



Eric Bonzar — The Morning Journal

Motivational speaker Justin Ford of Detroit speaks to students at Horizon Science Academy, 760 Tower Blvd. in Lorain, during an anti-bullying rally.

Youth speaker shares life experiences with Horizon Science Academy students

By Khadija Smith, The Morning Journal

Motivational Youth Speaker Justin Ford's passion to reach youngsters comes after his own life struggles during his teenage years.

The Detroit native spoke March 8 to grades 6-12 at Horizon Science Academy of Lorain, 760 Tower Blvd. in Lorain, about the battles he overcame.

"I dropped out of school, didn't graduate and I'm a felon," the 34-year-old Ford told students. "I have eight misdemeanors, a felony on my record for selling drugs to a cop, been arrested 13 times, overdosed on drugs and almost died – all because when I was your age, I wasn't taking today serious."

Ford said his past is what drives him to change the mindset of youth, so they won't follow his same path.

"What happens today and what you do today is going to affect what you do, who you become tomorrow," he said.

Ford travels around the country to share with students his "Champion Challenge," a message that challenges students with issues like bullying, peer pressure and to help them discover their true identity.

Ford said he has been speaking to the youth for 15 years.

"When I was 20 years old, I went to a Mother's Against Drunk Driving meeting and realized I had a story to share," he said. "There are people going through the same struggles I went through. I want to be able to help them avoid the consequences I faced."

Co-leaders Nasja Aude, Elena Sayeris and students of Horizon's Anti-Bully Task Force Club held a fundraiser to bring Ford to the school.

After hours of research, the Anti-Bullying Task Force Club chose Ford because of how well he relates to students.

"So many of our students are struggling with home life and he is someone who can relate to the students," Aude said. "It is a way to get students to listen to someone else other than teachers."

Student Hailey Marcum, 16, and an Anti-Bully Task Force Club member, agrees with Ford's message.

"Just like Mr. Ford said, people can be successful no matter who they are and that's what our club wants to show people," Hailey said.

Teens are facing an epidemic, Ford said.

"There is a crisis with young people today, identity crisis," he said. "Young people don't know who they are."

Ford stressed to students how important they are.

"Everyone in this room matters," he said. "You can be anything you want to be as long as you make the decisions."

Ford ended the presentation by challenging students to talk with other people they normally don't associate with.

"I want you all to come out of your comfort zone and reach out to someone you don't know to help support their success," he said. "By taking this challenge, you transform your school and community."