Junior Auxiliary of Columbus’ Provisional Class of 2012-2013 answered the call of a community request for an educational program to address the terrible effects of bullying. A local middle school reached out to JA asking for a program to educate students, teachers, and parents about bullying. Initial research led the group to the story of John Halligan. In 2003, Mr. Halligan lost his 13 year old son, Ryan, to suicide after Ryan experienced years of bullying abuse. Mr. Halligan became an anti-bullying advocate as he traveled the country to speak on the impact that bullying and suicide had on his family’s life. JA of Columbus sponsored Mr. Halligan as a speaker for local schools and a community-wide forum. His emotional testimony described the struggles his son dealt with, as well as the helplessness Mr. Halligan felt as the parent of a bullied child moved the audience greatly. Mr. Halligan wished for teachers and parents to have a better understanding of the cyber world our young people are involved in and how it enables bullying to extend beyond the school yard and into children’s lives 24/7, in turn
increasing the abuse to epidemic proportions. Thus, Ryan Halligan’s story became the foundation for 
*Stand Up Speak Out.*

The Provisional Class presented the program to 6th grade classrooms by using informative PowerPoint to outline the fundamentals of bullying, coping skills and how to make good, socially responsible decisions. JA members aimed to clearly define the different kinds of bullying along with identifying the different players in bullying situations. The following session focused specifically on the ‘Bystander’ in bullying scenarios, which is one of the most important and influential roles. The content highlights how students will most often find themselves in the ‘Bystander’ role and how vital the ‘Bystander’ can be in either stimulating or defusing bullying situations. The JA presenters lead healthy discussions by allowing students to share real life stories and also participate in interactive exercises to strengthen the student’s ‘Bystander’ skills. Students are also provided with strategies of how to avoid becoming the target of bullying and how to respond if they find themselves as a target or a bystander. The JA members work to empower the student’s individual actions while encouraging positive decision making, emphasized as tactics, to counter bullying.

Initial presentations of *Stand Up Speak Out* at Columbus City schools were extremely well-received by students, school officials, parents and community leaders. The program was praised for its immediate impact in addressing a growing epidemic within our community. The immediate success of *Stand Up Speak Out* led to an increased demand. As such, the 2013-2014 Provisional Class expanded the program to Lowndes County Middle Schools with a goal to continue to raise awareness about the various forms of bullying and the effects it can have on children, families and communities. With evolving technology leading to instant access to social media sites, the *Stand Up Speak Out* committee wished to properly adjust the content and material to project a larger focus on cyberbullying. Students are educated on ways to address cyberbullying by using key words when communicating with a bully
and various ways to report cyberbullying activity. Like bullying, the options provided to the victims of cyber bullying are intended to empower the student.

A request for the Stand Up Speak Out program from a local Christian private school seeking re-accreditation led to a format change in order to meet their need to educate the student body on bullying in an assembly style format. Once that program concluded, the committee saw the benefit of presenting assembly style versus a single classroom setting. The committee could pool resources to reach more students by making this simple change. The new format allowed for classes to join one another without losing the crucial interactive aspects of the sessions. The change also allowed for member flexibility for assignments and rejuvenated the project wholly with member engagement. By shifting to an assembly format, which reaches more students at once, the project can be presented to more schools in a calendar year, as bullying, and especially cyberbullying, is an issue at every school in our district.

Stand Up Speak Out has been a strong project within the Junior Auxiliary of Columbus chapter for five years. JA member support, school leadership requests, and recent community events involving suicide by local children and teens continue to push our chapter to reach every child to make a difference. After WCBI TV footage on Stand Up Speak Out aired in the Fall, Facebook comments included “Every school in town should have this....a few times a year!” and “Congratulations for doing this to bring attention to bullying!” One common statement made from inception of Stand Up Speak Out is that teachers, administrative staff and school counselors recommended it would be beneficial if the project was presented earlier in a child’s academic career. At a recent School Liaison luncheon, Junior Auxiliary of Columbus was approached again about introducing bullying content earlier in the classroom setting. With the arrival of a new Provisional Class and a desired project idea, we were able to meet the school’s request and implement Stand Up Speak Out Jr.: Choose Kindness this Spring. Inspired by the children’s book and recently released popular movie Wonder, Stand Up Speak Out
content has been revised to age appropriate verbiage and ideas with interactive stations to keep the 4th graders engaged in the topic of discussion. The chapter plans to continue with *Stand Up Speak Out* with the 6th grade population and to expand *Stand Up Speak Out Jr: Choose Kindness* in the next JA year.