



COMMUNITY
MATTERS

Safe School
Ambassadors®

2024/2025 ANNUAL REPORT





Message from the CEO

Dear Friends and Supporters of Community Matters,

I am filled with immense gratitude and optimism looking ahead to the 2025-2026 school year. Our mission to equip and empower students and adults to create safe, welcoming, and inclusive schools and communities has never been more crucial, and your unwavering support has been the cornerstone of our success.

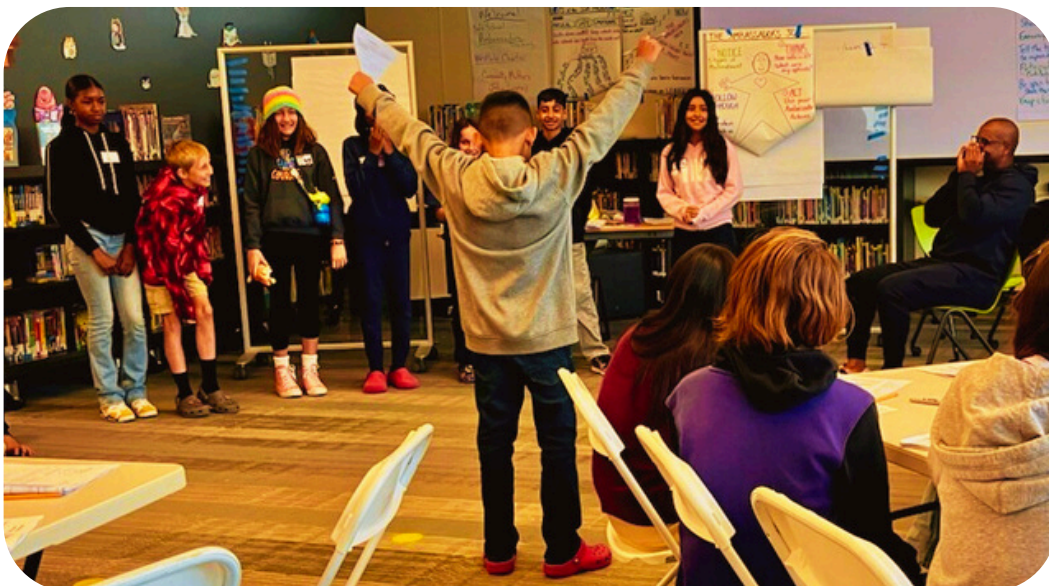
Since our founding in 1996, Community Matters has grown from a focus on youth development and bullying prevention to become an internationally recognized organization. Our Whole School Climate Framework has touched the lives of countless individuals. Your dedication has enabled us to work with over 2,100 schools and organizations and empower more than 170,000 students to be the change-makers in their own environments. The impact of our collective efforts is evident in the safer, more inclusive spaces we've helped create, where every individual feels valued and supported.

As we look to the future, we are excited about the potential to expand our reach and deepen our impact. With your continued support, we aim to introduce our programs to even more schools, equip a new generation of young leaders with the tools to intervene in bullying and violent acts, and to foster environments of mutual respect and understanding.

Your belief in our mission fuels our work and inspires us to push harder, reach further, and dream bigger. Together, we are not just envisioning a better future – we are actively creating it, one school and one community at a time.

Thank you for being an integral part of this journey. Your continued support will help us make the the upcoming school year our most impactful yet, as we strive to create a world where all individuals feel safe, valued, and empowered to reach their full potential.

With heartfelt gratitude and hope for the future,
Erica Vogel, CEO



About Community Matters

Who We Are:

Community Matters is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1996 and based in Sonoma County, CA. For 25+ years, we've helped schools build safer, more inclusive climates.

Our Whole School Climate Framework guides everything we do. It's a systemic approach that equips students and adults to share responsibility for a positive and safe school culture. We know students thrive when their social and emotional needs are met in and out of the classroom.

What we provide:

- Evidence-based programs that advance: school safety, violence prevention, bullying and cyber-bullying prevention, youth voice and empowerment, belonging, and connection.
- Restorative Practices training and consulting for educators and youth-serving leaders.
- Consulting, presentations, workshops, and trainings tailored to schools and organizations.

The results are real.

Schools implementing our programs report: safer campuses, fewer suspensions, stronger attendance, improved academic outcomes, and fewer alternative placements along with measurable savings of time and resources. Our flagship program, Safe School Ambassadors® (SSA), was listed in SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (2012–2017). SSA identifies socially influential student leaders and equips them with practical, non-violent communication and intervention skills to prevent, interrupt, and report bullying, harassment, and cyber-bullying among their peers.



Community Matters is led by CEO Erica Vogel, a 30+ year nonprofit and education leader who held senior roles at the YMCA, American Heart Association, and Big Brothers Big Sisters. She joined Community Matters in 2010 and became CEO in 2020.

Founder and former Executive Director Rick Phillips is the author of *Safe School Ambassadors: Harnessing Student Power to Stop Bullying and Violence*. He continues to advise as a nationally recognized expert in violence prevention and school climate transformation.

Our Board of Directors comprises of respected leaders from education, community building, finance, healthcare, and the nonprofit sector, providing strategic guidance and strong community ties. Together, our leadership is united by one purpose: youth empowerment and school safety.

2024/2025 Impact Report



NATIONAL IMPACT

SAFE SCHOOL AMBASSADORS

189 SCHOOLS IMPACTED
5,706 STUDENTS EMPOWERED
1,032 EDUCATORS TRAINED
4 TOT TRAININGS W/ **63** EDUCATORS TRAINED



WAKING UP COURAGE ASSEMBLIES

13 ASSEMBLIES
6,518 STUDENTS EMPOWERED

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

77 TRAININGS
1,668 EDUCATORS TRAINED

SAFE SCHOOL BUDDIES

13 SCHOOLS
326 YOUTH EMPOWERED
66 EDUCATORS TRAINED

“BACKYARD” IMPACT

IN OUR HOME COUNTY OF SONOMA, CA:

SAFE SCHOOL AMBASSADORS

31 SCHOOLS IMPACTED
924 YOUTH EMPOWERED
139 EDUCATORS TRAINED
1 TOT TRAINING W/ **10** EDUCATORS TRAINED

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

9 TRAININGS
207 EDUCATORS TRAINED

WAKING UP COURAGE ASSEMBLIES

1 ASSEMBLY
390 YOUTH EMPOWERED

SAFE SCHOOL BUDDIES

1 SCHOOL
24 STUDENTS EMPOWERED



Since 1996, Community Matters impact has reached youth & adults in **42 States, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam, Japan, Paraguay, and Canada.**
170,000+ Youth Empowered | **30,000+** School Staff Trained
2,100+ Schools & Organizations Served

96% of Ambassadors state that since having become an Ambassador they think more about how their words and actions affect other people.

"The students seem happier coming to school this year... Chronic Absenteeism has dropped from 23.7% to 8%. One of our yard duty aids commented, 'I barely need to do anything anymore, the old student problems like harassment and fighting have gone down.'"

"I now have a sense of desire to actively make a difference. There has been a major decrease in exclusion on campus."

89% of Ambassadors state that since becoming an Ambassador, they feel more comfortable at school.

90% of Ambassadors state that since becoming an Ambassador, they feel more accepting of other students outside their friend group.

"The momentum is undeniable. During our commencement ceremony, we proudly recognized our 6th-grade ambassadors, many of whom expressed how meaningful the experience was."

"Over the past months, we've watched these students rise to the challenge. They are more than leaders - they are role models. They've de-escalated conflicts, supported peers through emotional moments, and taken real ownership of the kind of culture they want to see."

89% of Ambassadors state that since becoming an Ambassador they know what to do or say if they see hateful content online.

THE MOST REPEATED WORDS STUDENTS USED TO DESCRIBE THE TRAINING
EMPOWERING | INFORMATIVE | **SUPPORTIVE** | VALUABLE | **MEANINGFUL**

Thank you for your generous support
from all of us at Community Matters!

Board of Directors



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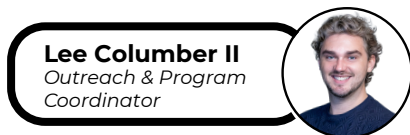
Our Leadership & Staff Team



Erica Vogel
Chief Executive Officer



Max Buschman
Development Manager



Lee Columber II
*Outreach & Program
Coordinator*



LeeAnn Lichnovsky
Sr. Director, Outreach



Gwenth Shears
*Outreach & Program
Coordinator*



Ashley Ranger
*Program & Training
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Kimberlyn Moffet
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Training*



Emma Edwards
*Outreach & Program
Coordinator*



Raedene Simson
Administrative Assistant



Erica Buonassisi
Finance & HR Director



Jahmela Kushkaki
*Finance & Executive
Coordinator*



Marin Broadbent-Bell
SSA Alumni Coordinator



Geo Howard
Operations Manager



Brett Naftzger
*Outreach & Grant
Specialist*



Nolan Steinhart
Operations Assistant