

Columbine team has the biggest, best idea

Effort to help disabled earns scholarships for four students

By Ramsey Scott

Wednesday, May 20, 2015 at 11:32 am (Updated: May 20, 3:51 pm)

A big idea from a group of Columbine High School students has turned out to be a big winner.



Ramsey Scott

Ty Duffy, 18, presents his team's project during the Big Idea competition at Columbine High School on Saturday.

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Columbine's team placed first last weekend in the inaugural statewide Big Idea competition with its project Denver Push, which focused on accessibility for the disabled. Kale Reader, 17, Dan DeGraaf, 17, Ty Duffy, 18, and Megan Lacy, 17, each won a \$1,500 college scholarship.

"It's amazing," Lacy said. "And it's not just the scholarship. It's the fact that now more people can find out about it, and we can build even more awareness."

The four students created a website to gather information about the level of accessibility at businesses across the metro area. The goal is a one-stop information source for people who use a wheelchair or other assistance to get around.

"I think people don't know that everywhere we go, there's some sort of obstacle that people in wheelchairs have to overcome that is completely invisible to us," Duffy said. "I think that it's really important for people to keep an eye out for the things they take for granted and that can be changed."

The group worked with Craig Hospital to distribute surveys to people with disabilities to assess their experiences with accessibility at area businesses.

"That's a lot of hard work (the disabled) go through each day," DeGraaf said. "They have to look for elevators and ramps. They can't just go places. They have to think about access all the time."

Along with the website and an awareness campaign at Columbine, the four also helped raise money for Gracie Fisher, a teenage patient at Craig from California. Fisher has acute flaccid myelitis, a neurological illness that causes paralysis. The disease was first reported just last year, and there were 118 confirmed cases as of April.

After the group from Columbine met Fisher, they wanted to help. So the students raised hundreds of dollars and bought Fisher's best friend in California a plane ticket to visit her.

"It's been a really rewarding experience the whole time," Reader said. "Seeing our project make the progress it has, it has been incredible."

In 2011, when Bryan Halsey and his wife, Tricia, started the Big Idea Project at Columbine, the goal was to provide students with an experience that would help them become generous leaders. An idea that began with 20 students now involves more than 300 students at eight metro area schools.

"It's been awesome. Three years ago we had some educators come and watch projects, and (they) said, 'We need to do this at our school,'" said Bryan Halsey, a teacher at Columbine. "Since then, we've turned it into a nonprofit and took it outside of Jefferson County.

"We train educators in the model and allow that teacher to adapt it to their classroom. We prepare them with resources and tools, and now they can implement a project and impact their kids and allow the students to get involved and become a part of a bigger entity."

To learn more about Denver Push, visit denverpush.myfreesites.net. For more about the Big Idea Project, visit www.bigideaproject.org or its Facebook page at www.facebook.com/BigIdeaProject

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