

This Sunday, children can discover their superpower

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If you ask most kids for their favorite color, most can answer without even thinking about it. But what if you ask children, “What’s your favorite way to make a difference in the world?” They’ll probably tell you it’s a job for adults — or superheroes like they see in the movies.

Several years ago, I decided to try to change that. With my daughter Rachel, I founded a non-profit called the Global Game Changers Children’s Education Initiative. Our mission is to teach all children that no matter how young they are, and no matter where they come from, they can make the world a better place.

On Sunday, Aug. 24, we’re taking our mission to a new level with a one-day “Discover Your Superpower” celebration from 1 to 5 p.m. at the Muhammad Ali Center — free for all families with preK and elementary-school kids. Children will go from station to station, make a Superhero Pledge, and finish the day with their own superhero photo. Guided by more than a dozen local non-profits running the celebration’s stations, kids will

learn how to combine their talents with their hearts to become superheroes. They’ll also have access to the entire Muhammad Ali Center.

In the time since we founded the Global Game Changers, I’ve frequently been asked three questions. Why teach kids to help others? How are you teaching kids to help others? And is your teaching successful?

Researchers at Stanford University, UCLA, and the University of Wisconsin have found that teaching kids to help others reduces bullying, prejudice, discipline problems, aggression, fear of failure and depression, which can lead to suicide, the third-leading cause of death in youth. At the same time, teaching kids to help others improves cognitive functioning, cooperation, team-building, leadership, health, and happiness.

To teach kids, we provide schools and after-school programs with curricula that feature a fictional alliance of superheroes called the Global Game Changers. Led by Global Girl and Little Big Heart, they fly around the world with their trusty dog Pixel looking for real-life kids doing nice things for other people.

Our book and curricula feature three real-life kids who embody the superhero equation “My Talent + My Heart = My Superpower.” Its message is that all kids can take something they enjoy and combine it with a cause they care about. When they do, they become superheroes.

One of my favorite examples of this equation came from a 10-year-old in a local elementary school that embraced the Global Game Changers. He fights bullying by playing basketball with unpopular kids who are picked on. With courage and compassion, he’s learning you don’t have to be born on the planet Krypton to be a superhero.

With all our programs, independent experts collect data to see what works and what needs to be improved. So far, our results have been encouraging. Before one of our programs, only 56 percent of teachers in the school thought their students were aware of good things happening our community, while 100 percent thought students were aware of bad things. Some students would introduce themselves by providing information about imprisoned relatives. It’s no wonder that one-third of students didn’t have the self-esteem to believe they could make a positive difference in the world.

But after our program was over, that changed. Ninety-four percent of students said the Global Game Changers showed them they have talents they can use to help others. The same number wanted to “Ignite Good!” – our superhero motto.

Teachers report similar results. “Students began to recognize when other students were feeling down, and they would try to help them feel better,” said one teacher who has taught the program for two years. “They would be quick to help each other pick up fallen books, clean our reading area, and pitch in around the classroom. We even had a couple of students and their moms organize a group to go clean up a local park for Earth Day.” Another said, “I feel like my students left my class this year with an invisible cape attached to their backs.”

We hope that more kids will learn how to “Ignite Good!” at our “Discover Your Superpower” celebration at the Muhammad Ali Center this Sunday. Not many Louisvillians have been better than Muhammad Ali at combining their talents with their hearts. If you have a preK- or elementary-school-aged child, come learn more about “the Greatest,” and help your children discover the greatness that lies within each of them. For more information, go to www.globalgamechangers.org/upcoming-events/

Jan Helson is chair of the Global Game Changers. Her book, *The Global Game Changers*, is available on amazon.com