



National Alopecia Areata Foundation

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Alopecia Areata Awareness Month Focuses on Teaching Children about Difference

SAN RAFAEL, CA (August, 2009)—In an effort to increase understanding and compassion, the theme for Alopecia Areata Awareness Month 2009 is Starting Early: Educating Today's Youth about Alopecia Areata. During the month of September, the National Alopecia Areata Foundation (NAAF) is urging all individuals affected directly or indirectly by this autoimmune skin disease to visit their local schools to educate school administrators, nurses, and teachers about alopecia areata, and to provide the resources needed to encourage teachers to add information on alopecia areata to their health curriculum.

Studies have shown that if you introduce children and young teens to a concept while they are still in school, their understanding of that concept will lead to tolerance and acceptance. Rosemary Henze, a teacher and the author of *Leading for Diversity* agrees, saying “we should be teaching acceptance. A school should be a place that welcomes, likes, and embraces people who are different, not just a place that tolerates them. That should be (our) ultimate goal.” In 2002, the California EDUCATOR publication, noted that “some teachers fear that student behavior toward people who are considered ‘different’ is getting worse instead of better, and the need to teach tolerance has never been more urgent.”

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Compounding the desire to have our children become respectful adults are the findings of a study on the affects of bullying. The study, which was published in *Pediatrics* in July 2006, was authored by Dr. Louise Arseneault of King's College in London, who wrote, "Our results indicated that bullying victimization in the early school years is an influential experience for a child's behavioral development and mental health problems." She concluded that "bullying could be regarded as a stressful life event that might influence children's normal development." Though not all children and adults with alopecia areata are bullied, the roots of bullying are typically found in unfamiliarity and fear, so teaching students about the physical symptoms of certain diseases can dispose of these feelings early on.

Children are not the only ones who suffer from this disease, though they are most vulnerable to torment from their peers. Alopecia (AL-OH-PEE-SHA) areata (AIR-EE-AH-TAH) is an autoimmune disease that may result in total or partial loss of hair. Affecting over 5 million Americans, alopecia areata currently has no cure, and there is no treatment that works across the board. It occurs in both males and females and in people of all races and ages, but young people are affected most often. Alopecia areata usually starts with one or more small, round patches of hair loss on the scalp. In some people, the condition spreads until all of the hair on the scalp is lost (alopecia totalis) or all of the hair on their entire body (alopecia universalis).

The National Alopecia Areata Foundation (NAAF), headquartered in San Rafael, CA, supports research to find a cure or acceptable treatment for alopecia areata, it supports those with the disease, and it educates the public about alopecia areata. NAAF is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors and a prestigious Scientific Advisory Council. Founded in 1981, NAAF is the largest, most influential, and most representative foundation associated with alopecia areata.

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We are eager to bring Starting Early: Educating Today's Youth into schools throughout the country. This campaign will be supported by teaching resources, letters, educational videos and national support. Alopecia Areata Awareness Month has been celebrated in September of each year since 1987. For more information on this campaign or alopecia areata, please contact the National Alopecia Areata Foundation at www.naaf.org or 415-472-3780.

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