

CULTURE TO CULTURE
FOUNDATION



2014 MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS
AWARD CEREMONY



IRVINGTON HIGH SCHOOL
VALHALLA THEATER
41800 BLACOW ROAD
FREMONT, CA 94538

MAY 31, 2014

WELCOME

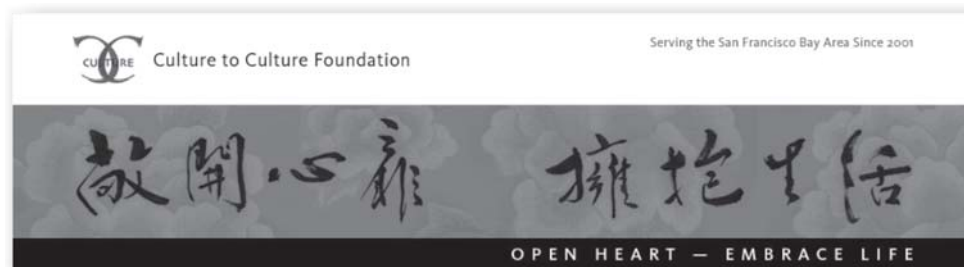
On behalf of the Culture to Culture Foundation, we welcome you to the 2014 Mental Health Awareness Award Ceremony. This year we asked students to tell us about their personal definitions of success and how these definitions impact their mental health. We were greatly inspired by the essays submitted by 242 students from 78 California high schools throughout the Bay Area and beyond, and believe you will be too. This is a special opportunity to learn about the diverse perspectives and aspirations of the students in our community, while supporting and celebrating each of their individual paths towards achieving happiness and fulfillment.



*Chia-Chia Chien, Founder
Culture to Culture Foundation*



*Shiao Chien Lee, Co-Founder
Culture to Culture Foundation*



Visit our website at: www.culturetoculture.org



INTRODUCTION

by G. Julie Xie, PhD.



At the inspirational Culture to Culture Foundation Essay Contest in 2013, 127 entries on *“the number one mental health issue affecting high school students”* opened our community's eyes on what our teenagers' challenges are from their own perspectives. More than half of those essays discussed how comparison with peers and reaching for goals set by social norm had added to, if not resulted into, anxiety, depression, eating disorder and other mental health difficulties. How does that happen? What could we do to help?

Thanks to the generous sponsorship of Mr. and Mrs. Jeff and Shiao Chien Lee and other sponsors, the Culture to Culture Foundation (C to C) is able to do another Mental Health Awareness Essay Contest for juniors and seniors in high school in spring 2014. This year's topic is *“How does your personal definition of success affect your mental health?”* Armed with last contest's positive impact, the C to C received endorsement from the State Superintendent Office, Superintendents of Fremont and San Ramon Valley Unified School District as well as the famed Challenge Success from Stanford University. Thanks to our community's support, 242 students from 78 high schools throughout the Bay Area and beyond submitted their essays within three months.

Reviewing the entries alongside four other judges, I was touched and inspired by our teenagers' heart-felt sharing in each and every essay. As an educator and school psychologist, this topic is particularly dear to my heart as I have been studying and presenting on the “true success in education” for different schools over the past three years. Our community, the Silicon Valley with large percentage of highly educated parents, is well known for our pride in good education in and outside of schools. However, we've suffered several heartbreaking losses of high achieving students over the past five years. Those are echoed by sad news from elite universities throughout our country. For instance, Harvard Crimson found that, counting enrolled undergraduates who committed suicide either on or off campus, Harvard's suicide rate is 18.18 per 100,000, which is significantly higher than the average for college students (*6.18 per 100,000 in a 2009-2010 nationwide study conducted by a University of Virginia researcher*). That rate increases to 24.24 per 100,000 when students who committed suicide while taking a leave of absence are included. And the list goes on in Princeton, Cornell, Stanford, and other prestigious colleges. Those are our cream of the crop, decorated with all signs of “success” such as perfect transcript, trophies and awards from all fields, leadership roles, etc.

What is wrong with this picture?

What is missing in our education?

How did our grade education fail to prepare those “successful students” for the challenges in college and beyond?

Thanks to our 242 brave participants, we were able to experience what they go through in high schools. They opened their hearts and opened our eyes. Many vividly documented how pressure from family and peers shaped their personal definition of “success” as they began forming their beliefs about themselves and the world around them when freshman year started.

“Crumpled papers, droopy eyelids, and insane amounts of caffeinated green tea. These were the factors I once thought made up the ingredients for ultimate success, which at the time consisted of a transcript of A's and strong standardized test scores.”

(Senior, Northgate High School)

“Once I reached high school, the pressure came crashing down. I had to take SAT classes, I had to take AP classes, I had to show leadership, play music, play sports, do community service, and speak another language. But I had to be the BEST at all of these, so I could beat out all the other kids and get into the best college and get all the best scholarships and get the best job that would give me the best life so I could show the world that I had the best mom who raised the best kid. ... My self-esteem and confidence were low. My worry grew to an extreme level, which made me prone to anxiety attacks when I thought of and feared all the things I had to do. ...”

(Senior, Silver Creek High School)

“The pressure to be perfect at school began to plague my rationality a year ago. Students at my school overloaded themselves with five to six AP classes and would talk down to those who didn't. My fear of being looked down upon by my peers, by myself, drove me to doing the same. For months I would barely sleep at night, either from staying up to study or the relentless anxiety about failing. I felt behind in everything I was committed to ... I was desperate to escape from the responsibilities of maintaining a perfect life.”

(Junior, Dougherty Valley High School)



INTRODUCTION

by G. Julie Xie, PhD.



continued

"Unfortunately, our vision of success has been marred by societal pressure, which dictates that we must achieve stellar grades and maintain a thriving social life."

(Junior, Washington High School)

Those concerns are echoed through findings from local as well as national surveys for our teenagers.

According to *Stanford Survey of Adolescent School Experiences* in 2009, 62% of the nearly 5,000 surveyed high school students in the Bay Area said that they always or almost always work hard in school, but only 10% always or almost always enjoy schoolwork. Furthermore, 54% of female and 32% of male students reported three or more symptoms of physical stress in the past month.

According to National Sleep Foundation (2006), teens need 9.25 hours of sleep each night but 80% of teens don't get the recommended amount of sleep.

According to Josephson Institute of Ethics' report card on American youth's values and actions, 59% of teenagers said that they had cheated on a test during the last year; 34% had done it more than twice; 1 in 3 admitted having used the internet to plagiarize an assignment. (Josephson Institute Center for Youth Ethics, 2010).

According to *Partnership attitude tracking study* by Partnership for a Drug-Free America (2008), 73% of students listed academic stress as their number one reason for using drugs while only 7 % of parents believe teens might use drugs to deal with stress.

The ironic fact is that the emphasis on "strong or perfect school grades" reported in most of the essay entries has no standing among studies on "success." Instead, characteristics such as resilience, self-motivation, goal-oriented, passion, perseverance, willing to take risks, etc. are repeated in various studies on "successful people." (See references.)

In the book, *Lives of Promise: What Becomes of High School Valedictorians*, Dr. Karen Arnold followed the progress of 81 Illinois high school valedictorians over 14 years to study the nature of academic success, its costs and rewards, and its effects on career and personal life. She found that those with perfect grades "*obey rules, work hard and like learning, but they're not the mold breakers*" because "*they've never been devoted to a single area in which they put all their passion. That is not usually a recipe for eminence.*"

Did we ignite our children's passion, the fuel for their motivation and the natural booster for mental health?

I'm inspired to see how many contestants pinpointed how personal definition of success impacts their mental health so significantly.

"I couldn't properly count the amount of times I questioned how I had gotten to this point (suicide attempt). ... I knew that there was a common denominator to it all: my personal fear of failure."

(Junior, Dougherty Valley High School)

I'm grateful for the reminder.

Isn't the courage to take risks the foundation where our great country's success is built upon?

Dr. Jeff Szymanski, a Clinical Psychologist, distinguished between "healthy" and "unhealthy" perfectionism in *The Perfectionist's Handbook: Take Risks, Invite Criticism, and Make the Most of Your Mistakes* (2011). The difference is not on the "high expectations" but our approach to obtain the goal as well as our reaction when things are not going well.

While our schools pass on book knowledge, did we teach our children life lessons such as frustration tolerance, coping skills with anxiety, and sense of gratitude?

Did we discuss that everyone is different and judging a fish by its ability to climb a tree is not logical?

Did we show them that life is not perfect and how to deal with "imperfection" and "setback" is as important as algebra equations?

Did we emphasize that social and communication skills are as important as economic theories?

Did we help them link the knowledge taught in class to applications in life to promote their enthusiasm in learning for the life time?



INTRODUCTION

by G. Julie Xie, PhD.



continued

Teenager years are full of wonders, trials and errors as they try to understand themselves and the world around, discover who they are and what they can or cannot do before they leave home for more independence. I'm encouraged to see how many contestants were able to find out that "success" does not exist without taking care of their mental health. With their family and communities' help, many found a balance between the two after developing more awareness of the significance of mental health.

"My personal definition of success used to be a heavy burden on my mental health. With the help of my supportive family and friends, I am able to realize the true meaning of success. To me, success is anything that gives me happiness and pride in who I am. Taking care of myself is a necessity for my wellbeing. Enjoying life is success. I will be sure to keep this healthy vision of success for years to come."

(Senior, Northgate High School)

"In the beginning of my high school experience, success dictated my mental health. However, after my experiences, my mental health now dictates my success. I no longer look at success as striving to be the best, but instead, I look at what makes me happy. ... If I can be happy through life's experiences, I have succeeded. "

(Senior, Dozier-Libbey Medical High School)

"I used to think that reaching my goal is the way I define success. However, this method of defining success became discouraging when I failed to reach my goals. As a result, I decided to define success as the strength to continue to do my best under circumstances where I am least comfortable. This definition allows me to evaluate my performance depending on different situations. In addition, this flexibility enables me to maintain a positive mindset throughout my life."

(Senior, Lowell High School)

"There is no best and there never will be; the standards by which I had been measuring my worth are boundaries that cannot contain all that I am. I am not limited to my imperfect GPA or standardized test scores or the number of trophies and certificates that I own. I am not defined by how many people I rank above or how many problems I solved incorrectly on my latest math test. I am so much more than a comparison to others."

(Junior, Alhambra High School)

"So I'm trying to change. Instead of waiting for my mom to be happy and compliment how much I've accomplished, I'm trying to do so myself. Instead of seeing my goal as "pleasing Mom", I'm trying to find my own goals and passions in life. I want to change my personal definition of success to "being happy". It's really difficult, trying to remind myself that my life is not all about reaching my mom's expectations. But on the bright side, at least I have realized it. Moving my life's spotlight from my mom to me is a slow work in progress, but it's getting somewhere. ... And if my definition of success now is building a healthy, happy world, I have to start by building a healthy, happy "me" first."

(Senior, Silver Creek High School)

"Success is seeing the world through my own eyes, not someone else's camera lens. ... I just want to find myself, fix myself. ... We live too much in the future, in the bodies of our future selves, because our present selves just aren't good enough. ... But what if I just let it all go? What if I was happy with Present Me and Past Me wasn't someone to regret, but someone to admire? ... My dreams are noble, my hard work admirable, my efforts laudable, but my sanity and love for myself at every moment of every day is crucial."

(Junior, Monta Vista High School)

"The standards of success at my school have produced a culture of guilt and inadequacy among students. I know for a fact I am not its only victim. Especially since the beginning of my junior year I have felt that everything that I am, everything that I believe in, has been reduced to meaningless numbers on a piece of paper. I am an advocate for changing this culture. While I managed to get out and get myself help, I am frightened that others may not be so lucky."

(Junior, Dougherty Valley High School)

Challenge Success at Stanford University has listed strategies for families to help their children find true success (2009). What they have recommended, such as "to ease performance pressure; to avoid over-scheduling; to find their



INTRODUCTION

by G. Julie Xie, PhD.



continued

passion; to maintain down time and family time," are echoed in many contestants' reflections.

"The definition of success is the accomplishment of an aim or purpose, and my aim was to lead a full, happy, varied life. Overwhelming myself with numerous activities did nothing but make me miss little points in my life, like relaxing, playing with my siblings, or cultivating a healthy relationship with my mom. I realized that I could not be triumphant if I continued on the destructive and engulfing path I had set myself on. When working towards my goals I should be content and driven, and when I reach them, I should celebrate instead of disregarding it and focusing on my next checkpoint. I began to realize that I am allowed to have small triumphs count on my bigger path to leading a successful life."

(Senior, Homestead High School)

Mental health generally refers to "a state of well-being which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (WHO).

Isn't that what we wish for all of our younger generations?

Culture to Culture Foundation (C to C), a nonprofit organization, has been working tirelessly to raise awareness for the importance of mental health and provide better access to culturally competent mental health services. In the past, C to C has organized many mental health workshops and given scholarships for adults. We are very grateful that Mrs. Chia Chia Chien, founder of C to C, recognized the growing needs among our younger generations and extended the scholarship to high school students in 2013.

Thanks again to the C to C's Mental Health Awareness Essay Contest, we have the opportunity getting to know our younger generations more through their own voices. While we are relieved to see that, with support from family and friends, many teenagers grow and learn from their struggles during the four years in high school, there are also many others who identified the negative impact of an unhealthy definition of "success" but continued to be confused about how to overcome it. We pray that more teenagers could have an opportunity to read those essays, learn from their peers' experiences and lessons, recognize the importance of mental health and grow along their journey to true "success."

Research conducted by Mental Health America found that the more educated the population, the lower the percentage of reported unmet mental healthcare needs, the better the state's depression status. In addition, the more generous a state's mental health parity coverage, the greater the number of people in the population that receive mental health services. May our community leaders read those essays and devote more resources to parent education, Positive Psychology classes and other productive approaches to build a more supportive environment for our teenagers' mental health. For instance, Hopkins Junior High in Fremont started Parents' Night on "Authentic Success" since 2011, which has been well received by the local community.

We understand that we still have a lot more to improve on mental health care for teenagers. However, like one old Chinese proverb states: "the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." The ultimate goal for this essay contest is to raise awareness of the importance of mental health in high school students. It is C to C's hope that those seeds of awareness will grow into a forest of community support to our teenagers' mental health development in the near future.

Reference

The Winner's Brain: 8 Strategies Great Minds Use to Achieve Success (Da Capo Press, 2010).

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success. (Ballantine Books, NY, 2006).

Outliers: The Story of Success. (Little, Brown and Company, NY, 2008).

The Talent Code. (Bantam Books, 2009)

Mental Health Issues Affecting High School Students in the Bay Area. <http://overseaswindow.com/node/10005>



PROGRAM



CALL TO START

Chia-Chia Chien, Founder of the Culture to Culture Foundation

WELCOME REMARKS

Shiao Chien Lee, Co-Founder of the Culture to Culture Foundation

REMARKS FROM THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT TOM TORLAKSON

Mrs. Mae Cendaña Torlakson

REMARKS FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE FREMONT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Dr. James Morris

VIDEO



STUDENTS' PRESENTATION

Alaina Bain

Lauren Farnworth

Liya Khan

Kelly Knowles

Stefanie Roberts

Hannah Travis

Andy Zhang



PARENTS' PRESENTATION

Mr. Cheng, father of Christina Cheng

Mr. Nagesh, Father of Neha Nagesh

Ms. Jenna Smith, Stepmother of Sage Franet-Selvan



PROGRAM



REMARKS FROM STANFORD'S CHALLENGE SUCCESS

Ms Maureen Brown, Executive Director

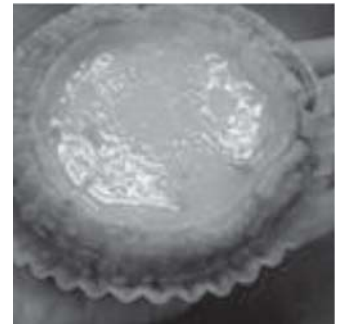
AWARD PRESENTATION

CLOSING REMARKS

Shiao Chien Lee

RECEPTION

*Please join us for an outdoor reception
in the school courtyard behind the theater.*





PROGRAM



Winners

- * Chung Mei Chen - 12th Grade, Lowell High School, San Francisco
- * Christina Cheng - 11th Grade, Monta Vista High School, Cupertino
- * Lauren Farnworth - 12th Grade, Dozier-Libbey Medical High School, Antioch
- * Sage Franet-Selvan - 11th Grade, Burlingame High School, Burlingame
- * Jacquelyn Hampton - 12th Grade, Las Lomas High School, Walnut Creek
- * Liya Khan - 11th Grade, Dougherty High School, San Ramon
- * Stefanie Roberts - 11th Grade, Burlingame High School, Burlingame
- * Joshua Tsuei - 11th Grade, Monta Vista High School, Cupertino
- * Miranda Yu - 12th Grade, Silver Creek High School, San Jose
- * Andy Zhang - 11th Grade, Claremont High School, Claremont

Honorable Mention

- * Alaina Bain - 12th Grade, Las Lomas High School, Walnut Creek
- * Denzelle Casil, 12th Grade, Irvington High School, Fremont
- * James Chen - 11th Grade, Mills High School, Milbrae
- * Michael Chen - 12th Grade, Monta Vista High School, Cupertino
- * Sania Elahi - 11th Grade, Amador Valley High School, Pleasanton
- * Nina Hu - 12th Grade, Monta Vista High School, Cupertino
- * Tara Iyer - 11th Grade, Evergreen Valley High School, San Jose
- * Kelly Knowles - 12th Grade, Amador Valley High School, Pleasanton
- * Ausine Lai - 11th Grade, The Harker School, San Jose
- * Rebecca Lei - 11th Grade, San Gabriel High School, Alhambra
- * Mei-Mei Chun Moi - 11th Grade, Burlingame High School, Burlingame
- * Neha Nagesh - 11th Grade, Washington High School, Fremont
- * Allison Pei - 12th Grade, Dougherty Valley High School, San Ramon
- * Caroline Ren - 11th Grade, Alhambra High School, Alhambra
- * Hannah Sanford - 12th Grade, Monta Vista High School, Cupertino
- * Kathryn Shimizu - 12th Grade, Northgate High School, Walnut Creek
- * Dominic Timpano - 11th Grade, Burlingame High School, Burlingame
- * Hannah Travis - 11th Grade, San Mateo High School, San Mateo
- * Mallika Varkhedi - 11th Grade, Evergreen Valley High School, San Jose
- * Linda Xia - 11th Grade, Monta Vista High School, Cupertino



2014 MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AWARD



Contest Winners with \$1000 Award



Chung Mei Chen

12th Grade
Lowell High School
San Francisco



Christina Cheng

11th Grade
Monta Vista High School
Cupertino



Lauren Farnworth

12th Grade
Dozier-Libbey Medical High School
Antioch



Sage Eve Franet-Selvan

11th Grade
Burlingame High School
Burlingame



Jacquelyn Hampton

12th Grade
Las Lomas High School
Walnut Creek



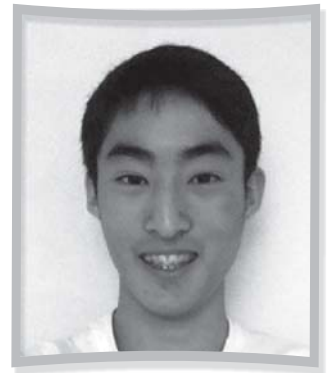
Liya Khan

11th Grade
Dougherty High School
San Ramon



Stefanie Roberts

11th Grade
Burlingame High School
Burlingame



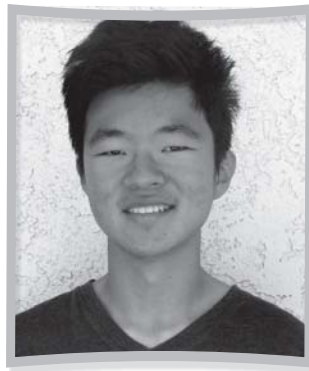
Joshua Tsuei

11th Grade
Monta Vista High School
Cupertino



Miranda Yu

12th Grade
Silver Creek High School
San Jose



Andy Zhang

11th Grade
Claremont High School
Claremont





2014 MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AWARD



The Honorable Mention with \$250 Award



Alaina Bain

*12th Grade
Las Lomas High School
Walnut Creek*



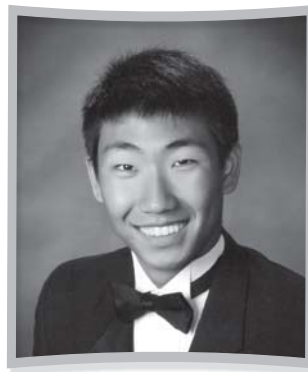
Denzelle Casil

*12th Grade
Irvington High School
Fremont*



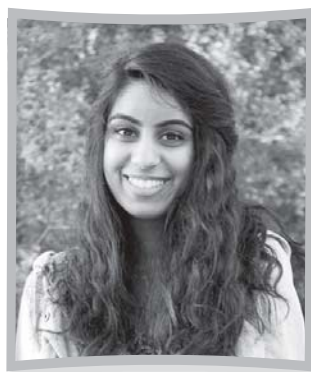
James Chen

*11th Grade
Mills High School
Milbrae*



Michael Chen

*12th Grade
Monta Vista High School
Cupertino*



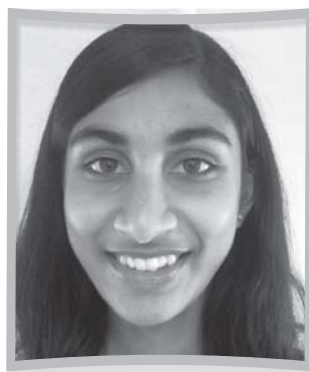
Sania Elahi

*11th Grade
Amador Valley High School
Pleasanton*



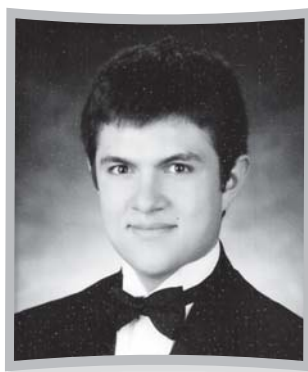
Nina Hu

*12th Grade
Monta Vista High School
Cupertino*



Tara Iyer

*11th Grade
Evergreen Valley High School
San Jose*



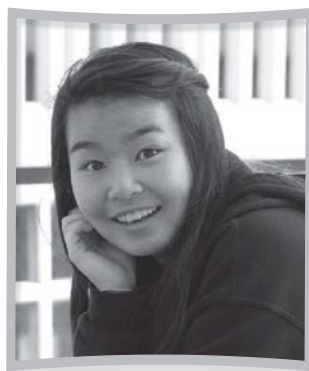
Kelly Knowles

*12th Grade
Amador Valley High School
Pleasanton*



Austin Lai

*11th Grade
The Harker School
San Jose*



Rebecca Lei

*11th Grade
San Gabriel High School
Alhambra*





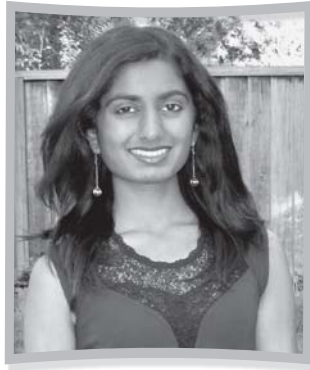
2014 MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AWARD



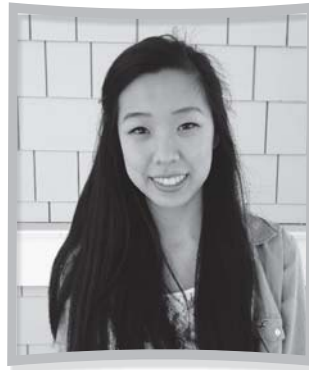
The Honorable Mention with \$250 Award



Mei-Mei Chun Moi
11th Grade
Burlingame High School
Burlingame



Neha Nagesh
11th Grade
Washington High School
Fremont



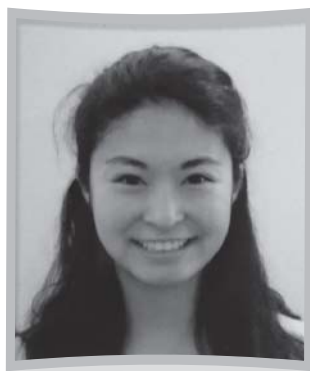
Allison Pei
12th Grade
Dougherty Valley High School
San Ramon



Caroline Ren
11th Grade
Alhambra High School
Alhambra



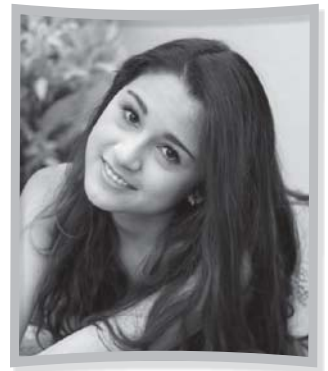
Hannah Sanford
12th Grade
Monta Vista High School
Cupertino



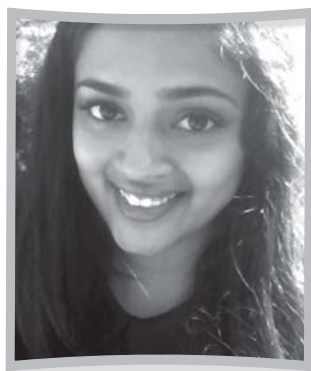
Kathryn Shimizu
12th Grade
Northgate High School
Walnut Creek



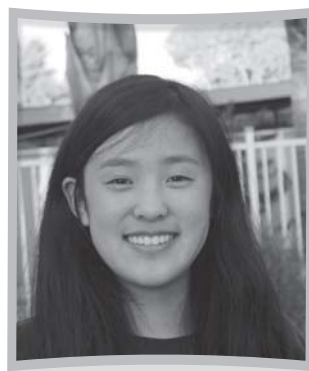
Dominic Timpano
11th Grade
Burlingame High School
Burlingame



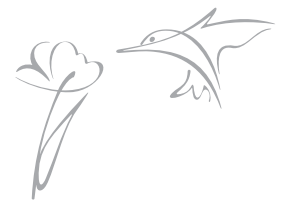
Hannah Travis
11th Grade
San Mateo High School
San Mateo



Mallika Varkhedi
11th Grade
Evergreen Valley High School
San Jose



Linda Xia
11th Grade
Monta Vista High School
Cupertino





JUDGES OF OUR REVIEW COMMITTEE



Mary Ellen, Chair of the Valley Care Medical Foundation, Ambassador and Community Volunteer



Across the essays I reviewed the general theme of the students understanding of success dismissed money, materialistic accumulations, and popularity. Rather it was the import of family, friends, good health, and entering an occupation in which one enjoyed and realized their passion. There were some who characterized their personal experiences of depression, cutting, isolation, and imperfection while seeking to be the best in their school and/or extracurricular activities. Few were able to express and perhaps even comprehend the personal “success” in working through the despair. It was extremely difficult to select one or two out of such profound writing, especially those that tugged at one’s heartstrings.

Kenneth Mintz, San Ramon Valley Unified School District Board of Education Trustee



I was honored to participate in judging this year’s Culture to Culture essay competition. I appreciate the students’ willingness to share their candid and honest perspectives on the struggles they endure in coping with the challenges growing up in today’s fast-paced, always-on, success-oriented environment. They collectively spoke to the need for thoughtful balance and support as each of us determines the course we’d like our lives to take. Their insights into how their personal definition of success affected their mental health caused me to reflect on my own values associated with success and how it has impacted me. I felt personally enriched by their contributions to this effort.

Hung Wei, Member of Board of Trustees, Fremont Union High School District



It is a privilege and honor for me to read the essays written by teens who told of their personal and emotional journeys that often touch my heart. Many of them struggle to define what “success” really means in life, how “being successful” brings feelings of failure and constant self-criticism, and often, teens realize that achieving “success” academically and/or in extracurricular activities does not equal to “happiness”. After reading all these heart-felt stories from current high school students, I am more aware that we need to cultivate a healthy meaning of “success” among our teens - that success is feeling loved, success is being surrounded by friendship, success is feeling secured in trying new things, success is not being afraid of failures, and that success is being happy

in what we do, instead of being judged by what we achieve.

G. Julie Xie, Ph.D., School Psychologist at Fremont Unified School District



I was touched and inspired by our teenagers’ heart-felt sharing in each and every essay. Thanks to our 242 brave participants, we were able to experience what they go through in high school. They opened their hearts and opened our eyes. They vividly documented how narrow definitions of “success” negatively impact their mental health while more positive definitions of “success” boost mental health. They taught us first hand why characteristics such as resilience, perseverance and courage to take risks are so crucial to “success.” They also reminded us the importance of integrating those life lessons in high school curriculum in order to better prepare them for college life and beyond. I sincerely wish that all children, parents, educators, and community leaders have

access to those messages voiced through those beautiful writings so we could work together to build a more supportive environment for our teenagers’ mental health.

Dr. Paul Yang, M.D., Ph.D., Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, University of California, San Francisco



I was deeply touched by the each of the essays that depicted vividly the struggle and the transformation students have gone through. I believe that their personal story can serve as a role model to help all high school students redefining success and improve mental health.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Thank You, Thank You, and More Thank Yous

We are very thankful to the following people who have made our Culture to Culture Foundation's mission possible in the last 13 years.

Event Sponsor

Jeff and Shiao Lee

Diamond Sponsors

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Thank You, Thank You, and More Thank Yous

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 - ★ Hung Wei, Member of Board of Trustees, Fremont Union High School District
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