

Category 1, Section I

Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes and Crematory: Innovative Program

Best of the Best Essay: NFDA POE 2018

Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes and Crematory's Innovative Program for this year's Best of the Best submission is a unique and engaging 16-page anti-bullying activity book created entirely by our team, and geared specifically for children ages 4-8.

The book, entitled "**Duchess the Bulldog Says Be a Buddy, Not a Bully,**" was finished in April of 2018 and distributed by Spicer-Mullikin staff to local libraries, YMCA and several elementary schools. The book is also available to children who accompany adults to the funeral home. Spicer-Mullikin staff have also hosted live "book readings" to community children in aftercare and summer camps at the local YMCA.

Uniqueness of Idea on National Level

The goal of the activity book was to present positive opportunities for children to learn about helpful behaviors, including what to do if they saw someone being bullied, if they themselves were being bullied, as well as how to cope with sad or negative feelings. "Our goal is to help children understand the value of kindness," says Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes and Crematory owner, Matthew C. Smith, "and that sometimes it is OK to feel sad and through activities in the book we have provided ways to manage it."



While there are many books that address bullying for older children, this book's focus is more interactive for the child, because it includes activities on the pages that enable the child to either draw, match up questions with answers, or fill in the blank with an appropriate word or phrase.

The book's main character is a lovable bulldog, Duchess, which we believe is a warmer, gentler way to introduce the topic of bullying to a young audience. Duchess is the name of Matthew's bulldog – she really exists!

Quality of Implementation

Matthew c. Smith, and Director of Administration and Communication Kristy Stellini, along with licensed funeral director Mary Etta Russum, traveled to one of the biggest youth camps in the region - the Western YMCA in Wilmington, Delaware to read the book to several groups of children – over 150 children in total.

Matthew, Kristy and Mary Etta were welcomed by each camp facilitator and were told the story time session was a nice break from the typical camp activity schedule, as having 'guest speakers' or 'special guest storytellers' were the highlight for many of the children.

Children asked questions such as, "Can Duchess really swim?" "Why is Duchess playing with a turtle?" "Have you ever been bullied?" "I like to watch videos when I am sad. What do you do?"

We were thrilled they could relate to the book and learn from an early age that bullying is not acceptable, and to reach out to a trusted adult if they feel they are being bullied.

Benefit to those Served

The feedback and reaction from the children and the adults surpassed our expectations; teachers and camp counselors noting that the book's message is especially necessary and compelling for children to hear in light of loss, gun violence and bullying campaigns that are happening across the nation. "They see so much sadness on the news," said one teacher. "This helps them understand that they can help themselves and others to feel better."

Children were engaged with the story and liked learning about what they could do if they felt sad or angry. The benefit to the families we serve is three-fold:

- We are reaching the youngest generation with our message of compassion and empathy.
- We are acknowledging that the next generation and those who care for them, are managing stressful situations that generations before them never had to address, especially with social media issues and violence in schools.
- By sharing the book with the community, we have partnered with organizations that we normally may have not worked with before, such as the YMCA and elementary schools, thus expanding our reach with a new audience.

We are hopeful that this children's book is just the first step in having children be able to manage their feelings and know that they have a friend and a support system at Spicer-Mullikin.

As word has spread about Spicer-Mullikin's the book readings, community support has been overwhelming. "This is such an amazing idea and I wish more companies cared as much." - Youth Director, YMCA.



Some of the community responses to our book-reading on Spicer-Mullikin's Facebook

- Bridget Pavard** What a perfect example of community service-this is really wonderful.
Like · Reply · 2w
- Phyllis Thompson** What a blessing you share with the children. Bullying needs to stop . Thanks for sharing. May Jesus continue to use you and your staff 🙏🇺🇸👤 God Bless
Like · Reply · 2w
- Nancy Houser Clymer** Matt and his associates do a lot of good things for our community! Wonderful job!
Like · Reply · 2w
- Jane Trincia Williams** This is awesome I need more of this in our schools.
Like · Reply · 2w
- Betty Ann Short** That is great. How proud I am to have been part of all of you. Thank you.
Like · Reply · 2w
- Patrick McDevitt** Wonderful seeing businesses undertaking community engagement opportunities like this!
Like · Reply · 1w
- Jamee DeBoer McGaughan** Bravo for this action!!
Like · Reply · 2w
- Patricia King Lawson** Proud of you Matt!!!❤️
Like · Reply · 2w
- Cheryl Barnhill** So Proud of you Matt! 🙌🙌🙌
Like · Reply · 2w

What do you do when you feel sad? Draw your answers in the boxes below:

Here are some more ideas for you to color in:



Talk to a parent



Listen to music



Play with a pet



Write a poem



Watch a movie

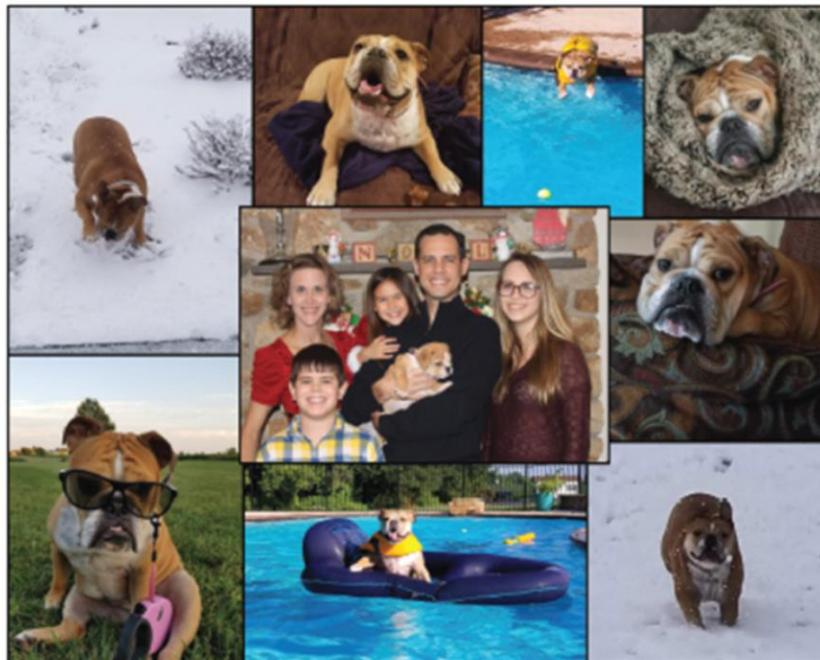


Hangout with a friend

A bully is someone who says or does something to someone else that is not nice - for no reason. **ACTIVITY:** Which of the animals below is the bully?

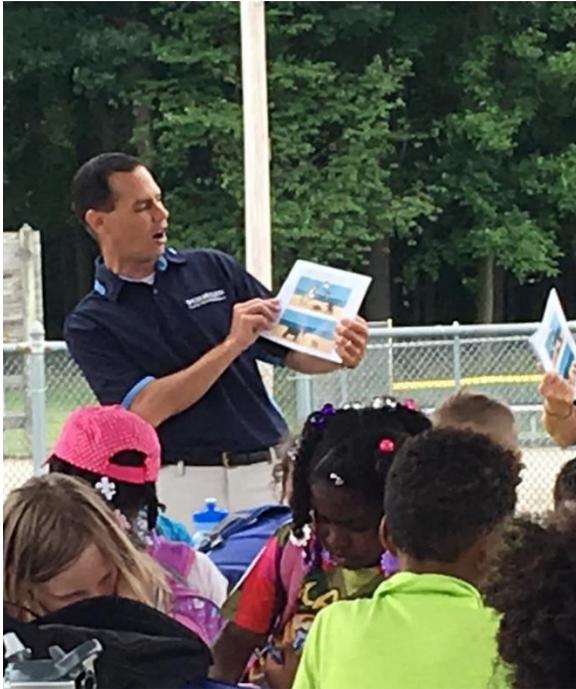


MEET THE REAL DUCHESS AND HER HUMAN FAMILY!



Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes & Crematory joins Duchess and the Delaware community in promoting anti-bullying messages.

PHOTOGRAPHS:



Matthew C. Smith, owner of Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes and Crematory, reads the Spicer-Mullikin anti-bullying book, “Be a Buddy Not a Bully” to children at the Western Wilmington YMCA Youth Camp, June 2018.



(L) Spicer-Mullikin Licensed Funeral Director Mary Etta Russum enjoys sharing “Be a Buddy not a Bully” book with a young camper. “This was an absolute joy,” said Mary Etta. (R) Kristy Stellini, Director of Administration and Communication and Matthew C. Smith engage the children.

