



A PROJECT OF THE VERMONT SECRETARY OF STATE

# DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

## PART FOUR PEOPLE WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

### VERMONTERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Voting is only one way to make a difference in your community, state or world. Here are some examples of young Vermonters who have made a difference.



**EMILY LESTER**

Emily Lester of Plainfield is living proof that you don't have to be an elected official to make a difference. You don't even have to be an adult!

Emily wanted to ensure that foster children had the same opportunity to go to college as children who had parents who could help support them. As part of a school program called "Project Citizen," Emily and three other Eighth Grade students asked the legislature to allow foster children who meet the entrance requirements of a state college or university to attend that school for free.

Emily began in the spring of 2001 by discussing this idea with her Representative, the Lieutenant Governor, the Governor's office, and the Vermont Foster Parents Association. Although these conversations did not result in a legislative proposal, the next year Emily was able to get a bill introduced. Unfortunately, although the education committee liked the bill it was never brought up for a vote. Emily did not give up.

In response to concerns that the first bill could be too costly, Emily drafted a new proposal to provide grants up to \$3,000 to be used at any state college or university by any foster child who had been in state custody for six months or more and who has graduated high school. Emily again had the bill introduced and lobbied the legislature. Although the bill passed the Vermont House overwhelmingly (109 to 17) there was not enough time for the Senate to take up the bill.

Over the summer of 2003, Emily met with various Senators, and she spoke to the Governor's office to ensure that there would be money in the budget for the grants. The legislature reconvened in January 2004, and in early February Emily's bill passed the Senate and was signed into law by the governor. Emily Lester's one voice changed state law so that foster children might have a better chance to succeed. Emily is a Vermonter that truly made a difference!



**KATHERINE MESNER-HAGE**

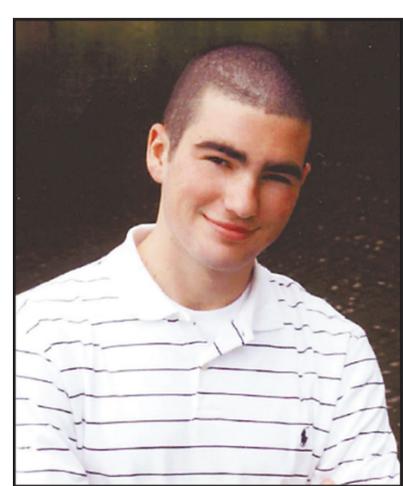
Just because you are in high school in the small state of Vermont does not mean you can't make a difference on another continent.

Katie Mesner-Hage, a 2004 graduate of Montpelier High School and an accomplished flutist, realized how fortunate we in America are when she read a series of articles describing the suffering and devastation to the arts in Iraq caused by war. Katie compared her privileged life to the lives of those in Iraq and was compelled to help. She founded an organization called Young Musicians Without Borders (YMWB) and started a fund-raising campaign to send instruments and supplies to Iraq. Her focus was the Baghdad School of Folk Music and Ballet that had been badly damaged from bombing and looters and the Iraqi Symphony.

Katie joined efforts with Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), a world-wide relief organization, to assist in the rehabilitation of the school and orchestra. She posted flyers about YMWB at concert venues all over the state and she arranged for information to be in newsletters. As a result of her initial efforts, in mid- August, a shipment of instruments and supplies valued at \$1,600 was sent to the orchestra and school.

Katie and the YMWB continued to raise money, getting the word out in Vermont as well as around the country. On December 9, 2003, the Iraqi National Symphony came to the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. to perform alongside the U.S. National Symphony Orchestra. Katie was invited to attend and meet the musicians. She presented the conductor with a check for \$2,300.

Katie proves that anyone with a good idea and willingness to work hard can make a difference. She got out, formed an organization, fundraised, helped people in need and received national recognition for her efforts. This Vermont teenager has made a difference in the world.



**STUART CAMPO**

Many students complain about the way their schools run. Stuart Campo, a junior at Spaulding High School saw a problem with the disciplinary system at his high school and instead of complaining he got active and made a difference.

In 2003, as a volunteer project, Stuart joined the Citizen Advisory Board of the Greater Barre Community Justice Center (GBCJC). GBCJC uses "restorative justice" to address crime. During his time on the Citizen Advisory Board Stuart observed restorative panels that helped offenders understand how their actions affect others, including the victim and the community, and then required the offender to make amends through an apology and by making reparation - either to the victim, if the victim wishes, or the wider community, for example by repairing property, cleaning premises and removing graffiti. Studies show that offenders who go through a restorative justice process are much less likely to become repeat offenders.

As a senior Stuart decided to bring restorative justice to Spaulding High School to deal with student discipline and conflicts that arise between students. The way it works is that if a student agrees to use restorative justice, he or she is brought before a panel of six students. Everyone involved in the incident that led to the discipline or conflict is asked to be present for a discussion of how the student affected the others involved as well as the school community. Everyone then agrees on how the student can make reparation for the harm done.

Under Stuart's leadership, 11 cases (of 12) were resolved successfully with no repeat offense. Stuart's panels worked and now other schools are planning to try them, using the written procedures developed by Stuart! Stuart's experience shows that you have more power to change your school than you may think.

Emily, Katie and Stuart have each been able to make a difference. In the process, each of them demonstrated determination, courage and passion for their cause. What can you do to make a difference? Start today! That's how Emily, Katie and Stuart did it.

There are many young Vermonters who have accomplished extraordinary things. If you know other Vermonters who have made a difference, tell us who they are and what they have done so we can include their stories on our website. [www.vermontvotesforkids.com](http://www.vermontvotesforkids.com).

### PREDICTING THE WINNER

On Election Day, voters will decide their choice for the following offices. Having studied the candidates, the issues and the election process, make your predictions about how the election will turn out. Save your choices and see just how accurate your predictions were.

#### ELECTION FOR THE OFFICE OF:

##### UNITED STATES SENATOR - VT

Prediction: \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome: \_\_\_\_\_

##### U.S. CONGRESSMAN - VT

Prediction: \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome: \_\_\_\_\_

##### GOVERNOR OF VERMONT

Prediction: \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome: \_\_\_\_\_

##### LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Prediction: \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome: \_\_\_\_\_

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Should community service be a high school graduation requirement? Visit [VermontVotesforKids.com/vtvotes/dia.shtml](http://VermontVotesforKids.com/vtvotes/dia.shtml) to answer.

### TALK BACK

Here are the results of last week's question: Should candidates be allowed to use negative ads when campaigning?

**Yes 100% No 0%**

YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR RINGTONE  
YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR PLAYLIST  
YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR PROFILE  
YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR MIND

**CHANGE YOUR WORLD**

**Vote!**

*It may be the best change you make all year.*

### VOTING MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Voting is an important way to make a difference in the world. When we vote we help decide who will lead our government and we influence the policy decisions and priorities of those who are elected. Although you may not be old enough to vote, you can still have an impact on the elections. Think of what would happen if students across Vermont took their parents to

the polls on Election Day. Imagine how you could make a difference if you discussed the issues that matter most to you with adults in your life and encouraged them to vote for the candidates who will address those issues!

In the space provided, list some political issues that are important to you.

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