

Teen Showcase at IVCC reminds teens to think, love and dream big (with video)

Jeff Dankert Mar 31, 2017



"Chase the love and the passion:" Speaker Jeff Yalden talks with area teens Thursday at the 32nd Annual Teen Showcase at Illinois Valley Community College. Yalden has been featured on USA Today, TIME Magazine and the Oprah Winfrey Network.

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Scott Anderson

He looked like their dad but he talked their talk.

He is known as the teen whisperer but Jeff Yalden did anything but whisper.

The 46-year-old Marine from Myrtle Beach, S.C., shouted his message to more than 600 area students Thursday at the annual Teen Showcase at Illinois Valley Community College.

Yalden, a motivational speaker for 25 years, used humor and stories from his life to reach out and grab students from area junior and senior high schools.

"He brought up topics that not everyone thinks about every day. He didn't sugar coat it," said Kevin Parr, eighth-grader from Northlawn school in Streator. "I like how he said that life's not perfect. When life knocks you down, you take a break and then you get back up."

Cassidy Anderson, a seventh-grader from Tonica, said Yalden changed the way she thinks.

"I won't forget that," she said.

Yalden advised students to follow their dreams and write down who and what they want to be.

"I will maybe try that and look at it every day and think about what I want to do with my future," Anderson said.

Yalden didn't waste his 75 minutes on stage, saying several times that he was sweating profusely. He asked: "Who is the hardest person to get to know?"

He noticed that students understood.

"Ourselves, me, us," he said.

Yalden said he graduated high school 128th out of 133 students. He suffers from depression, bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder after serving as a Marine corporal in the Middle East. He walked in on a buddy who, preparing to shoot himself, said nobody cared about him.

"I care about you," Yalden said,

"Maybe you're the only one" the Marine replied and shot himself with his 9 mm.

Yalden delivered his advice like gunshots: "The world owes you nothing. If you want something, you have to go out and get it. The only thing that's holding you back is in your head. I want you to do what you love to do. Don't chase the money. Chase the love and the passion."

"How many of you have a dream? Raise your hands, No, raise your hands like you're enthusiastic."

He warned teens about society's influence.

"We are dumbing down America. We don't think anymore. We go home and we want to watch stupid reality television. The Kardashians? They're pretty?"

He pulled two students onto the stage and put them through a few life lessons until one reached down and helped the other to her feet. The rest of the students applauded.

"I spent many years pushing away the messengers, pushing away my parents and pushing away our teachers, our coaches. I would love for each and every one of you, when you walk out of here today, to take your ego and put it aside. Ladies and gentlemen, my life was hard, too. Every single day you have to believe that it's going to be OK. When the boat comes into the harbor, get on the boat," Yalden said.

Yalden lives by the four Ts — Take time to think. He asked students to control anger and let it go, getting a big laugh at the same time.

"Anger is like peeing your pants. Everyone can see it but only you can feel it."

The event had several presentations and was organized by area health professionals, including North Central Behavioral Health Systems, La Salle. Prevention specialist Krista Casey watched Yalden speak on Thursday. She too served in the military, she said.

"The 'get back up' thing," Casey said. "It might be a simple thing, but when you get knocked down, you get back up."

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