

ARTS & CULTURE

Anti-Bullying Musical Features Young Tarrytown Performer

Gina Carey — October 10, 2022



Kieran (in blue shirt) and the cast. Photo by Burcin Ayebe, @lucidluxphotograph

A new children's musical from **Random Farms Kids' Theater** is set to debut this fall at schools around Westchester. **#JustBeYou** tackles cyber-bullying, with the core story centered around an app that allows kids to upvote or downvote their peers.

"We follow a character named Jordan who downloads a new app on their phone. Jordan finds that in this app, posts aren't only liked or disliked," Random Farms' Artistic Director **Sarah Boyle** told *River Journal*. As the musical unfolds, Jordan grapples with their online life vs. real friendships, and in the end begins posting the titular hashtag. "We may create an online persona for ourselves, but we also need to realize that how we treat people online affects them in real life."

Tarrytown fifth-grader **Kieran Salvatierra** auditioned for the production and landed the part of Steve, a kid who has trouble fitting in at school. "He is in a click called The Misfits, and it's one of the least popular in the school," he said. "And The Misfits try to act real tough, but really deep down inside, they're just good kids."

Boyle believes an important aspect of the program is peer-leadership, with kids delivering the anti-bullying message, minus the grownups who usually enforce it. "What we find great about this type of program specifically is that it is an anti-bullying program that is performed by students," Boyle said. "So Kieran is in fifth grade, and he will be performing the show to children who are also in fifth grade."



"When a kid actually your age does it, it will be a little easier to hear, says Kieran Salvatierra. Photo supplied.

Salvatierra agrees that kids will make a bigger impact on their peers. "We were talking about how it would be especially good if kids do it, because when a normal parent does it, it's just hearing the same thing over and over," he said. "When a kid actually your age does it, it will be a little easier to hear."

Though he's just 10-years-old (and one of the youngest performers in the production), Salvatierra already has experience delivering anti-bullying messages to schools. As a student with Tourette Syndrome (TS), he worked with youth ambassadors from Westchester's chapter of **Tourette Association of American** to present in his classroom.

"They have a whole slide show that they showed to the class," he said. "So they did that, and then I spoke. I talked about definitely not bullying people with TS. We also talked about what it is, and what are some things that go along with it."

"We do a little bit of a talkback after the show with all of the students that watch," Boyle said. "So all of our cast members come to the front of the stage and we have our director facilitate a Q&A with the audience. If the audience has questions about bullying or about the show and theater, our cast is there to answer them."

#JustBeYou is fully booked this fall, with three runs in Westchester school districts and one in Connecticut, but it will resume again in the spring. Parents or administrators interested in booking **#JustBeYou** at their schools can contact Random Farms: patrycja@randomfarms.com. The musical is recommended for grades 3-6.

#JustBeYou was created by: Eric C. Webb (Book); Stephanie Bianchi (Music & Lyrics); Will Reynolds (Orchestrations); Julie Schwartz Webb (Director); Sarah Boyle (Choreographer); and Ben Doyle (Music Director)