

## Jacqueline Monetta - MPower Award Nomination

I am pleased to nominate Jacqueline Monetta for MHA's 2018 MPower Award. Jacqueline is the inspiration and driving force behind *Not Alone*, a documentary on teen suicide that is nominated for a 2018 MHA Media Award.

Jacqueline is currently a student at Duke University studying Public Policy and receiving certificates in Documentary Studies and Policy, Journalism, and Media Studies. She is a senator for the Equity and Outreach Committee for the Duke student government and specifically works on policy and events surrounding mental health awareness, sexual assault prevention, and multiculturalism. As a member of Students of the World, Jacqueline directs her efforts toward filmmaking to spark social and political change.

The work Jacqueline is nominated for began a few years ago. When Jacqueline was a high school student, her best friend took her own life. The news was shattering. Jacqueline couldn't believe that someone she knew so well and spent so much time with could die by suicide. She wondered why she didn't see the signs and asked herself whether there was anything she could have done to help her friend. There were so many questions, but no answers.

By the end of that school year, 6 more teens in the area had taken their own lives. The problem of suicide was epidemic, but no one seemed able to talk about it or to find solutions. In that atmosphere of grief and fear, Jacqueline decided she needed to find out more.

After educating herself about suicide and suicide prevention by researching online, reading about teen suicide, and watching videos, Jacqueline came to understand that silence and stigma around suicide were preventing teens with suicidal thoughts and feelings from coming forward and asking for support. She reached out to her circle via social media and asked if anyone she knew who had experienced thoughts of suicide would be willing to talk to her about it. Multiple people stepped forward, and the conversations they had with Jacqueline formed the inspiration for the acclaimed documentary *Not Alone*.

I first met Jacqueline through the experience of providing media consultation for *Not Alone* as part of my role as Community Engagement Manager for the Mental Health Association of San Francisco. In that capacity, I approach mental health from a recovery-focused perspective in which every individual is the expert on their own experience and individual healing and transformation are possible through peer support. Jacqueline's drive to create change in the way teen suicide is perceived and addressed through education and community connection perfectly exemplifies the mission and values of MHA and affiliates across the US.

Through Jacqueline's determination to help other teens, countless conversations have been started around peer support for suicide intervention. I have facilitated

several group discussions on *Not Alone* and in each of them, participants have expressed deep emotion, relief that the subject has been brought into the open, and compassion for each other, for themselves, and for teens who are suffering. These conversations are being replicated in homes and classrooms throughout the US and Canada as a direct result of Jacqueline's drive to make sure that the people she cared about experienced doesn't have to happen to anyone else.

A unique feature of Jacqueline's work is her harnessing of social media as a means of reaching out to her peers to offer support and an opportunity for them to share their voices and experiences. In an era when social media is ubiquitous but so often vilified for its link with bullying and other abuses, Jacqueline's use of social media as a tool to uplift, support, and encourage is exceptionally important. It's a real-world example of how to meet teens where they're at and give them what they need to survive and thrive in an accessible way.

I believe that by spotlighting Jacqueline's important, self-driven, and far-reaching work and by honoring her as an example of the impact teens can make on their communities and the world, MHA will help inspire other teens to create change as well. Especially during this moment in our national history when teens are organizing as never before to protect themselves and each other from external danger in the form of school shootings, Jacqueline's work represents another area of powerful personal advocacy. With suicide currently the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death for teens in the US, her message and methods are more relevant and urgent than ever before.

Finally, by honoring Jacqueline, MHA can also honor the courageous teens who shared their own experiences to create *Not Alone*, and honor the lives and legacies of all teens who have died by suicide. Jacqueline's passion for change has amplified those voices and experiences, and we're already seeing a difference as a result.

I encourage MHA to consider Jacqueline Monetta for the 2018 MPower Award. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can answer any questions or provide more information.

Sincerely,

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