

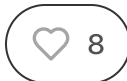
BAND Against Bullying: Promoting Dignity Through Music & the Arts

Despite recent grant freezes and attacks on DEI programs, students are more energized than ever for Tuesday's 11th Anniversary event at UB's Center for the Arts



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Recent cuts and spending freezes implemented by the Trump government have threatened medical research programs at the University at Buffalo, much as they have at universities across the country.

These losses include a projected \$47 million in National Institutes of Health grants over the next three years. The administration's attacks on Diversity Equity & Inclusion programs have also placed immense pressure on UB's Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

In this climate, an organization like **BAND Against Bullying**, which is hosting its 11th annual event at the University at Buffalo, Center for the Arts on Tuesday, April 8, 2025, at 7 pm, becomes increasingly significant.

The Annual BAND Against Bullying Program is a performing arts competition where students from area high schools combine multiple forms of art to create illustrations and illuminations of dignity awareness, the end goal being the prevention of bullying and the strengthening of dignity, self-worth, and open-mindedness.

The program was born in September 2012, in response to New York State legislation known as the *Dignity For All Students Act*, which seeks to provide a safe and supportive environment free from discrimination, intimidation, taunting, harassment, and bullying on school property and at school functions.

“BAND was born as a collaboration between M&T Bank, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and the **UB Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention**,” says Brie Kishel, the organization's Vice President. “It was a philanthropic project, founded by Mike Bryant, who worked at M&T at the time.

“Because the Alberti Center was a partner, I became involved. I started working for the University of Buffalo in 2014. For the past 10 years, I helped out with BAND Against Bullying behind the scenes. I did the scoring. I helped them print out marketing materials, and did social media. So I was just kind of like their ‘whatever

they needed' person. And then this past year, I was elected into the position of vice president.”



One of Kishel's first endeavors was the creation of a concert fundraiser, which took place in late March, at The Caz in South Buffalo.

“The fundraiser at The Caz was something that that I wanted to try out this year in new role, just to see how much we could promote the program,” Kishel says. “I focus it in the south towns, because we haven't gotten a lot of participation from that area. Post-COVID, it has been a struggle for us to get schools back involved with BAND part, because the pandemic had such an impact on the students' mental health and how much they could handle, and schools have been somewhat reluctant to put too much on the students' plates.

“I put this together with the Buffalo Music Club, and Eric Crittenden from the BMCA was phenomenal. He jumped right on board, and connected me with the two youth bands that participated - **Underage** and **The Committed**. And then he pulled in his Critt's Juke Joint to participate as well.

“The most significant outcome of the fundraiser was that the two bands of kids that performed didn't know anything about BAND before that, and now they want to be fully involved.

“To me, that made it all worth it.”

The BAND Against Bullying live event takes place in the Mainstage Theater of the Center For the Arts, in front of a panel of judges including area bullying prevention experts and musicians, who will provide the students with constructive feedback on their performances, as well as score tallies for each school.

Rather than creating a sense of competition, the event aims to bring students together to create camaraderie and an atmosphere of support.

Despite the attacks on funding and the targeting of DEI-based programs, the students are far from cowering in fear. In fact, they seem to be particularly energized this year.

“People just want to get involved and speak out,” Kishel says. “The students are angry. They want to make their voices heard. This climate is empowering them this year, which is incredible to see.”

“BAND is our opportunity to provide the students with a platform to showcase their talents and creativity in support of kindness, dignity for all, and bullying prevention,” says the organization’s president, Jessica Sanna.

“It’s truly so inspiring and impactful to see the art that our students create and perform. Our hope is to empower our students and community to be advocates for change.”

Kishel believes that there is no time like the present for employing music and the arts as a means of celebrating what’s best in us as a culture.

“Art has always been a force to bring people together, to tell stories and break down barriers,” she says.

“The students who participate in BAND are using the power of storytelling through art to share their interpretation of what dignity, respect, and kindness means to the



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