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My first experience with CHARACTER COUNTS! was in 6th grade at Gaithersburg Middle School. Our principal at the time, Dr. Steinberg, was a big fan of the program and wanted the school to reflect the pillars. All over the school I remember seeing posters while our teachers would mention the various pillars throughout the school day.

CHARACTER COUNTS! was used to reinforce positive behavior at school, in the City programs I attended, and later at my job. I don't know if I consciously utilized [the Six Pillars] for personal or professional achievement, but I think it would be naïve to think CHARACTER COUNTS! didn't help shape my personality and moral compass – which helped me to develop the relationships that have guided me personally and professionally.

I am not sure how consciously I am applying CHARACTER COUNTS! to my personal life, but I know I am trying to raise my children to be the best they can be. A lot of the most important lessons I have taught my kids have a hint of the CHARACTER COUNTS! Pillars: being caring and trustworthy, respecting others, sharing (being fair), cleaning up after themselves (responsibility), and giving back to your community (citizenship).

The foundation of the rules at the GYC were guided by the CHARACTER COUNTS! Pillars. At the front desk at the Robertson Park Youth Center we have our rules and expectations written out and almost all of them have a pillar mentioned. Also at both GYCs [there is also one at the Olde Towne Youth Center] we have our CHARACTER COUNTS! murals that the members helped me make a few years back. Having the pillars prominently displayed with the GYC members' handprints making up the pillars themselves shows that it is their duty to personify the qualities while at the Youth Center. The hope would be that they also personify the pillars when they are away from the GYC as well.

Local government being at the forefront of the CHARACTER COUNTS! program allows them to lead their residents by example. It isn't enough to simply put some banners up. CHARACTER COUNTS! cities and towns need to have tangible displays of character to really drive it home: hosting family festivals, scholarship programs, outreach, citizen recognition, and community service projects are just a few ways for a local government to personify CHARACTER COUNTS!