharing my knowledge and love of nature to become friends. I'm a good cat fisher and I live in a woods. My family and I cut firewood to heat our home. I have a lot in common with Appalachian children but education has made me smart. My life is better because I see a bigger world.

I still show my new friends that they have to use the right bait to catch a big catfish. In other words, if they want to have a good life when they grow up, they need to have plenty of good learning right now. I will also share cat fishing tips on how to catch a big ten pounder! While we fish we'll share Bible stories because it's important that we know Jesus as both our Savior and Friend.

I suppose one of the best values I can share is don't quit the race! Once Meimer wouldn't stop talking and she made us late for our Dog Days Circleville High School 5K race. Mom said to be respectful, so I never blamed her. I didn't want to show up late, knowing there would be no way to win anything. Mom said one of the most important things in life is to remember to never give up and always finish what you start. We had signed up for the race so we were going to finish it! That is what makes a real winner. I guess she was right because I wound up with third place.

Throughout my life I want to help other people by encouraging them and making them smile. I can be a good example which speaks louder than anything someone might say.

Nate Marcum - Finalist

Encouragement

Many people have been a positive influence in my life. For example, my mom always does her best. I can make a difference as a 4th grader, as a teen-ager, and as an adult.

As a 4th grader, I can help a classmate. I can help them learn better. I can help them with tests.

When I am a teen-ager, I will help the community. I will plant trees and pick up trash in local parks. I will volunteer at a nursery.

Finally, as an adult I will help physically handicapped people. I will make machines to do things for them. They will have arms able to be controlled by the brain and try to find cures for cancer and other life-threatening diseases.

I hope to be a positive influence in someone else's life. I can help people no matter how old I am. I hope to inspire people too when I grow up.

Veronica Thompson - Finalist

My Life Influences

As I grow up many people have influenced me; they still do now. There are many people I look up to including my parents, my teachers, and even some of my friends. When I grow up, it would give me great pleasure to work as a nurse. My mom is a nurse and I have watched her when she is in the ER at Adena Hospital. She is great! She is nice to the patients. I don't know if I will be as good as she is, but I will try. My dad is a pharmacist. He makes a difference by giving people medicine to make them better when they are sick.

There are very brave and awesome people out there that risk their lives to help us. A lot of people are still here because of them. I want to be a good person and help people, making a difference in their lives. These people don't even have to be older or have a specific job. My friends even make a difference in me.

My whole life has been full of mistakes, but what really matters is how I handle them. If I look at my life every day, I think what I can do to make it better.

Dalton Cowgill - Honorable Mention

I would like to be like my dad, because he has helped all kinds of different kids in little league for 28 years he had always been a great positive role model. He helps me and he teaches me something new and what's right and wrong in my life. I would like to help other kids in all kinds of different ways, school, sports, and life. I would like to be a giver not someone that always asked for help. I try now in school with other kids with school homework or worksheets as a quarterback and a captain on my team. I try to help my teammates with plays and what ever they ask me. I'm always positive. If I can't make it in sports I want to be a teacher and I can keep on helping my friends and their kids.

Dominick Holding - Honorable Mention

Right now I am ten and on January 16, 2009 I will be eleven. My parents' are Paige and Seth and they take care of me every day. I lived in Illinois and now I live in Ohio. I make friends every day. My parents say they will love me forever.

My mom got pregnant when I was in second grade and had my brother in the middle of my third grade school year. When he was born his lungs collapsed and he was life-flighted to Columbus Children's Hospital. The doctors that took care of my brother put him in lots of wires and cords. I stayed with my grandparents. It was close to my birthday. On my birthday, even though my mom and dad did not want to, they came to see me. They took me to Columbus to see my baby brother and he was like one thousand presents.

When I grow up I am going to help my family in every way I can. I will do things like shopping, cleaning, cooking and anything to take care of them. The way they treat me is more than life or money. They love me and I love them.

Carly McCloy - Honorable Mention

I Am a Child of Appalachia

Many people have been a positive influence in my life. I live in the small town of Chillicothe, Ohio and attend a small Catholic school named Bishop Flaget Elementary School.

When you live in a small town like ours, many people show compassion towards other people. My family, school teachers and church friends of our small town have influenced me to think of others and show compassion and provide aid to families who may be less fortunate. We have joined together many times to purchase clothes, toys, school supplies and even farm animals for others in small towns such as Redbird, Kentucky.

I plan to make a difference in other's lives by showing small town values I have been taught. I want to help others to succeed in life, to show that God does provide help through others and that we can all achieve more when we set our mind to it. I want to show others that when you show kindness, sometimes it bounces right back. We should all treat others as we want to be treated, with caring and kindness.

Leah Shephard - Honorable Mention

Homegrown Appalachian Charity

As I grow older I will help people by becoming an employee at a local homeless shelter. I would make sure that everybody had everything they needed including toothbrushes, food, and anything else that was important to them. I would use my money to help give kids that didn't get anything for Christmas something like a hat and gloves.

Once I get out of college I will open a doctor's office and kids who couldn't afford shots would get free shots at my office. I would also help families who have no health insurance get health insurance by talking to different insurance companies and seeing if poorer families can get health insurance for a very low rate. I would still visit local homeless shelters and I would give out food and clothes to people who needed them and give free check-ups to anyone who wanted one.

Once I retired I would give my office to another physician who was starting out so they didn't have to buy a building, new furniture, and equipment. That's what I would do to help others. I would try to make sure every family I know was safe.

Alsion Ward - Honorable Mention

Many people have been a positive influence in your life. As you grow, how will you help others and make a difference in their lives?

As I grow up, I will try to help people learn to protect the planet and all living things. My Grandpa always taught me to take care of Mother Nature. He was a scientist. I will help teach children to recycle, stop so much pollution and to conserve energy.

I will do my best to be a role model for the others around me. Talking to them about why we need to protect the planet for the future is very important. Some people don't think about getting older and needing clean air to breathe. I will show them how to turn off any kind of energy such as light bulbs or CD players. The food we grow needs to be natural. Today some have chemicals. These chemicals are bad for our bodies and the environment.

That is what I hope to do to influence others and make a difference in their lives and the world.

5th Grade

Abigail Siders - First Place

What I Want to do to Help My Community

When I grow up I would like to be like my mom because she does a lot of work for the community. She started LAUNCH which is a nonprofit that helps teens and prevents under-age drinking and smoking. She also does many other things for the community.

When I am an adult I would make a nonprofit that helps elementary kids. The nonprofit would help make kids want to do after school activities at school instead of bad things like doing drugs, drinking or smoking. I think this would help.

First, I would talk with the principals about starting after school clubs and after school sports. Next, I would pick kids for a leadership group. Finally, I would start doing programs with the leadership group.

I think kids should have chances to change the world for the better. This nonprofit would help kids be leaders in their school and in their community.

Also, I think kids should have a chance to build up ideas that could help their community and change it for the better.

Pooja Dayal - Finalist

I'm a Child of Appalachia

The person who has made a positive influence in my life is my dad. My dad is a doctor and he works in a rural area. He spends a lot of time with his patients, takes care of them, and gets them better. In the hospital, he also takes care of people who are much sicker. He encourages them to stay active and live a healthy lifestyle.

My dad has inspired me to become a doctor. I will help by being a doctor, like my dad, and saving peoples' lives. I will educate people about healthy food choices and to get plenty of exercise. I will play sports and stay healthy so that people will look up to me as a role model. I will donate foods and goods to the needy people so that they can live normal lives too.

Also, I will give free music lessons and books to needy children and adults. Children and adults should play musical instruments. It relaxes their mind and gets rid of stress.

I will follow the footsteps of my role model. That is how I will make a difference in peoples' lives and be a role model.

Tori Hatfield - Finalist

My name is Tori Hatfield, a 5th grade student at Northwest Elementary School. During my summer break and any day I have off school I volunteer at my mom's work. My mom works at a local nursing home in the therapy department as a physical therapist assistant. Volunteering is very important to me. I get to talk to the residents and learn about their lives and their past. The elderly residents have great stories to tell, things that I may never learn or hear about from people my age or my mom's age. They tell me about how things were in the past and how the time has changed so much. Things that we as young people take for granted. Just little things like city water, inside restrooms or television.

Volunteering with the therapy staff I get to learn about the actual different types of therapies and the patients that they work with. I really like to follow the speech therapist around learning about the different changes that residents may have to do like change their diets and whether or not they may need thickening added to their liquids so they don't get choked. Occupational therapy showed me that people even though they are adults they may still need help getting dressed or teach them a new way to get dressed or eat their meals. Physical therapy teaches people to get out of their chairs and walk again. All of the therapies help the residents get back on their feet and go back home. The staff encourages me to focus on my studies and go to college so some day I can get a job in therapy so I too, can help others. One day I hope to work in the medical field where I can help others. One day it may be me helping a young person to focus on their future.

Whether you talk to the elderly or your parents they all say the same thing to focus on your studies and succeed in your future. Encouragement comes in different forms whether it's helping a resident eat their meal or a therapist teaching someone to walk again or even the people encouraging a young person to focus on their studies. We all want each other to succeed at whatever we are doing. Making the world a better place.

Whitney Jenkins - Finalist

I'm a Child of Appalachia

As I sat thinking under the old weeping willow tree in the backyard, watching the sun slowly drift behind the beautiful Appalachian hills, I sighed happy thoughts of my heritage, holding onto my dreams, then realizing how truly lucky I am to be a child of Appalachia.

Watching a butterfly flutter through the air, I think about ways my life can make a positive influence on others. Like the butterfly, I will spread my wings and sprinkle kindness to other people. As I move through the different stages of my life, like a butterfly's metamorphosis, even though I change physically, I still will be gentle and kind.

Each visit to a new flower made by the butterfly represents an act of kindness that I will show to other people by simple things that I do such as: making cards for sick people, visiting nursing homes, writing thank you letters to veterans, helping at the homeless shelter, being a candy striper at the local hospital and making donations to charities.

Looking out over the hills, the butterfly now on my nose, I know this is the direction my life will go.

Von Wooding - Finalist

I am a child of Appalachia, and as I grow I will help others. Cancer has affected me in many ways. One way is my Great-Grandpa passed away with cancer in 2007. Another way is my Grandma is a retired cancer specialist; she helped found a breast cancer hospital in Philadelphia.

I will invest my money in cures for cancer. I will also try to create a cancer hospital in Ohio that helps treat cancer patients. I think this would help the community by knowing that they are in close range of a cancer center. I will hire the best surgeons in the world. They will have to have over twenty years of experience.

The building will have five floors and one hundred and fifty rooms used specifically for chemotherapy. Another seventy rooms and two floors will be for rehab. All of the highest grade machinery will be put to use in the surgery rooms.

I am hoping that this will help Ohioans in need of cancer cures. This is how I will help Ohio.

Hope Anderson - Honorable Mention

I'm a Child of Appalachia

When I grow up a thing I could do to help others would be this. I would like to have my own stable full of horses and do horse therapy for autistic kids. The reason I chose this is simple, I love horses and I bet a lot of autistic kids do too. The reason I think horses would help the kids is that I read before that the rocking gait or pace of a horse helps calm them kids down and they enjoy it.

I enjoy horses and I think they are wonderful animals. Me and my family own horses and I love my horse, Spirit, he's sweet and fun. I want to own horses now and when I grow up, and I will always want to share this love for horses with everyone.

Taylor Helterbrand - Honorable Mention

My Plan to Change the World

As I grow up, I plan to make a difference in the lives around me by becoming a marine biologist. I can discover a way to make fuel out of something that is not needed in the ocean or in sea life, but I do not want to use an animal or species that is endangered or in scarce supply. I also want to make a fuel that cost less. I am a strong believer in protecting endangered sea life so we can keep the type of lifestyle we have now. We are running out of natural resources because people want more of them. We don't understand that there are other people and things that need what is being taken too much of. I really think about how I could make this fuel without using non-endangered sea life. I don't want to use something for fuel and use it all and then the plant or animal becomes extinct. I would make fuel out of something like dirt but I might use too much and farmers couldn't grow crops. I also like things like sharks and dolphins so, that way I would have a job where I like what I do and could help the world. I'll always have something like grass to have as a back up. I don't know what will be invented by the time I am old enough to do this. I believe this will make a difference. If I follow this hope, it will use less energy from the sun and will preserve our coal.

Anniedale Johns - Honorable Mention

The people I am most inspired by are my mother and father. They make up the two halves that make me whole. My father has inspired me by always teaching me to give it your all until you reach the finish line and then keep going even whey you cross it. My mother shows me in so many ways how you can do more than one thing. My parents are always there to encourage me. My mom is a realtor, pig farmer, a wife, and of course my mother and she handles everything so well. My father was a dairy milk inspector, but he studied and worked hard and has become a state surveyor.

I will inspire others to move ahead and keep trying. I will also help them to understand that if you want something don't sit there—go get it. I will show them that you can do many things and anything if you put your mind to it and work hard. My parents have shown me that there is no substitute for hard work and I plan to show that to others and inspire them to do the same.

Jeffery Mathews - Honorable Mention

As I get older I'm going to help people by shoveling snow in winter. I will pick up trash, rake leaves, pick up big rocks and limbs, plant trees and wash cars.

When I grow up, I want to become a forensic scientist. The first thing I'll try to find is a cure for cancer and then I'll try to discover a medicine to prevent heart attacks and strokes for a life time. I think my whole family wants me to be a scientist because my step-grandpa's side of the family has all had some form of heart disease. If I can't become a scientist, I'll become a doctor so even though I can't make new medicines for diseases, I can still help and save people's lives.

At first I thought of being an architect but I learned that if something's wrong, I'd have to go up and see what doesn't work right and I'm afraid of heights so that won't work. Then I thought of being a mechanic but my dad goes and works on things all day so I don't think I want to do that. That's why I want to be a scientist.

But for now I'll just stick with shoveling snow.

Isabelle Smith - Honorable Mention

I'm a Child of Appalachia

Many people have been a positive influence in my life. As I grow up I want to help others and make a difference in their lives. I hope to help a lot of people and things in my life.

I would love to go to Africa and give food water to children or to anybody who needs it. I would stay there for about a month with tons and tons of food. I'd make sure the food we don't eat won't go to waste and go to Africa. Then, I would also teach the kids and teachers how to read.

Secondly, I would love to be a teacher for Kindergarteners. I would enjoy seeing little girls and boys' faces when they come to their first day of school. I would teach them how to save energy and save resources, like trees.

Next, I would do some activities with people that have diseases like Crone's Disease (like run marathons, auctions, and contests.) The activities would be for raising money for cures.

As, you can see I like being very helpful. This is very important to me because many people have been a positive influence in my life.

Molly Pierce - Honorable Mention

Irreplaceable Treasure

When my father, James Albert Pierce, passed away, I was devastated. But before that all happened, Dad and I always went together to stores and other places. We'd also play soccer in our backyard, along with football and other games.

Dad and I would go bike riding in the summer, and sledding in the winter. We'd often take walks and just ride around town, having fun together.

But on a Friday night, my father went to play cards, and on his way home had a horrible car wreck. On January 12, 2008, at 1:15 P.M., my dad passed away at age forty-two. The night it happened, I had a strange feeling something was wrong, and my life changed forever.

I know how it feels to lose a loved one, and he was the best dad I could ever imagine. No one can replace him in any way. He was kind to everyone, and taught me to always tell the truth. Sometimes lying hurts people, so you need to be honest, but be careful how you choose your words, so feelings won't be damaged.

I've been taught to laugh and joke, but not to hurt others' feelings. I try to be kind and loving to others. I've learned the importance of having friends to talk to when things get to be too much. We should always be there for one another, and help those in need and respect them.

So be sure to be honest, loving, and kind to everyone, because some day you may lose a friend, neighbor, or relative. You want to know that you did everything possible to make that person feel loved and happy; make sure those around you enjoy laughter in their lives. Those are the lessons my dad taught me.

6th Grade

Matthew McComas - First Place

Giving It All Back

There have been many positive influences in my life; one of the greatest being the state in which I live. This area has friendly people, rolling hills and valleys, lakes, rivers, my home, family, school and community. So many have been kind, compassionate and caring to me that I would like to give back to the community tenfold by becoming a rural health physician.

Becoming a rural health physician in Appalachian Ohio would allow me to share my future formal education with my patients as well as care for them physically, emotionally and spiritually. I would like to care for the patient as a whole person and be a role model for those that have none.

Growing up in church has been a big part of my life. Being humble and learning from my parents and family that it is right and good to help others has had a major impact on the way I think and feel about people.

As a physician, I want to listen to someone who is all alone, hold someone's hand that is frightened and comfort someone in pain. It is not so much about the money, the job security or the title of MD- it is about doing good work for good people everyday-my community.

Alexis Burris - Finalist

These Things I want to do to Help Others

These are the three things I am going to do to help others when I grow up. First, I am going to be a lawyer. I am also going to volunteer to help kids as a coach or mentor. The last thing is I want to be a good mother to my children.

The way being a lawyer helps others is I want to be a child advocate lawyer. My parents are foster parents and I have seen abused and neglected kids first hand. A child advocate lawyer can help these kids. I will be able to provide a voice for some of these kids who are not being heard.

The way being a volunteer helps others is people see you helping people and then they want to help people. I can be a positive influence to the children I am coaching or mentoring. Some kids don't have positive influences in their lives. This is just one small thing that can make a big difference in someone's life.

The way being a mother helps others is I can raise kids who are willing to help others and be positive influences. I can be a good mother and provide love and guidance to my kids. I can also teach them to respect other people as well as their property. I can provide unconditional love to my children.

These are just a few of the ways that I can help others. I will use all of my gifts, talents, and abilities to help others. I believe if we all were a little less selfish the world would be a better place. The greatest thing that we can all do is to show love and respect for all people.

Emily Conzett - Finalist

Give a Little Bit

I have been exposed to some really great school teachers and also some wonderful life teachers. Though, if I had to choose, my aunt Linda has had the greatest effect on my life. I get to spend a lot of time with her; we even went to Boston over the summer for a just girls' vacation. She was a teacher and guidance counselor for thirty two years. She is the one that has influenced me to become a teacher. I would like to be a teacher to help others just like her.

My aunt Linda was telling me that my cousin was having a little trouble with multiplication tables. I asked if I could tutor him when my after school activities lightened up. She thought it was a great idea and it has been a great experience. I am another step closer to becoming a teacher!

To expand my dream of teaching, I would like to apply for Ohio State University and earn my Master's degree in education and counseling. After school, I would like to come back to the Southern Ohio area and teach children in Kindergarten through Fifth grade, like my aunt.

In conclusion, becoming a school teacher would be my way to affect the lives of others. Maybe one day I could be a positive influence, too!

D.J. Madison - Finalist

I love to play football. I play wide receiver, defensive end, and linebacker. I am fast and I catch the ball well, so I am a good wide receiver and linebacker. I am a good defensive end because I can break through blocks and sack the quarterback. I plan to continue to play in high school, college, and the NFL. By developing a football camp in southeastern Ohio, I hope to help Appalachian students learn about not only football, but about leadership and teamwork.

My football camp will be a week long, overnight camp. It will have a football field, training equipment, cafeteria and cabins. Each week will be set up for a different age group. Each child will have a chance to play in every position. For the kids who can't afford to pay for camp, I will offer scholarships and financial assistance so that EVERY kid can afford camp.

In conclusion, my camp will teach the kids the rules of football, teamwork, sportsmanship, and leadership. It will also allow the kids to meet new people and make new friends. The kids will be confident in knowing that they can do anything that they set their minds to.

Lexi Petrie - Finalist

Confidence

In the twelve years I have spent on this Earth, I have confronted many influences. Some were good; some being bad. Many people have impacted my life, but there is only one person that has left the biggest mark. It sounds a bit cheesy, but it is my sister.

She has Crohn's, a rare colon disease. But despite this, she still lives her life like a normal person.

This bravery has reached my heart and impacted me heavily. She has inspired me to have confidence, even when things get tough; because she knows that sooner or later, you will see a better day.

I am going to share her strength and self-assurance with whomever I can, whenever I can. One way I can do so is by teaching; I have always wanted to be a teacher. I can donate to charities for animals and people; I can recycle and conserve. Being an excellent role-model is important to me, and I can set respectable examples by doing these things.

I cannot wait to mature and have so many great opportunities. I can still make differences in others' lives as a child, however, and I am determined to do just that.

Mallory Jenkins - Honorable Mention

One day when I was about 5 years old, my little cousin fell in the pool. It was over his head and it was almost over mine. I had to jump in and save him because, my Grandma was inside.

Maybe one day I can be a lifeguard, and save more people's lives like I saved my cousin's life. Or maybe I can be a doctor and still save people's lives.

But maybe, just maybe I could just be myself. What do you think? I think I can do it. In fact I know I can do it. I can do anything I set my mind to.

When I grow up I won't be a SUPERHERO but, I will be myself and I will make a difference. I might not save anymore lives but I can still change people's lives and I can still make a difference. I could just give \$10.00 to a homeless person but, that is still important.

If you are someone who thinks the only way you can make a difference is to save a life, then you're wrong. There are many ways to make a difference, and to change a life. So change your mind.

Robert Johnen - Honorable Mention

My mom has been a positive influence in my life. She has taught me the importance of reading and how important it is to learn. She did this by reading to me when I was younger. When I was little, I didn't like to eat, so to get me to eat, she would read to me. Some of my favorite books and stories, that she would read were The Poky Little Puppy and Winnie the Pooh.

My mom has also always told me how important education is and she always wants me to do my best.

I feel that I will be able to help my younger sister, who is only in the first grade and is just learning to read. I can help her with her homework and I have already been reading to her.

In the future, I would like to be an author and write stories, and then maybe I can help someone else learn to love to read too. If I can fulfill these two goals, then I will be making a difference in my family by helping my sister and in the world, not just the community, by writing good stories. These would be good ways to thank my mom for being such a positive influence in my life.

Mia Lambert - Honorable Mention

I'm a Child of Appalachia

Many people have been a positive influence in my life. One special person is my grandmother, "Memaw". Memaw taught me to believe in myself and never let go of my dreams. She also taught me that I could be what ever I wanted to be. I really want to become an author and an illustrator. I want to write about the Appalachian ways, such as the colors of the leaves in the fall, the loving family togetherness that we all share, the cold wintry days with a good book and hot cocoa and the warm sunshine on your back in the summers. I want to make my writing come alive on paper. I will achieve the goal, thanks to a very special person with Appalachian roots that was willing to teach me wisdom to last a lifetime. When I grow up I will help others and make a difference in their lives by not breaking the chain of love, support and encouragement that Memaw taught me. Memaw has made such a difference in my life. She recently passed away from brain cancer. Appalachia is very special to me. You will be reading about it in my book someday.

Ellen Hinshaw - Honorable Mention

A Mountain of Change

It is great to grow up in a small community at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. In a small community, you are likely to know many people and can influence or even make great changes in their lives. Even though there are only so many ways to make a difference, those differences can be great and can spread. By influencing people, I hope to keep the environment clean.

I enjoy monitoring the local streams for pollution. That way, I can keep the beauty in Appalachia. If I help others to do the same, there will be cleaner streams and then better lives in the future, too.

Later in my life, I hope to influence people just by being a decent citizen and being very green. Doing good deeds shows the people around you that it is easy to be kind and environment friendly. People will see me do what I do, like throwing away trash in a wastebasket or recycling box rather than on the ground.

Keeping my Appalachian home green with cool, clean water is what I want my legacy to be. Every little good deed adds up to a mountain of change.

7th Grade

Gabrielle Moore - First Place

Many people have been a positive influence in my life. I think that the person that has inspired me the most is my mother, Amanda Inez Coffield. She has influenced me by how brave and strong she is. She has been through so much by raising three kids on her own and being in my opinion, the “best mother” there is. Even whenever she has a lot of work to do that day, she still runs me to cheerleading practice and gymnastics classes, my nine year old brother to football practice, and my six year old autistic brother to his therapist trying to help his condition. My mother could have had the worst day and be completely stressed out and still take the time to help my brothers and I with our work, whether it be to bake cookies for school or help with a science project, and she always stays calm even when she’s tired and angry.

As I grow I will help my brother, Logan Matthew Coffield, in the future. I want to help him with communicating with other people and having the knowledge of an advanced child. I really want to make a difference in his life by helping him with school. When I was in elementary school, there were a couple of kids who were mentally challenged. Everyone looked at them as aliens, everyone except, well, me. People always whispered and joked just because they were different. They don’t understand that they are just like us, they eat like us, they sleep like us, and they play like us. They are no different than each and every one of us. Most children with special needs are the nicest people you will ever meet, maybe even some of the smartest people, too. As I grow, I have decided that I don’t just want to help my brother, but children all over the United States. Logan has inspired me to be an occupational therapist. I want to make a difference in the world by helping children with special needs; I want to be that person that people look at and say “Wow, I wish I was like her” and be the one to make that difference. I want everyone to know who I am and I want everyone to know what I did for the children. That is how I would like to influence people all over the world.

Alicia Hopkins - Finalist

The Helping Bug

Throughout my life I've wanted to do many things, but my drive to become a nurse, an author, and help many people has been the strongest by far. I've been coping with a rare disease known as Gorlin syndrome since the age of five, and now as I learn more about it, my inspiration to help those both well and suffering has been born and now burns greatly in my heart.

My inspiration to become an author came to me just three years ago, while I was lying in my room reading "The Wild One" by Terri Farley. I remember stopping mid-paragraph and thinking, "Wouldn't it be so cool if I wrote a book that lots of people could enjoy as much as I enjoy this book?" Then, at that moment, the writing bug bit me and it bit me hard, I've loved to write every chance I get since then, and I don't ever plan on stopping.

My inspiration to become a nurse started just a few short months ago after I went in for heart surgery, and saw a side of my nurse Tammy that left me wonderfully in awe. I knew she'd been nice, but not the type of person who would hold my hand as the anesthesiologist made many miserable and unsuccessful attempts to stick an IV in my arm. But fortunately, she is that kind of person, and she now owns one hundred and one percent of my complete and utter respect.

My third inspiration, other than Tammy and Gorlin syndrome, came just after my surgery when I was admitted to the hospital to be monitored. I met possibly the nicest nurses on Earth, four women named Chris, Sara, Jessica, and Heather, who were perfect living examples of how a nurse should be. They were very sweet and considerate enough to let me sleep when they needed my blood pressure, and they always asked how I was feeling.

Although I'm only twelve years old, not a day goes by where I don't think about what it would be like as a nurse or author. I think about how I could connect with my readers through my books and how I could relate to the patient through my own experiences. I then smile because I know that as long as I can make one person happy, I'll live my life peacefully and die completely satisfied.

Savannah Nelson - Finalist

Helping People Near and Far

Many individuals have been an influence in my life. My parents are among those people. My mom is a nurse in the neonatal intensive care unit at Cabell Huntington Hospital. The man I call dad is a pipe fitter at Special Metals. Both of my parents are hard workers, but they still have enough time for my brother and me. My parents also donate money to organizations like St. Jude's. They enjoy helping people as I do.

I would like to be like my parents when I grow up. I will help people and make a difference in their lives. I will start by finding a pen pal in a country like Africa. People there do not have clean water or much to eat. The person I write will probably enjoy learning about my life as I will his. I will send him bottles of water and the many important necessities he will need. I will keep my pen pal for a long time, and hopefully visit him in Africa.

As for helping everyday individuals, I can give them a smile as I walk by. A smile from a stranger could brighten someone's day. Another thing I could do is make new friends. Everyone needs a friend to call when they are in a bad mood or to share good news with.

Also, I can teach handicap children how to do things like play sports or learn to ride a horse. Some handicap children never get to experience things like sports because their parents are afraid of them getting hurt. Simple things like that could change a child's life.

Following my parents' example, I can donate money to charities. I can also run races that donate money to research for diseases and illnesses, like cancer.

Using my mom and dad's hard work ethic, my plan in life is to succeed in helping people near and far.

Wade Nelson - Finalist

Many people have had a positive influence on my life. As I grow, I will help others and make a difference in their lives. I would like to provide help for foster children. Also it would be nice to teach people to be more self-reliant. They could fix their own vehicle or tractor and grow a garden for food. I could even be an inspirational speaker on losing weight and being healthy. As I grow up there are many ways I can help others.

I could help foster children in many ways as I grow. As soon as I become old enough and get married I could adopt several children. If that is not possible, running a foster home would be a good idea. Another possibility would be to help find good homes for foster children. If I were capable of doing so, I could do all of the above and help a lot of foster children.

People need to learn to be more self-reliant. To me, that would be a good thing to teach people. If I started an organization to teach people to fix their own vehicles or anything else correctly it would be extremely useful. For example, if something breaks you would not have to go to a repair shop or call a repair man. You could fix it yourself and save money. You could also plant your own garden, save some money, and have fresh vegetables. If people were more self-reliant it would be useful to them.

Inspirational speaking on losing weight and being healthy could help people in many ways. Instead of just dealing with being obese, I could inspire people to do something about it. Using a proven method I came up with, I could show them how to exercise, eat healthy, and lose weight. My method would also include ways to keep it off. I would make a big difference in a lot of obese peoples' lives.

A lot of people have had a good influence on my life. As I get older it would be nice to help future generations. Helping foster children would be a good way to help. I could help people learn to be more self-reliant. Also I could help people lose weight and eat healthy. I could help people in many ways as I grow.

Hunter Schenewark - Finalist

Influencing Others

I live in Rome, Ohio. This is the place where the Rome Beauty Apple was first created and then grown. In order to grow, this apple needs sun, water, and soil. Before we can help others, we also need to grow.

One thing that will help us to grow is our parents and others who have helped us. They are like the soil. They are our foundation and provide support.

The sun is like education. Education enlightens us by giving us new knowledge. Knowledge improves our lives and makes us more prepared to be successful.

The water is like experience. Living life gives you experiences that you can learn. Water gives life to the apple, just like experiences can do for us. I am trying to obtain an education and learn from my experiences and the lessons I was taught to teach others.

An apple provides food and nourishes us. This fruit can be made into apple pie, apple butter, and applesauce. They make a tree beautiful and give nutrients back to the tree so it can continue to produce. I want to be like the apple and nourish others through volunteer work; I want to help others feel better about themselves and their accomplishments. This is how I am going to help others.

Rebecca Grunder - Honorable Mention

My Plan

In 1997, my mom was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder 2. That means she gets depressed more than she gets bursts of high energy, mood swings, and short tempers (manic phases). Bipolar Disorder is a chemical imbalance of the brain. It is also hereditary. Since she was diagnosed, Mom has faced an uphill battle. She has always been smart and told people the truth; she didn't change because she was diagnosed, she just knew what was wrong now. Mom went to the hospital a couple of times because of depression. Whatever happened, I never saw Mom any differently. She was Mom and I love her.

In the world today, people consider those with mental illnesses and other disabilities dumb. That is completely ridiculous! Just because someone has trouble with certain things, they're not stupid. Mom is a perfect example; she was in advanced classes in high school and junior high, has a college degree, was an EMA director, was looked at by MIT and the Air Force Academy, and is a MENSA member. I was raised to accept the differences in people, and I think it's wrong when people judge before knowing.

When I get older, I want to go to college and become a psychologist or psychiatrist. After I graduate I'll open a clinic somewhere in this part of Ohio. The clinic will be for people with mental illnesses and their families. The clinic would help people understand their mental illnesses. It would also help their families understand how to support them. Free classes would be offered to anyone interested in learning about mental illnesses. The better everyone in this world is treated, the better off the world will be. The best thing my mom has taught me is if you go through life with a friendly attitude, the experiences will be better.

Samantha McKim - Honorable Mention

How I Will Help Others

As I grow, I will help others in many ways. I will teach younger children, have a career, and donate to charities.

To make a positive influence on children, I can help them learn by teaching them things I know that are new to them. I speak several different languages, such as Spanish, Japanese, and of course, English. I could teach them how to speak these languages or improve what they already know. I could also help them with the four main school subjects: mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts. Some of the other things I could teach them would be Kempo Karate, softball, volleyball and many outdoor and craft activities.

Another way to make a positive influence on others is to have a career. I could have a religious career as a pastor or a church camp counselor. As a counselor, I would be a LOMO (Lutheran Outdoor Ministries in Ohio) staff member and Camp Mowana in Mansfield, Amazing Grace Day Camp, or both. Another career I could have is to be a Martial Artist. I could be a sensei, which means teacher, or a sempai, an assistant instructor.

Donating to charities is another great way to be a positive influence on others. I could donate clothes, food, and money to places like the Salvation Army and G.R.A.C. E. Pantry. Another thing I can do is give my old clothes or shoes to children who need them. I could also give money to Heiffer International to give food to people in poorer countries.

I can do many things to help others as I grow. One of those things is teaching younger children. Another one would be to have a great career. The last thing I could do is to donate to charities. These are just three ways that I can be a positive influence on the world around me as I grow.

Hannah Pagano - Honorable Mention

I'm a Child of Appalachia Essay Contest

Many people have been a positive influence in my life. I am only now beginning to appreciate the impact they've had in my life. When I'm an adult I would like to put a positive influence in another person's life. For example, I want to be a veterinarian. Because of my love for animals, I am going to care for other people's animals just as I care for my own. I'm going to volunteer at my local animal shelter when I'm old enough, so that I can care for the animals that are hurt and need a home. As a veterinarian, I will sometimes go to schools and talk to children about becoming a veterinarian and get them interested in animals just as I am. As I grow, so will my knowledge of animals. I will share my knowledge with children all over the state. My parents say that if I am going to be a veterinarian then I'll have to do at least six, maybe eight, years of college but I'm okay with that. When I own my own clinic I will train the young people in my clinic that are trying to learn from me. I have already partially started learning about what to do in my future job. I have a veterinarian game which shows me how to care for animals, and I can practice veterinarian techniques on my own dogs at home.

I will make a difference in children's lives all over the state. As they come into my clinic, I will show them the importance of making sure their pets get a regular checkup at least once a year and to make sure that their animals also get rabies shots. A veterinarian plays an important role in our community by caring for the lost and sick animals. Animals all over the world are homeless and hurt and need our help, and that's a veterinarian's job, to care for the animals and hopefully find them a nice warm, loving home.

Being a veterinarian will also benefit my family and my community. That is how I will make a difference.

Austin Scarberry - Honorable Mention

Positive Difference Essay

My grandparents have been a very positive influence in my life and are helping me to become a better individual. They have taught me how to value family members and the importance of unconditional love. When my Uncle Paul was 22 months old he had encephalitis that left him brain damaged. They were told he would never talk or walk but they worked with him and never gave up. Even though he can not talk like us he has his own communication. He does walk but it is getting harder for him. He went to a special school until he was 18 years old and then started working at a workshop for handicapped people. He is now 43 years old and is still working.

Now that I am getting older I need to begin to help my grandparents and my uncle Paul more. My grandpa is 68 years old and has had cancer. He gets really tired after doing work. I need to start mowing his grass and cutting down his weeds. I also can pick up the sticks that fall from their trees and burn them. My grandma is 63 years old and is still working. I can help her with it on the weekends.

To help both my grandpa and grandma I could do more things for my Uncle Paul. He has to have special drinks so I can learn to make them for him. I can also get the drinks for him so he will not fall going to the refrigerator. When he wants to go to the living room, kitchen or bathroom I can help him walk there. He loves to watch television and listen to the radio so I can make sure that he has batteries for his remotes.

It is very important to help people especially those that have helped you. My grandparents and Uncle Paul have taught me to be kind and generous to all people, even if they are different. They have also taught me to never give up and that hard work and dedication pays off in the end. I know that as I get older I will keep doing more for them and for others.

Jonna Shimo

There are many influential people in my life. One of these influential people is my dad. He is influential to me because he has the patience to work with and help kids with disabilities. To me, my dad is a hero because the kids he teaches all have individual needs requiring my dad's attention. He takes time to help each student no matter how stressful the task or what else he has going on in

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his life. This occupation can become extremely stressful and time consuming, but my dad never gives up. Therefore, my dad is a positive influence in my life.

My dad has helped me realize that there are many ways in which I can help to better the lives of those around me. He has also helped me realize that no matter how big or small the contribution, you can make a positive change. I have always been taught to live by the golden rule, treat others as you would like to be treated. To me, this means that I would want people to treat me as I would treat them. I would want people to do random acts of kindness for me like opening the door for me or loaning me a pencil for class. As a young teenager, I would like to do the same for others. I could start small like, telling someone I like their project at school or saying encouraging, positive things at volleyball practice. I could even take after my father and help kids with homework in subjects I'm good at or help those with disabilities. There are numerous things I could do to help those around me.

These random acts of kindness would hopefully make a difference in people's lives. I would hope that these small acts would put people in a better mood or even boost their confidence. I would also hope that the people I help would think of me as a positive influence and how they could help others around themselves. If some of the people I have affected started to help others too, soon many people would be doing small acts of kindness towards one another.

Many people around me have shown me how I can positively help and influence others to spread kindness and start doing considerate things for one another. However, my dad has been the most influential person in my life.

8th Grade

Zach Maenz - First Place

Encouragement

Buzzzzzzzzzzzz! The siren screamed. The game was over. We lost thirty to nothing. It was the last game of the season. We wanted to win more than anything. Before I got to the locker room, I saw my dad running over. "Great game, son!" he said to me.

Didn't you see the score? We lost thirty to nothing," I said.

"I saw you make some pretty nice tackles," He told me, "and you sacked the quarterback twice!"

"Yeah, I guess that was pretty cool."

By the time I got home, I had forgotten the score and felt great about myself. My dad encouraged me.

That is what kids need. Encouragement can get someone through tough times or make them try something new.

When I get older, I would like to be a teacher. I want to encourage kids to try their very best all of the time. I will pick kids up, not put kids down. I have had teachers who encouraged me to be the best that I can be. Those teachers are my favorite. Kids want to be encouraged. They don't want teachers to put them under the microscope and pick out their flaws. They need teachers to praise them for their good works, not their failures.

I want to be that teacher. I want to encourage kids every day, hopefully right here in Salem. Whatever happens in my life, I will encourage kids because I believe with a little encouragement, you can do anything.

Addison Coldren - Finalist

I have many dreams. Some, like my dream to move to a castle in Ireland, are very unrealistic. But others, like my dream to teach gifted children, are much easier to reach. I have been thinking about my future more often, and with the presidential election coming up, I think I would love to go into politics. Many people have inspired me, but I think that the people who have inspired me the most are the ones who had nothing growing up but managed to succeed.

Living in what seems like the middle of no-where, going to a small public school, and living in a low income home, I sometimes think that I can never reach my dreams of being in Congress or becoming President. But then I think about some of the important political figures who, as a child, had less than I do now. For example, one of my role models, Governor Ted Strickland. As the son of a steelworker and one of nine children, he was still able to go to college, and later become a Congressman and then Governor of Ohio.

But even if I do succeed in politics, I would still want a family. Even though I disagree with her, I do look up to Sarah Palin. As current Governor of Alaska and John McCain's vice-presidential running mate, she still manages to run her family. I doubt that having a pregnant teenage daughter would be an easy thing for anyone to deal with, but Palin has handled it considerably well and I admire her for that. Someday I hope to have a family and use the experiences and ideals that come with parenting to help our country.

I want to be able to help children in Appalachia get the education and experience they would need to achieve. I would love to help organize and find funding so that students can take field trips to places that might broaden their horizons which would help with their academic goals. I know that whatever I do in life that I will help students in this area as much as I can.

Ashley Thompkins - Finalist

As a child growing up, I heard many stories of sorrows faced by my ancestors that grew up in Southeastern Ohio. Sad times of loved ones lost just to bring a little money in a household. Not to buy televisions or fancy clothes like today, but to keep from starving to death. One incident that stuck in my mind was how my great-grandfather went to work one day in a coal mine where all his young sons also worked day after day from daylight until dark. After arriving at the mine with his lunch pail containing a few slices of homemade bread with nothing but a little butter on it, he descended down in that dark hole never to be seen again. He disappeared forever. Was it a cave in? There was no evidence of it. His body was never recovered as his oldest son's had been just a year earlier. His son was killed by a piece of falling slate at the age of 16.

My grandfather also died as the result of being a coal miner. Only this time he didn't die quickly by a piece of falling slate; he died slowly, year after year, getting more and more out of breath until he could barely walk. He died from a disease caused by coal dust getting in his lungs and slowly smothering him. He died of Black Lung Disease at the age of 56.

Another kind of death in the family was the death of a dream. My grandmother had always dreamed of being a teacher. After her father disappeared and her brother died in the same mine, she dropped out of school in the 4th grade to help her mom clean houses.

I look around and see many things writers perceive as signs of poverty. Some of these authors see lazy, ignorant people, but all I see are family members I didn't get to meet. Ones with many hardships – people well worth knowing - that touch my heart and make me want to help them. I haven't figured out how just yet, but if I do well in school and keep my love of people, I will find a way. A good education can lead to good jobs so maybe, me, a child of Appalachia, could become the teacher.

Julie Wu - Finalist

Influencing Others

People change, life changes, and sometimes people change lives. Our lives are greatly affected by the people around us, and in turn, we impact the lives of others as well. I think about all the people who have positively influenced my life, and I cannot help but wonder the ways that I will be able to make a difference in theirs.

As I grow, I will undoubtedly make plenty of mistakes, but I will also learn many lessons. If I can use the advice that I have been given to assist someone else then I will not give it a second thought. I have received so much guidance from my friends and family. Whether it be lending a hand or comforting a friend in need. I will certainly try my best to assist others in any way possible. My friends and family are extremely important to me, and I will always be sure to stand up for them. In some situations, I might not know what to do, but in the very least, I can listen to whatever a person has to say.

Hopefully, I can change someone's life. It only takes one experience, one person to shape a life. It might be something small, such as giving someone a hug when they are having a rough day, or it may be something life changing, such as a being an organ donor. You can never be sure how something will affect a person because what might seem to be a small favor might make all the difference to someone else. I love knowing that I put a smile on someone's face because whether I helped them in a big or small way, something good came out of it.

We can so easily improve the lives of the helpless by providing donations and supporting charities. Some people's lives actually depend on the generosity of others and their willingness to assist. I want to be able to make the lives of the less fortunate easier by giving to them what I can.

As I continue to learn and mature, I will try to help others and make a difference in their lives. Many people have set a great example for me, and with any luck, I will be able to do the same for someone else.

McKenzie Woodburn - Finalist

I Am Appalachia Contest

As my ancestors settled on these rocky lands of Appalachia, they had one thing on their mind, to create a better life for their family and generations to come. Six or so generations later of potato farming and making ends meet, we still reside in Stockport, Ohio. Ever since I've been a couple years old, I've seen my family spend mindless hours for the greater good. My grandma was always working: driving a bus, volunteering her time for 4-H, and in the last years of her life, fighting cancer. My grandpa was the same way. My parents have worked night shifts and two jobs to provide for my siblings and me. My mom has been there for my deaf sister Jenna and fighting for her equality. Ever since, my mom has helped other deaf kids feel the same way. My dad has worked for the community as a police officer to basically bring down the bad guys.

After seeing how life is how you make it and how you take it, I really want to make a difference in the world. To me the real problem with the world is that people don't really care about anything. The age of heroes has really ended. Sure there are still good people, but where did the heart of America go? I think the way to inspire people is to show them and really prove to them, that there is nothing wrong with being a "goody two shoes". Sometimes it gets lonely doing what's right and fighting for it, but that only makes the victory sweeter. I already try to help my community by volunteering down at the library a couple times a week. It's really not too bad shelving books and talking to the funny ladies. I am active at my school with student council and peer mediation. To change the world we have to do as Ghandi says, "We have to be the change we want in the world."

Dustin Duffy - Honorable Mention

A Man of Honor

I have been taught at a very young age what is expected of me. From playing on the monkey bars to sitting in the classroom. My mother always told me that everyone is unique in their own way. No one is better than the other. But society teaches us different. Society teaches us that the more money you have the better you are. And that beauty of a person is portrayed from the outside. And society teaches us that the more money you spend on education makes you the smarter being. I do not believe this to be true.

Leadership and teamwork are core ingredients in the way you are looked at. I believe that you must have respect for others to make an impact on others thoughts and feelings towards you. By doing my best in school, my fellow students tend to look up to me. How I handle myself in front of others displays my leadership qualities. By encouraging my classmates to do their best and to step up and take on more responsibility, I can help them not only to feel better about themselves but that they can be successful at anything they do. I know that some people struggle with their school work. I am fortunate that I can easily understand the work. I try to help them understand the work.

To me, playing sports consists of nothing but teamwork. Whether I am playing or sitting on the bench, I am still encouraging players and recognizing their efforts. I do not believe that one person loses the game. Each player contributes something to the team. By understanding each person, I know what their limitations are and I do not criticize them for not going beyond those limitations. This not only discourages them but they believe they are less than others. This discourages kids from playing sports the next year.

In order for me to help others and make a difference in their lives I must do the best that I can. I must take advantage of what is given to me and not waste it. Society cannot take this from anyone.

Andrew Gregory - Honorable Mention

I learned in Social Studies that Ohio was first settled by Germans and they were farmers. Therefore, when I realized there were so many families in my county were going hungry. I was very sad. The long lines of vehicles on Front Street opened my eyes to hunger and to the generosity of Smith Chapel Food Pantry. I am sure the people receiving food every month are thankful if they would never have to worry about being hungry again. I also realized, I could be hungry too.

Recently, we lost our electricity for four days. The daily routine was disrupted due to the inconvenience. The daily diet over those four days altered to accommodate our source of cooking – the gas grill. My family is actively seeking a wood kitchen stove as a secondary source of heat and cooking appliance.

I am currently learning what heirloom seeds are and their perpetual characteristic. I have learned I can eat the same tomatoes that George Washington and Thomas Jefferson ate over two hundred years ago. Heirloom seeds have been gathered from across the United States and are available through many suppliers. Heirloom fruit trees are also available. Or a sapling can be transplanted in the early spring from Great, Great Aunt Sara's old-fashion pear tree.

Along with my education and playing football, I want to learn how to grow my own fruits and vegetables. I can look to my family, neighbors, senior citizens, books, internet, and helping other farmers to learn how to grow, harvest, and preserve. Then, throughout my entire life, I can share and teach others how to fulfill a basic need for survival – food.

Kodi Hesson - Honorable Mention

I'm a Child of Appalachia

As I've grown, the people around me, such as my parents, have influenced me greatly. I have learned to persevere and work hard just as they have. Even though I just live in a rural area, I wouldn't go to live in a big city for any amount of money. The people there don't know what it's like to endeavor for their living. I like to work hard for the pretty penny because I am a child of Appalachian Ohio.

Just as the people around me have influenced me, so has the land. The land that has made them who they are is making me who I am. It is not rich in resources as some other land is, but I like it. It has given us an attitude that is who we are. We've had to milk it and use it for all that its worth and it has taken care of us. It has only provided as it has because of our grueling work. As I've said before, we are who we are and nobody else. We don't try to act rich or as if we're better than anybody else because we know we're not. We're poor and we admit it, but rich in companionship is just how we are.

I'd like to pass my beliefs and ideal to my children or other children who are willing to listen, to try and make a difference in their lives. I believe they're going to need to know how to persevere, to never give up on their goals, and to work hard. They need to appreciate everything they have because others are less fortunate. Along with all this, I think that they'll need to be honest as well as to have values and morals. That is how I believe. I hope to influence them greatly in the right way.

The people and the land. They together have made me who I am today. I would like them to influence the younger children to grow up as I have, if not better. They are like my family. They are a part of me and I like it like that. That's the way it's going to stay that's the way it's always been.

Kevin Hwang - Honorable Mention

The Big Man

A thud sounded as my friend accidentally upset a stack of books. A low tone growls, “We should develop a punishment for that. We’ll use duct tape to tie her feet to her chair. That way, she won’t go around kicking my books.” It was from a big man, Mr. Barrington, one of the best teachers in the county.

I first came to know this big man as I struggled to become a better writer and to join the Power of the Pen team. It was he, with smiles and encouragement, who helped me through difficult times, times when I felt like quitting. When I finally made the team, an unscheduled time run-in forced me to quit the team. The big man showed me his big heart. He welcomed me to participate in the team writing practices, and equally gave excellent feedback on my writing. He, as in my heart, lit up a whole new definition of kindness.

On a brisk afternoon, bright orange and red leaves covered the ground like a blanket of fiery nature. The sun peeked out through massive, puffy clouds, rolling whales of the sky tumbling through the air. Crisp, cool air filled my nostrils with the sweet scent as I gazed down the street. The big man stepped out from the school building wearing his blue backpack, and strode down the street. Abruptly, he bent down and picked up a piece of trash along the curbside of the school. It is so natural—so natural—anyone would admire his care of his students as his own kids and his care of the school as his own house.

Just yesterday, I forgot to put my name on my homework. By the time I noticed, it was already under the big man’s big hand. When he found out, he growled “trouble-maker” before scribbling on my name. He then handed me a card. I opened it up and was greeted by a chorus of monkey hoots. As the big man snatched back the card, he snarled “trouble-maker!”

At that moment, I made a promise to myself. When I grow up, I will be as kind, as caring, and as funny as he is. I might never grow to be as big as he is, but I will make my heart as big as his.

I hope that someday, I’ll be a big man.

Kris Zimmerman - Honorable Mention

How will you influence and make a difference in the lives of others?

I am writing this paper on September 11, 2008 and am reminded how unfair people and life can be at times. With these feelings I guess the thing I want to teach the world is that no matter what one person believes in, or how a person dresses, where a person comes from, or the color of their skin, they are all children of whatever God they believe in and that we all need to live in peace and stop fighting over things that are not really important. I want to teach my children what it means to live in a democratic society and that helping out at election time is important because you should stand up for the person you feel would do the best job running our country. I want to teach my children that you need to help those who have less than you and that honesty is very important if you want to become successful in life. I am going to teach my children not to use illegal drugs and alcohol. I want my children to know that gangs are for weak people who cannot stand on their own. I want my children to understand the importance of taking care of their elders and listen to their stories because they are what made it possible for them to be here and they deserve to live out their lives with dignity. The last thing I want to teach my children is that some of us in our family have been given the gift of being able to see people who have passed on but not yet left and that it is ok to talk to them and that they do not have to be afraid, God gave us this gift for a reason and we should be proud of it.