



At A Glance

WHAT:

CHEER (Consciousness Helps Encourage Equal Respect) is a school-based program designed to encourage inclusion and open the eyes of students to see their fellow peers with special needs as more than their disability. The week-long program invites student volunteers, called CHEER Leaders, to adopt a disability for a day. The supplied kit includes visual impairment goggles, noise reduction headphones, whiteboards, slings (for dominant arms), and mouth guards (to simulate speech impairment). The school also organizes events and offers information throughout the week to help raise awareness about those living with disabilities. The week culminates with an assembly featuring a video of Kurt and Brenda discussing the importance of inclusion and the negative impact division causes. CHEER Leaders speak of their experiences and challenges faced while adopting a disability.

WHO:

Leadership

At least one adult advisor will be needed to oversee the program, however, the program is designed to be student led. A committee of at least four students should be formed to organize the activities of Recruitment, Publicity, Assembly, and Awareness.

Participants

Student participants called CHEER Leaders “adopt” a disability for a day. The basic kit includes equipment for four days of “adoptions” with 25 students participating per day.

Indirect Participants

Both CHEER Leaders and students who did not adopt disabilities are included in the assembly as well as any other activities planned for the week by the committee (i.e. Wheelchair basketball game)

Kurt Warner First Things First Foundation

The Foundation will provide a full “how to” kit in addition to the equipment needed to run the program and two videos featuring Kurt and Brenda Warner: one to help kick off the week and the other for the assembly. Staff is available to answer questions, offer advice, provide best practices and assist in trouble shooting problems to help schools maximize the impact of the program.

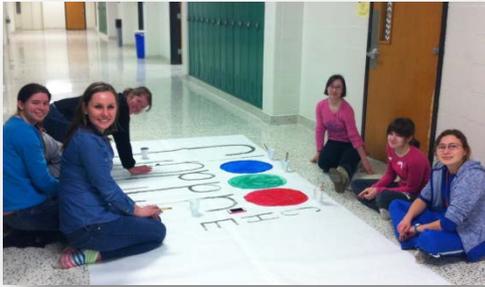
WHEN:

Schools interested in hosting the program should contact the Kurt Warner First Things First Foundation at 602-385-0840 to find a date convenient for the school when a program kit is available.

HOW:

The Kurt Warner First Things First Foundation covers the cost of the kits and shipping. The school is responsible for any rentals of AV equipment related to the assembly and ancillary supply costs for promoting the program at the school.

Frequently Asked Questions



How far in advance should we begin planning the CHEER program at our school?

We recommend a minimum of one month to plan all of the various activities associated with the CHEER program. However, the more advance planning the better.

What if a student has a test or presentation the day they are adopting a disability?

One of the benefits of having four days of disability “adoption” with each student adopting a disability on one of the days is to try to avoid scheduling a student on a day he/she has a test or presentation. If that is absolutely not possible to avoid, we recommend each school use its best judgment to allow a grace period during that test or presentation. Our goal is certainly not to have a long term negative effect on the grade of any student participating in CHEER.



How and why did the CHEER program begin?

After visiting her son’s high school at lunch and finding him sitting with his special education peers separated from the rest of the student population, Brenda Warner knew something had to be done to open the eyes of students and create an environment of inclusion.

We are a public school and cannot participate in programs that promote religion. Does the CHEER program promote Christianity?

The majority of schools that participate in CHEER are public schools. There is no mention of God, Jesus, or religion in any of the CHEER materials, either written or video.



Our school is small and we may not be able to recruit 25 students per day. Is there a minimum participation requirement?

Getting the direct involvement of as many students as possible will help schools achieve the best results from the CHEER program. However, there is no minimum number of students required to participate. Any unused equipment can simply be returned.

Our school is large and we’d like to include more than 25 students per day in the program. Is that possible?

We will do our best to help schools increase the potential number of students who can participate in the CHEER program each day and will work with schools on a case by case basis to determine the amount of increase each day available in the budget.



Our school isn’t able to schedule an all-school assembly this year? Are we still able to host CHEER?

In order to ensure the CHEER program goals of inclusion and respect are met, it’s important as many students as possible attend the assembly. However if an all-school assembly isn’t possible we are open to working with your school for a smaller section of students to be involved, i.e. one grade level.



Feedback



"The week of CHEER here was probably one of the most meaningful and inspirational weeks of my students' lives. The dialogue we shared during that time will always remain near to my heart." – Brenda, Department Chair for Special Education (Phoenix, AZ)



"We received tons of recognition from our district for the amazing program and kids keep asking when it will be back on campus." – Jordan Samson, Life Skills Teacher, Eleanor Roosevelt High School (Corona, CA)

"It was incredible! HUGE success! By the end of the first day, the advisor had lots of students that were not even involved in Best Buddies come ask if they could participate...It was a really great experience for all of the students at The First Academy and I am really excited to get more of our schools in central Florida involved next year!" – Brittney Donovan, Program Manager, Best Buddies Central Florida



"Faculty and students alike were moved and challenged to consider others from a new, inclusive perspective!...THANK YOU for helping to bring such an important message to our school community!!!" – Kimberly Dailey, Special Educator, Lindbergh High School (St. Louis, MO)

"In my freshmen learning lab today I had a mute CHEER participant. I thought it was really cool that she spent the entire class period using online tutorials on her phone to help learn some basic sign language. Every time I looked up, she was practicing signing different things. The program seems to really be enlightening students and encouraging learning about challenges many of our students face on a daily basis." – Kristin Drinen, Teacher, Lindbergh High School (St. Louis, MO)

#EqualRespect

