

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

SOLE EFFECTS

ARTICLE BY KAREN OGDEN

OUR MISSION
IS TO GROW
CONFIDENT AND
COURAGEOUS LEADERS
THROUGH INFLUENTIAL
ROLE MODELS.



KAREN & KEVIN OGDEN

With the focus on mindfulness, I would like to introduce you to an amazing educator and coach, who happened to be my third grade teacher, Karen Ogden. Karen is the founder of the non-profit Sole Effects which aims to lead and mentor college-age students to influence and guide teens through relevant topics of today which include: Passion & Purpose, Confidence & Courage, Empathy for Others, Stress Relief, Courageous Communication, Mind & Body, Healthy Relationships, and Leadership. It is my pleasure to share her story and her team's mission.

The story of how SOLE Effects came to fruition can quickly turn a 30-minute lunch, walk or phone call into three hours. This is because, this story is not only close to me, it's a part of me. Building this organization has been a combination of my own life experiences, and what I witnessed and grew passionate about through a career in teaching. As an upper elementary teacher, I became increasingly aware of the lack of space and time devoted to social and emotional issues that students faced. I cannot tell you how many times girls would come in from recess after dealing with drama, many of them crying, and it was time for math. Although nearly every minute of classroom time was accounted for, focusing on academic standards, I could no longer ignore this "silent violence" that was impacting learning.

Opening my classroom on Fridays at lunch allowed girls to congregate in a positive environment, escaping this toxic social climate. Over the course of several years, these lunchtime gatherings grew to 90 fourth & fifth grade girls who named their group "G-Pact," standing for girls making pacts to be positive influences, and support systems for each other. Parent volunteers stepped up to facilitate groups in three separate classrooms and I continued to pour in the time and resources I could while still teaching.

Word spread to the middle school next door, and soon former students of mine were hanging out in my class now after school. With social media magnifying their issues, I realized the problems they were talking about were much more serious, significantly impacting their emotional health. In watching the natural growth and progression of this group, it was becoming apparent there was an incredible need for all girls to understand each other's stories, to be heard, and to feel safe.



Realizing how formative these middle school years were, I started to familiarize myself more with the climate these students were headed to in high school, a time of heightened social complexity and pressure. I had been aware of several suicides at our local high school, which prompted our district's principals and faith leaders to come together to support families of our youth. These caring leaders began to hold parent forums which today is known as "What I Wish My Parents Knew". For years, impactful workshops have given parents a better understanding of the pressures their kids are facing and how to provide support. While this team was addressing high schoolers' most pressing needs, it became abundantly clear to me that my role and my passion was to focus on prevention. How DID our kids get to this point of hopelessness? It was then that I knew I needed to retire as a classroom teacher, 3 years earlier than planned, to invest in this work full-time.

From spending my days in the classroom to now attending workshops, conferences, committees, and investing in research, I was absorbing all that I could. Soon I was joined by many others, equally devoted to improving the lives of our young people. Together, for 3 years, we held focus groups outside of school with 7th-12th grade students to identify our youth's key issues and pressures. Simultaneously, a former school psychologist and several retired teaching friends of mine joined me in leading girls' groups at the local middle school during lunchtime. Along with these adults, we also had volunteers from high school and beyond. When these individuals began to share their own stories and speak into the life of these younger students in regards to their experiences with relational aggression, it became crystal clear

that older mentors telling their stories of overcoming their challenges was the answer. After contacting a friend and professor at a local college, we visited the campus and promoted the opportunity of serving as a mentor, to college students. After conducting interviews, we soon had our first official group of college mentors working with 6th–8th grade girls. It was then that we started to see the impact that mentoring was having, not only on these girls, but on the college students as well. Us “old people” became advisors to the college students, creating a multi-generational mentoring model and witnessing the change happening in the teens, college students, and also ourselves.

SOLE Effects started as a program to address the needs and issues young girls are facing, but we were acutely aware that there was and is a need with boys as well as girls. Moving towards a structure that accommodated boys was uncharted territory. To be honest, we were nervous. How could we effectively meet their needs which were, in my experience, incredibly different from the issues young girls faced? With the leadership and commitment of an incredibly strong dad of one of our middle school students, we took on the challenge and began to launch a mentorship program, “SWITCH for Boys.” As group leaders, we laughed about the fact that we needed to increase our liability insurance because now we were dealing with boys and backflips.

Our new tagline became SWITCH, as in switching the story and living your adventure. This came from the middle school students feeling that they needed to put themselves in each other’s shoes, to SWITCH places with them. Shortly after, the high school students then added “Adventure” because they felt that an individual needs to be courageous to live life with exciting experiences. So with that, our tagline became SWITCH: switching our own stories or others’ around us, and living our adventure is living our passion/our life’s purpose.

Observing first-hand the growing social and emotional challenges students today are facing, we are a team of educators bringing hope to our youth, their families, schools, and our communities. Anxiety and depression is at an all-time high in our country. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10–24. Our current generation of teens is exposed to

more media than any other generation. This media exposure creates isolation, self-absorption, less exercise and unstructured technology-free play, increased wasted time, and greater access to prescription and illegal drugs. With absorption into this virtual world, there is less time with real life connections. As a result, our teens’ emotional and physical health, academic achievement, future opportunities, and our communities are jeopardized.

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SOLE Effects became a non-profit in January 2015. Along with our amazing community partnerships, we are on a mission to lead and mentor college-age students to influence and guide teens through our SWITCH Adventure. “SWITCH” is a highly impactful 8-session program implemented as part of a school’s curriculum. Ensuring that each session is relevant to today’s issues while utilizing best practices, it has been created through intense research and collaboration with high school focus



groups and college leaders. The topics include: Passion & Purpose, Confidence & Courage, Empathy for Others, Stress Relief, Courageous Communication, Mind & Body, Healthy Relationships, and Leadership. Woven throughout each lesson is “Navigating Our Digital Lives”. Today we are focusing on 9th grade students and our 8 sessions take place in health and/or PE classes. While instilling our 8 “SWITCH Steps” in all students, our mission is to simultaneously prevent depression/anxiety, self-harm, addiction, bullying, violence, and suicide. Students becoming strong leaders can therefore reach their fullest potential, leading fulfilled lives, while bringing hope to our families, our schools and our communities.

Our specialty goes hand in hand with this quote from Steven Covey Our, “Leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves.” We work to understand others so we can bring out their gifts, character qualities and talents, that they don’t even know they possess, to use to influence others.

The work SOLE Effects is doing and the individuals that are being empowered by this incredible non-profit has created just one example of how to instill leadership and mindfulness in our students inside and outside of the classroom. As educators, we can also live our “adventure,” empowering our students and helping others see their full potential. Everyone’s “adventure” may look a little different, but regardless, your “adventure” has the power to change others’ lives and to SWITCH the story.

ADVENTURE TOPICS

#1 PASSION & PURPOSE

#2 CONFIDENCE & COURAGE

#3 EMPATHY FOR OTHERS

#4 STRESS RELIEF

#5 COURAGEOUS COMMUNICATION

#6 MIND & BODY

#7 HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

#8 LEADERSHIP

MORE INFORMATION ON
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A MENTOR OR AN ADVISOR
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