

AHA!. This one acronym that has taught me so much from 8th grade up until the end of senior year. I was such an introverted kid with so much hidden potential that I did not even know back then the things I was capable of. From being able to socialize and communicate better with my peers to being able to conquer one of my biggest fears, singing in front of hundreds of people. If I have learned one thing all throughout these years, it's that we grow as an individual without even knowing it. I've grown mentally, suffering from anxiety, finding coping mechanisms that actually work and being able to freely express myself creatively. I used to suppress my emotions all the time because it was how I was raised due to a toxic father figure, but Aha had allowed me to set a new bar for myself, and taught me the benefits of living life the way I want to. It's an amazing program that has the potential to bring the best out of everyone. I can truly say that I'm glad AHA! is a part of my life.

- Miguel Rodriguez

I participated in San Marcos Peace Builders all four years of high school and was in PB Leadership for my last two years. Peace Builders provided me the unique opportunity to connect with people who were different from me. In most areas of my high school life I chose to stay inside my comfort zone and only associate myself with those who seemed most similar to me. I needed something like Peace Builders to nudge me outside of that comfort zone. Through connecting and playing with a wide spectrum of people who were racially, sexually and socioeconomically different from me I got to experience how similar we all really are. Peace Builders allows teens to dive deeper into what makes us unique in our communities but also what we all share so that we can grow closer to one another and forge a more peaceful future.

- Sarah Block

My name is Stephanie Martinez and I am an Alumni participant in AHA Peace Builders.

Peace Builders has taught me many skills that have helped me in my life, for example being able to step out of my comfort zone from time to time and being able to socially interact with new people. It has also made me more comfortable in public speaking even though I know that there are still ways I can improve with that skill. It opened my eyes to many ways we can help and give back to the community such as picking up trash down at the beach or anywhere you see it, helping out in the Unity Shoppe, and other ways of service. Most importantly it gave me, a person whose is dealing with two mental disorders and has dealt with many obstacles, a safe place to come forward and face challenges instead of hiding and pretending everything is ok. That is why I am proud to say that I am an AHA Peace Builder.

To Whom It May Concern,

Participating in AHA! Peace Builders at La Cumbre Junior High, this school year (2018-19), has been life changing for my son. AHA! has helped him thrive and grow in a truly safe and nurturing environment. AHA! activities have greatly enhanced his social and emotional intelligence and his leadership skills. Most important, he feels seen, heard, and accepted and he is learning to see, hear and accept others as well. At a very vulnerable developmental stage, AHA! has become his tribe—a kind, intelligent, creative group of socially conscious friends.

Having the opportunity to explore and practice social responsibility, active listening, compassionate dialogue, creative problem solving, conflict resolution, restorative justice and dynamic self-expression etc. in 8th grade has been extremely empowering for my son. AHA! is giving him tools and resources that are making him strong, confident, resilient and caring. AHA! is helping him flourish this year and preparing him to thrive and make positive contributions in high school and beyond.

- La Cumbre AHA! Peace Builder parent & current Summer program parent

My name is Talia Sanchez and I am about to start my fourth year at UNC Chapel Hill pursuing a double major in communications and public policy. AHA first came to my school when I was a first year high school student at Santa Barbara high school and I couldn't in a million years have imagined how it would have shaped my life and the person I am today. With the mentorship of so many educators through AHA's peace building program I was able to grow as a person, building my confidence, my public speaking abilities, and most importantly my awareness of the importance of social emotional learning and the value that this can bring to a school district. Through this program I was able to watch my own high school campus transform and it started with the peace builders. Peace builders brought together a group of diverse students coming from different backgrounds with different interests who all wanted to see a more inclusive campus. Those connections extended outside of the school halls and through this program I have made long lasting relationships with friends and mentors that I cherish very deeply.