



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on January 5, 2015

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The Goodness of America

In Honor of Taylor

The parents of Taylor Haugen, the Nice-ville (Florida) High School wide receiver who was killed six years ago during a football game, have decided to turn their tragedy into something positive.

The *Columbia Missourian* recalled in October 2014 the tragic moment that took Taylor's life in 2008: "In a junior varsity game with his mother watching in the stands, his quarterback's pass was slightly high, so Taylor, 15, thrust both hands over his head to catch it. One defender slammed into his now exposed abdomen, the other simultaneously hit him in the back. Taylor staggered to the sidelines and collapsed. He was dead hours later."

Taylor died from a crushed liver, an injury that his parents are hoping to prevent for future athletes through the creation of the Taylor Haugen Foundation's Youth Equipment for Sports Safety (YESS) program, which, if schools send in grant applications, will provide high-school teams nationwide with the necessary protective padding that could have prevented their son's death. The padding is worn by many NFL players and is molded to fit each player's body shape.

"On impact, it relieves a lot of the stress and impact from a hit or a blow that you might receive during a play," said Choctawhatchee High School coach Greg Thomas.

Thus far, over 2,000 football players in both junior high schools and high schools across the country have received the pads, which cost \$90 per set.

According to Kathy Haugen, internal injuries are more common than many realize. "I get emails, phone calls all the time about these types of injuries.... It happens all the time," she said.

The Youth Equipment for Sports Safety program is just the latest addition to a variety of community services provided by the Taylor Haugen Foundation.

The Taylor Haugen Foundation also provides a Taylor Haugen Trophy to students who possess a combination of worthy attributes, including faith, leadership, academic achievement, and community service. Likewise, through its Taylor Reid Haugen Scholarship Fund, the foundation recognizes well-rounded individuals who exhibit qualities of faithfulness to God and work toward continuous improvement by providing them with \$1,500 scholarships.

Kindness Club

Two teenagers in Colonie, New York, have started a Kindness Club to spread love as a means to counteract bullies, mean girls, and troublemakers.

The Kindness Club hosted its first meeting on October 2 and six teens showed up, a good start for the aspiring do-gooders.

The *Albany Times Union* wrote, "Their goal is nothing more complicated than carrying out random acts of kindness and encouraging others to pay it forward."

The plan for the club was conceived during a conversation between two Colonie Central High School students, Oneida Shushe and Allegra Padula. "After another stressful day at school, we were talking about life and the grand scheme of things and how much we wished we took time to show more



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appreciation to people who made a difference in our lives,” said Shushe.

The girls decided to write notes of appreciation to their teachers and all those they admired, but they knew they wanted to do more. As regular volunteers for various service organizations, they knew they had a lot to offer.

Both girls serve on the Key Club and Science Club and are members of the National Honor Society. They volunteer at the town library and the Pay It Forward program. Additionally, the girls helped assemble 200 craft kits with fun activities for pediatric patients at the Albany Medical Center Hospital.

They decided that they would start a club in response to the bullying and cyberbullying that has been dominating many school campuses. “We never really know everyone’s story and what they’re going through, so why not make life a little easier for them,” Padula said. “We thought we could try to make kindness more the norm than the exception.”

The Kindness Club meets regularly to create inspiring and comforting items to be placed around the school. At their first meeting, volunteers decorated bookmarks with motivational quotes and placed them in books in the library’s team room in the hopes that whoever finds them will be inspired.

Elissa Valente, advisor to the girls’ club, is beyond impressed. “They make volunteering to help their community a priority in their lives,” she said.

Teens Helping Teens

Seattle’s Teen Link is a hotline for teens in crisis, answered by teens. All the teens who answer the phones are volunteers eager to help their peers through their tough times.

[KUOW.org](#) reported in September that Teen Link was started by Breona Mendoza, mother of Audra Letnes, who was murdered by her abusive boyfriend in 1996. Audra’s mother observed that at the time, there were few resources for teens to turn to when they were troubled, and hopes that Teen Link will serve as one of those resources.

Mendoza trains the volunteers to create an atmosphere where kids don’t feel like they are being judged.

Mendoza criticizes our culture’s insistence on doling out advice. “Most of the time when someone has a problem, they’ve thought about solutions already,” she said. “They don’t need to hear one more thing that they’ve already tried. What they need is for someone to listen.”

Instead, teen volunteers are trained to “talk it out” with callers, to provide support for the callers rather than tell them what to do.

One such teen, Colin (student volunteers are not permitted to share their last names), started volunteering in September because his friends always came to him with their problems and he thought he could be that go-to person for others.

“I’ve had several friends throughout my life deal with suicide and self-harm,” Colin said.

Erica, also a volunteer at Teen Link, finds the experience to be highly rewarding. “I’m never going to know what someone else’s life is like, but at least now I really think about it,” she explained.



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