Wilma Johnson Wilbanks National Focus Award 2017-2018

Respectfully submitted for your consideration by the:

**Junior Auxiliary of Gulfport**
PO Box 6452
Gulfport, MS 39506
Population Category: over 30,000

#bullyproof

**CATEGORY:** National Focus Award  
**TOTAL HOURS OF SERVICE:** 71  
**ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP OF CHAPTER:** 84  
**NUMBER OF MEMBERS PARTICIPATING:** 27  
**PURPOSE OF PROJECT:** to educate children on the dangers of today's technology, while also providing tips and best practice advice; to make children feel comfortable speaking up when a possible threat arises; to better inform parents of the risks associated with social media and how to recognize websites and apps that may contain dangerous or threatening material; an overall example of how to use technology safely.  
**COST OF PROJECT:** $2,615.06  
**NUMBER OF CHILDREN SERVED:** 514

#bullyproof

*Helping to “Keep it Safe in a Virtual World”*

While the dangers and risks associated with social media and today's technology may be apparent to many, to a large majority of teens and adolescents, the true threat remains hidden behind a tablet or a phone. NAJA's National Focus, *Keeping it Safe in a Virtual World*, comes
at an important time in history when the shift from communicating face to face is changing
more and more to written words on a screen. Too often, society believes that because a person
may not say something negative or ugly out loud, that he or she hasn’t really said anything at all.
However, as sixth-grader Denae H. and many other students in Gulfport, MS learned, “you can
talk more with your thumbs when you wouldn’t actually speak it.”

Denae and her classmates had the opportunity to listen to a presentation by a group
called Protect Young Eyes (PYE) when the Junior Auxiliary of Gulfport (JAG) invited PYE to
speak to students at Bayou View Middle School (BVMS) and Central Middle School (CMS).
Inviting a speaker to lecture to a group of middle school students is not, at first glance,
groundbreaking. However, the path leading up to the presentation reflects one of the most
sacred and valuable aspects of junior auxiliary work: finding a need to be met and developing a
project to meet that need.

In late Fall 2017, an incident occurred at a local Gulfport middle school involving
students and the misuse of technology and social media. To the dismay of parents and school
administrators, student emails were utilized to facilitate an exchange of inappropriate content
that falsely singled out individual student behavior and transmitted personal information to
students in a middle school class. Naturally, parents were upset that their children had been
exposed to said information and school administrators were angered that the school email
server had been used as a platform for dissemination. Students were questioned. Emails were
shut down. Disciplinary action was imminent. Unfortunately, while the source of the messages
was never fully identified, the damage had been done. Parent and teachers alike knew that
action was necessary, and the JAG was more than happy to help.

A few JAG members were parents of children who attended the middle school in
question and as one member so frankly stated, “Y’all.....we have to do something.” It was then
that JAG knew it needed to act and within a few days of research, consulting with parents and
chapter discussion, it was unanimously decided that the project, #bullyproof, would serve as the
perfect base for action. When reacting to an uncomfortable and sensitive situation, it is easy to
be accusatory and let anger guide the decision-making process. However, the ladies of JAG
knew that the students were owed something much more than unyielding discipline. These
students needed to truly understand the long-standing consequences of irresponsible behavior
pertaining to social media and that today’s simple actions can last a lifetime. The #bullyproof
committee knew that outside help was warranted and through the help of PYE, JAG was able to
provide these students with a very important lesson.

On 20 February 2018, PYE gave three presentations to students at BVMS and CMS. In
preparation for the event, both schools sent home flyers with the students containing
information about the presentation, as well as an “opt out” consent form for any parent that
preferred their child not participate. In addition to the student presentation, PYE gave a
presentation that evening to the community parents. The schools sent out “RemindMe” texts to
parents to advertise for parent night and an Eventbrite and Facebook page also advertised the
free event.

Both the student and parent events were successes. Students were given real-life
examples of how virtual activity can have a negative and lasting effect. Many students did not
realize that even when you think you have deleted an inappropriate picture or negative
comment, it still is alive and well in cyberspace. Most importantly, students were made to feel
comfortable reporting suspicious or negative behavior and they learned the importance of
standing up for others who were possible victims of cyber-bulling. Several “Truths” were
presented to the students to take away and perhaps the most meaningful was Truth #5: You are
more important than your “followers and likes”. Stephanie H., a BVMS parent felt vindicated
in her efforts to regulate her child’s “screen time.” “My child fights me every day,” declared
Stephanie, “but I know what I am doing is right.” Parents left equipped with strategies for
creating an internet safer home, to include information about parental controls, filtering and
most notably, how to parent in the digital age.
The ladies of JAG were proud of the information that they were able to provide to local students, educators and parents. The PYE presentation was incredibly well received within the JAG service area. Both local news stations, WLOX and WXXV provided live and nighttime news coverage of the student and parent presentations. Local magazine, South MS Living, will be featuring #bullyproof in its April issue and numerous posts and shares occurred on Facebook and other social media sites. JAG was incredibly excited about how various media outlets covered this project as this further solidified that a need had been present and that a need had been met. Having the community rally so strongly around this project was an indication that JAG had heard the call to action and responded accordingly.

Being able respond so quickly to a community need was a very big accomplishment for JAG. The threat that is posed today by technology and online activity is growing and it is more important than ever for society, especially children, to be well-aware and well-informed about these risks. The project, #bullyproof, aims to continue fostering a healthy relationship between students and the digital age. The ladies of JAG look forward to the evolution of #bullyproof and learning new ways to help others keep it real in a virtual world.

TODAY'S DIGITAL CULTURE

and what you need to know

We want to give busy parents and tech-savy kids the information and tools they need to use technology safely. In today's digital age parents must be observant, engaged, and informed. Do you know what apps are on your child's phone? Who are the latest social media trends? We'll discuss digital literacy and provide the tools that will help parents who want to instruct their children in using technology responsibly.

SUNCOAST AUXILIARY OF GULFPORT
February 28th 6:15 - 9:00 PM

EXPO Center
701 Railroad Avenue
Gulfport, MS 39501
It's time for some notes! Tonight parents are gathered at the Bayou View Middle School auditorium for a presentation centered on how to keep children safe during the digital media era. We've got more at 9pm on @WXXV25.

Students at Bayou View Middle School were challenged to think before they post on social media as well as other internet sites. Full story here. >>> [Video Link]