

Fostering Youth Peacemakers: Bully-Proofing Schools by Building Empathy

OaklandOakland



Vicki Abadesco



Year Founded:

2001

Organization type:

hybrid

Project Stage:

Scaling

Budget:

\$500,000 - \$1 million

Website:

<http://www.soulshoppe.com>

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/SoulShoppe>

 SHARE

- [Conflict resolution](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Youth development](#)
- [Youth leadership](#)

Project Summary

Elevator Pitch

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

For 14 years, SS has created empathy-based learning environments that eliminate bullying at the roots. Our results go deeper than offering good curricula- we help students, teachers and parents EXPERIENCE empathy, then walk them through real problems to transform how they interact on a daily basis.

WHAT IF - Inspiration: Write one sentence that describes a way that your project dares to ask, "WHAT IF?"

What if we could infuse a culture of empathy in elementary schools so powerfully, so pervasively that it eradicates bullying in middle and high schools?

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

Bullying is the problem. How schools handle it is a bigger problem. Schools know the power of positive discipline but still rely on shame,

punishment and separation to curb bullying. Why? They don't have the tools and training to create an empathy-based learning environment, where kids can safely learn to regulate emotions. It's not enough to teach SHOULD, set a new standard or say no – if we haven't experienced empathy, we can't recreate it.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

To really end bullying, we need to provide an experience of empathy, and tools, trainings and reminders that show us HOW to take care of underlying feelings and needs that contribute to bullying. SS provides a WHOLE-SCHOOL (staff/parents/kids) approach addressing causes as well as behaviors, with specific tools to help us slow down, articulate feelings and needs, and try again. Our schools learn HOW to make positive behavior theory a daily practice. Our on-site trainers engage people in a shared experience, normalizing feelings and making it safe to be real and share in a healthy way. We leave tools in hands AND hearts, on the walls, and literally painted on the playground to remind kids to stop bullying and solve problems at their roots.

Impact: How does it Work

Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.

Our programs bring happier kids, higher test scores, and fewer suspensions. A Martinez principal used SS to unite her divided staff with our empathy-based discipline tools. Students used our Clean Up tool to slow down, address problems by identifying feelings and needs and change behaviors accordingly, planning for next time. Teachers tracked the new behaviors and adjusted them as needed. As a result, their API scores rose a whopping 48 points and suspensions were halved. We've had parents call us to say our Peace Path saved their marriages, and kids transform abusive family situations and avoid gang membership. A South Bay principal said "other programs give good content, but we come to Soul Shoppe to learn how to truly implement it."

Impact: What is the impact of the work to date? Also describe the projected future impact for the coming years.

Of near 1000 schools/250,000 kids served, schools consistently report fewer referrals/suspensions/absences, higher test scores, more calm/focus, better student rapport and dramatic decreases in bullying. A recent research project polling 300 school staff in 20 schools showed: 98% say our programs provide useful skills/address relevant problems. 93% say we positively impact how students think of themselves. 91% say we positively impact how they treat each other. 90% of teachers review/use our tools in their classrooms and 92% say we play an important role in their school. We have 100s of stories where kids recognize and stop bullying, change abusive family dynamics, handle long-standing recess/classroom issues. One teacher said "Students are given tools to problem solve on their own. Many of them aren't modeled these skills at home and I see them make huge strides after each workshop."

Spread Strategies: Moving forward, what are the main strategies for scaling impact?

We want our change-making programs to bully-proof schools and communities across California, the nation, and eventually the globe. Our expansion plan includes: •Training more facilitators to accommodate scaling •Conducting a comprehensive research study showing our impact and putting us on the "state-approved" list of programs •Expanding online trainings to bring our content more affordably and accessibly to parents and teachers •Completing development of our social-emotional learning app and our accredited teacher training •Continuing international expansion beyond Holland and Canada.

Sustainability

Financial Sustainability Plan: What is this solution's plan to ensure financial sustainability?

The business has lasted 14 years through 2 recessions. The core business is self-sustaining with a simple model of \$1,000 per program day with a realistic capacity of approximately 120 days per facilitator. So this core business is flexible - capable of scaling down if necessary or ramping up to meet demand as we reach more schools. More resources move us across the nation and onto a digital platform which helps us scale up and expand our reach.

Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?

No Bully, Girl Power and Playworks have good but narrowly focused programs that miss critical whole-school training, making lasting change less likely. Steps to Respect and Second Step provide curriculum that teachers have to implement (on top of all else) with little/no training, so effectiveness varies greatly. Project Cornerstone, according to one of our principals, provides good data but she comes to SS for the "how to." SS programs are engaging and experiential (=better retention). Our facilitators connect deeply with kids, modeling empathy and giving it language so kids can embody it.

Team

Founding Story

Co-founder Vicki Abadesco was a Program Supervisor at SF Peer Resources for SF Unified and a crisis intervention specialist (conflict resolution/violence prevention) teaching high school students to be peer advocates. Co-founder Joseph Savage was a seasoned elementary teacher who hated seeing social-emotional programs cut and teachers losing time to develop kids socially. They both realized that reaching kids in High School was too late, and that creating a foundation of empathy and self-esteem in elementary might just end the big problems before they start. From that, Soul Shoppe was born, capturing the essence of their previous work and giving kids helpful tools they need to navigate successfully through life from Kindergarten.

Team

Our full-time staff have over 80 yrs combined experience with Youth Dev, Curriculum Dev, Empathy and Leadership Training. Our 9 person team is 2 co-founders running Bus. Dev, Programs and Training; 3 full-time staff: Ofc Mgr; Sales/Program Mgmt; Development/Program Mgmt; 2 part-time

Facilitators; a part-time Project Mgr; a part-time Finance Director. Our Finance Director has over 20 years of managing finances for organizations and corporations.

About You

Organization:

soul shoppe

About You

First Name

Vicki

Last Name

Abadesco

Twitter URL**Facebook URL**

<http://facebook.com/soulshoppe>

About Your Project

Organization Name

soul shoppe

How long has your organization been operating?

Project

Organization Country

United States, CA, Oakland

Country where this project is creating social impact**What awards or honors has the project received?****Funding: How is your project financial supported?**

Individuals, Businesses, Customers.

Supplemental Information

On which of the following California counties does your project focus its impact? (check all that apply):

San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, Monterey, Other.

How does your idea help cultivate empathy skills to strengthen communities and equip young people to become leaders of change?

Soul Shoppe introduces a common language to the whole school, helping students become activists and adults to support them effectively. Beyond providing skills, we bring an experience that allows people to see from another's perspective, so they care and feel motivated to use what they learn. An example is our "Be An Ally" assembly where students talk about how it feels to need an ally, and practice what to say and do to safely intervene when they see bullying and other hurtful behavior. Our "Peacemaker Program" trains 30 students to become allies and help peers resolve problems on the playground after assemblies are over. Our adult trainings give social emotional how-to's to help teachers model safe boundaries and train new behaviors.

Needs/Offers

Need

We always need incredible, youthful, mindful facilitators! People of color strongly encouraged.

Offer

We can offer dynamic facilitator training, heart-opening facilitation for big company meetings, corporate empathy trainings!

Tell us about your partnerships

Current Clients: Over 100 Bay Area Schools/70,000 kids; SF Giants Jr. Giants Summer League. Educational Partners (credibility, reach, message): Alameda Co. Ofc of Ed (cohost annual Bullying Prevention Conf); Ca Inst of Integral Studies (co-developing adult Continuing Education Programs). Professional Partners (financial, tech & social network support): MedHelp (co-developing social/emot awareness app), 6x Project (finance), BB Coaching (mktg).

Challenges

Reaching more markets is our biggest challenge. We know how to activate empathy in school children when we are physically at an assembly. Reaching beyond that market to parents and adults, as well as remote national and international schools is the challenge. To increase our reach we need additional resources to:

- Digitize and sell what we have learned
- Formalize research on our efficacy

- Implement a University accredited teacher training program
- Roll out a Franchise model
- Complete a series of children's books
- Hire and train more facilitators

Does your project use any of the following approaches to cultivate community members as empathetic and collaborative leaders?

creating a safe space, developing emotional competency, building leadership skills, group play, storytelling, collective problem-solving, identifying shared values and differences, instilling courage, enabling action.

Target Age Group(s)

6-12.

Source URL: <https://www.changemakers.com/packardempathy/entries/fostering-youth-peacemakers>