

# GLEN ROCK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Andrea H. Tahinos  
Director of Communications  
600 Harristown Road  
Glen Rock, NJ 07452

Phone: 201-445-7700 ext. 5011  
Fax: 201-389-5018  
tahinosa@glenrocknj.org

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Andrea Tahinos  
Date: Nov. 16, 2017

### **Glen Rock Middle School students learn about “Breaking the Cycle” of school violence**

Last month, students in Glen Rock Middle School were given a tremendous gift. Through the first-hand experience of others, they had the opportunity to learn about “Breaking the Cycle” of violence through forgiveness. For over an hour, the students in the packed auditorium sat fixated on four speakers, whose stories of adversity and tragedy each ended with a positive message of hope through forgiveness.

Breaking the Cycle was formed in 1999 in response to the massacre at Columbine High School. Since then, the organization has provided assemblies to tens of thousands of teens across the US and the UK. The real-life stories told by its speakers address the escalating problem of school violence that results from bullying, peer pressure, suicidal isolation, racism and intolerance. The panelists encourage their young audiences to value their own lives and those of others.

#### **“Learn to use the ‘F’ word: Forgiveness”**

Hashim Garrett was paralyzed from the waist down through a gang-related shooting at the age of 15. He has since turned his life around and learned to forgive those involved in the shooting. Today he is CEO of Wisdom and Understanding LLC, which provides education on proactive – not reactive – decision making, and the importance of goal setting to enlighten people about the consequences of their actions.

#### **“You are a family; you need to treat each other that way.”**

Ann Marie D’Aliso lost her teenage son to suicide. After working through the heartbreak and tremendous guilt for not recognizing he was clinically depressed, she is now on the board of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, has established a survivor support group, and speaks in schools on trauma, recovery and the importance of learning how to forgive one’s self.

#### **“Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% what you do about it.”**

Charles Williams, the former chief of police in Cornwall-on-Hudson, NY shared his striking personal story of how a legacy of alcohol abuse nearly destroyed his family, and the healing power of forgiveness that positively changed his life.

Following the event, the students were given the opportunity to share their thoughts about the assembly. Their responses are proof of the positive impact the speakers had on Glen Rock Middle School students:

“I liked how it was meaningful and relevant to our lives as young teens. Many of the stories told happened as a young teen or happened to kids in a school, so us as students could easily understand them.”

“I do believe that it is entirely true that tragedy can bring us the biggest life lessons. From the worst mistakes, we can help solve our endless problems of what we should and shouldn't do. No one is perfect, but we become closer and closer through lessons...”

“People are so worried about how they look and what other people are going to think of them... I think we as a culture can tolerate differences; it's just that people don't want to be the different one of the crowd. I think the one lesson from this [assembly] is that it's not cool to be someone else; the coolest you is you.”

“Having someone to talk to can help you get thoughts out that you don't want anyone else to know. This relieves you of the stress that is put on you from holding in this secret. Everyone needs someone to talk to like a friend, parent, sibling or teacher because without that you need to take on your problem by yourself instead of someone to help guide you. You may want to keep these things to yourself, but you need to get this terrible thought out of your head instead of letting one small thing kill you from the inside.”

“This assembly was undoubtedly very powerful, one of the most important assemblies I have ever had during elementary or middle school. The speakers weren't just saying stereotypical things... they were giving actual context with stories that at parts were, quite frankly, harrowing.”