

**Nominee:** Samantha Hepler

**Organization:** Abraxas Youth Center

**Years Employed:** 4

**Current Position:** Teacher/Special Education Administrator

I am honored to nominate Samantha "Sam" Hepler for consideration as JDCAP's 2018 Educator of the Year. Sam is an energetic, creative, and passionate educator whose focus is on coaching and mentoring students to recognize and embrace their full potential not only academically, but in life.

As an educator in an alternative setting, finding the balance between teaching content area and teaching basic, pro-social, life skills is critical. Sam finds that balance daily, evident in her classroom activities, special programming, and daily interactions with students. As a consummate "advocate for a cause" Sam works to instill concepts of community and empathy within her students. She annually participates in the Franklin/Fulton County Women In Need "Walk-A-Mile" event supporting and encouraging students to raise awareness and money for the walk. Sam can then be found walking side by side with her students (in red high heels) cheering and supporting them along the walk. Sam also engaged students in the "Soles4Souls" project bringing awareness to poverty and teaching philanthropy comes in all forms.

Sam's greatest achievements however can be found within her classroom. What started as just an idea to bring math to life has grown exponentially into a small business. This year, Sam and her remedial math class established the AYC Coffee Cart to practice math concepts related to money, percentages and fractions. One rolling cart, one coffee maker, and an idea of learning to make change for a five dollar bill has grown into a classroom that has a work schedule, manages inventory, practices accounting, discusses customer service issues, encourages leadership and communication skills, and so much more. Sam's students are excited! They have raised hundreds of dollars that they donate to a local exotic animal shelter; they've expanded their offerings to "pop-up cold cart" in the afternoons; and continue to share ideas of additional expansion to include coordinating with the culinary program for pastries and other goodies.

The students are not the only benefactors of Sam's efforts, passion, and genuine soul. The AYC Coffee Cart has had a significant impact on the culture of the program overall. Every Tuesday and Thursday you are certain to see numerous staff huddled around the high table that sits just outside the classroom containing Coffee Cart. Smiles, laughter, and camaraderie are a common theme on these mornings. It has also provided a unique opportunity for students and staff throughout the building to relate in ways you don't find during normal programming activities.

Nelson Mandela is quoted as saying; "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". Samantha is an exceptional example of this perspective of education, a role model for all she comes in contact with, and a remarkable candidate for JDCAP 2018 Educator of the Year.

**Name of person submitting:** Melissa Kennedy; 717-749-2615

**Position:** Education Director