



The Wingman Program

Empowering children and instilling leadership and empathy to go above and beyond and foster inclusion in schools.

A wingman is defined as someone who helps, protects and guides. The middle school years are marked with tremendous growth and change. It is the most vital time in our lives to be surrounded by guidance, support and protection from both adults and peers. Our central focus each year at Helen Keller Middle School is to create a climate of respect, kindness and integrity. A school climate is a living and breathing entity that must be worked at each and every day by all members of the community. We recognize that our students value having their voice heard, feeling emotionally safe and being active members of the community. The Wingman Program addresses all three of these values. Dylan Hockley, a victim of the Sandy Hook Shooting, was a child with autism. He struggled to fit in with peers. When others would take the time to make a connection, he would light up. Those willing to see beyond his differences were able to change his world with just one smile.

Dylan's parents recognized the power of fostering supportive relationships. In memory of Dylan, they started the organization Dylan's Wings of Change. This organization created the Wingman Program in conjunction with the Connecticut Association of Schools. "The Wingman for Schools counters the root causes of rejection, exclusion and isolation with increased empathy and compassion. Students are empowered to take the lead in their school's climate." The program is described as "a highly customizable, student-led program for middle and elementary schools, running throughout the year to change climate and culture and create a strong, resilient community. It is a year long cycle of experiential activities that is student led and delivered in the classroom. The curriculum is tailored to meet the climate needs of your school and integrated into the timetable. Student leaders are trained by expert educators with selected teachers acting as champions to guide and continue their development." At Helen Keller Middle School we recognize that positive relationships are the foundation that allows all deep learning to occur. We believe this program will empower our students to see beyond differences and realize the power of helping others.

To date, our student school climate committee has completed the two day Wingman training program. It was an inspiring experience for all involved. The student leaders will now take their learning and activities to the student body through advisory classes and recognition programs. They are driven to spread empathy and understanding throughout our community. These students will change the world with kindness.