

The Aspen Declaration & Creation of **CHARACTER COUNTS!**[®]

In July 1992, the Josephson Institute of Ethics hosted a 3-day summit of prominent youth leaders, educators and character education scholars in Aspen, Colorado. The result was this declaration, which provided the guiding principles for the **CHARACTER COUNTS!**[®] movement that currently reaches about 8 million young people. It is clear that the eight sentences making up the Declaration is as profound and pertinent as it was nearly 30 years ago.

CHARACTER COUNTS![®] was created in 1992 with a coalition of 17 nationally prominent youth serving and educational organizations. Today there are hundreds of member organizations and **CHARACTER COUNTS!**[®] serves millions of children and their families every year. It is, by a very large margin, the largest character development organization in the world. The program, initially focused exclusively on the development of core ethical traits – trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship (**The Six Pillars of Character**[®]) – has continually evolved reflecting current research and best practices to become a comprehensive student development program embracing academic, social and emotional skills and traits as well as the

The Six Pillars of Character[®]

- 1. The next generation will be the stewards of our communities, nation and planet in extraordinarily critical times.*
- 2. In such times, the well-being of our society requires an involved, caring citizenry with good moral character.*
- 3. People do not automatically develop good moral character; therefore, conscientious efforts must be made to help young people develop the values and abilities necessary for moral decision making and conduct.*
- 4. Effective character education is based on core ethical values rooted in democratic society, in particular, respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, justice and fairness, caring and civic virtue and citizenship.*
- 5. These core ethical values transcend cultural, religious and socioeconomic differences.*
- 6. Character education is, first and foremost, an obligation of families and faith communities, but schools and youth-service organizations also have a responsibility to help develop the character of young people.*
- 7. These responsibilities are best achieved when these groups work in concert.*

8. The character and conduct of our youth reflect the character and conduct of society; therefore, every adult has the responsibility to teach and model the core ethical values and every social institution has the responsibility to promote the development of good character.