



Spotlight on Siena Castellon

Siena Castellon was the winner of the 2019 Child/Young Person of the Year Award at the Shine a Light Awards.

Sixteen-year old Siena Castellon is a neurodiversity and anti-bullying campaigner from London who is autistic, dyslexic and dyspraxic and has ADHD.

An inspirational young lady, Siena has recently signed a book deal with Jessica Kingsley Publishing to write a practical and useful 'survival guide' for autistic teenage girls; the type of book she wished had been available when she was growing up.

Her special educational needs (SEN) created many challenges for Siena at school, yet with sheer grit and determination, she worked hard to overcome them becoming a high-achieving student and dedicating her spare time to helping others. Whilst studying Maths at a highly-selective state sixth-form in Lambeth, Siena is tirelessly campaigning to change negative perceptions about SEN.

When Siena was just 13 years old she created a mentoring and support website, QL Mentoring, which three years on has over 1,500 subscribers from around the world and over 3,800 followers on Twitter! Packed full of fun and practical resources, Siena shares tips and tricks that she used to overcome some of the obstacles she has experienced.

Siena continues to grow her website, however it was her anti-bullying and neurodiversity work that really caught the Shine a Light judges attention. After being bullied at school and discovering that 75% of autistic students are also bullied, Siena decided to take it upon herself to try and change this.

Last year, Siena served on the Diana Award National Anti-bullying Youth Board, representing over 28,000 anti-bullying ambassadors throughout the UK. Wanting to make a real difference, Siena decided to focus on raising awareness of disability-related bullying and disability hate crimes by sharing her experiences and took the time to write blogs and articles for several leading magazines.

Siena's commitment to helping others captured the attention of many individuals and organisations. She was recognised for her anti-bullying campaign at the BBC Radio 1 Teen Hero Awards and received the Points of Light Award from Prime Minister Theresa May and the British Citizen Youth Award. She was also invited to a small reception in Kensington Palace to meet the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and was asked to speak at an event in Downing Street.

Whilst Siena continues her anti-bullying work, she has taken on another challenge to change the negative perceptions most people have about autism and learning differences. Siena has launched her own neurodiversity celebration school campaign (www.neurodiversity-celebration-week.com) with the aim to work with schools to flip the narrative so they are not just focusing on the negative aspects of having SEN but also the positives.

Siena believes it is important for schools to acknowledge the advantages and strengths that come from seeing and experiencing the world differently. These strengths include creativity, innovation, problem-solving skills and resilience and Siena believes schools can play a large part in improving the way SEN students feel about themselves.

Siena is aiming high and hopes to have every school in the UK take part in her celebration week, which is due to take place week commencing 13th May 2019. Siena has over 135 schools and over 120,000 students taking part, as well as 22 national charities and organisations supporting her, including the ADHD Foundation, Anna Kennedy Online, Ambitious About Autism, the British Dyslexia Association, NASEN and Dimensions UK.

For further information about the 2019 Shine a Light Awards visit www.shinealightawards.co.uk and follow us on Twitter #awards_SAL