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.