

# Campaign highlights bullying

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"oUT of One, Many" has a mission.

Its goal is to bring awareness to the issue of bullying and youth suicide.

Roger Curry started the campaign to protest a current bill in the Tennessee state legislature that is referred to as the "Don't Say Gay Bill." Curry feels the bill will essentially make it legal for children to be bullied in schools as long as they are being bullied for religious beliefs.

"The fight against teen suicide is a very real issue for youth in our country and my goal for the awareness campaign is to simply highlight the issue," Curry said. "I hope someone gets some small benefit from the campaign I have started. To anyone struggling, we want to send the message to never give up. It does get better."

In December 2011, 18-year-old Jacob Rogers killed himself as a result of bullying. Fourteen-year-old Phillip Parker hung himself in January after complaining of constant bullying. After these events, Curry began to wonder if he could make a difference by highlighting the issue.

Curry believes teen bullying and suicide has risen due to the usage of social media.

"When I was growing up and being bullied, the bullying stopped when I got off the school bus. I had the safety of my home to run to. Now, that's no longer the case," Curry said. "Thanks to Facebook, Twitter, etc. ... the bullying follows the kids home. They no longer have any space safe from the reach of those bullying them. I really think this adds to the feeling of hopelessness that many youth experience."

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"oUT of One, Many" began by symbolizing the theory that out of one small idea, something great can emerge. He lowercased the "o" of "oUT" to highlight UT, and make it specific to the community.

"Teen suicide is an issue that should not be overlooked," Azariah Parfite, freshman in animal science, said. "I am glad that someone is taking a stand and trying to make a difference."

The campaign, adapted from the Trevor Project (the leading nonprofit organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to the LGBTQ community),

requires signatures stating that individuals will help spread awareness about the issue. Thus far, the campaign has collected over 760 hand-written signatures and 1,200 online signatures from students, faculty and staff across campus.

Curry hopes to take the signatures to UT administration to be used as a symbol of progress UT students have made in bringing awareness to the issue of teen bullying and suicide.

"I feel strongly that bringing awareness to the issue is the first step in creating change," Curry said. "If enough people recognize how serious the

issue is, they will demand more from their local and state politicians. They will also do more to help others who may be impacted by bullying. If everyone remains silent, the issue will continue with America's youth killing themselves because they feel they have no hope of their lives getting better. By refusing to remain silent, we can change that."

Curry wants to continue the campaign in the fall and even have some focus groups of students, staff and faculty on campus.

To get involved, contact Rick Curry at rcurry4@utk.edu or view his "It Gets Better" video at itgetsbetter.org.



Photo courtesy of Rick Curry

A screen shot of Rick Curry's "It Gets Better" video.

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