

25th May 2021

NALINI VADDAPALLI

Administrator
Nunavut Law Foundation
PO Box 69
Iqaluit NU, X0A 0H0

RE: Upinnaqtuq (*To celebrate & be proud of a person's accomplishment*)

Dear Ms. Vaddapalli,

In August 2019, I met “Alex Ander”. It was my second year of teaching at Nasivvik High School in Pond Inlet, Nunavut. In the school records, his name is *Alexander Angnetsiak*. But sometimes, he prefers to be an *Anaviapik*.

How did he come up with his “Alex Ander” name? Well, it was during the term exams when he filled up the exam cover page. There were lines there for *last, first, and middle names*. I asked him if he has a middle name and he said he did not have, but he had the “*I know what to write*” grin on his face. When I checked his paper, I have seen that he split up his first name just so he could have a middle name. From then on, he is “*Alex Ander*” to me.

Alex was an explosive child. Before he came up in the high school, we had more than enough warnings from the teachers and admin in his elementary school: “He is *violent*”, “He *curse*”, “He is *trouble*”. True to their warnings, Alex really was “the trouble child”. He attends my Math & Science classes when he was in Grade 7. I had a number of incidences with him when he will just turn red and start to throw things at me. He cannot contain his anger.

When he explodes, he is like a raging bull whose focus is to catch the red cloth and just “kill” the “matador”. For Alex, the “matador” is anyone who does not give him what he wants. The last time I became his target was just last September 15, 2020. It was a few minutes before lunch break when he started shouting and throwing things at me. With his clenched fist, he advanced towards me and aimed to give me a hard punch. I was hit on my arm. I got bruised. He was sent home that day. When he came back, I talked to him and told him that I did not like what he did to me. I told him I do not hate him, but his actions are unacceptable. He was calm as if he understood what I am trying to say. I gave the class a fair warning that day that should anybody hurt me again, I am making sure that the RCMP will be involved. For a long time, Alex has been calm until recently when he exploded again, and the “matador” was the school vice principal. It was a traumatic experience for our school leader that day because she experienced firsthand how it is to be the “target” of an explosion.

Having said all of the above, then you might ask, “*What is the point of nominating Alex Ander to receive the Upinnaqtuq Award?!?!?*”

One of the award's criteria states that I can nominate *"someone who made a strong effort to change his/her attitude and behaviour to become a role model"*.

Alex is far from being the role model construct that we have in our minds but this year, he had made strides to become better and to be more in control of his emotions and his reactions towards them. Please understand that the defiant behavior he is showing is simply a response to his lack of skills — that is, when he feels incapable of responding to a specific expectation, he will lash out, push back, or melt down. Having understood the reason behind his defiance I have learned how to deal with him. I have learned that Alex needs consistency with rules, schoolwork, and people in his life.

This school year 2020-2021, Alex is in Grade 8 and he happens to be in my homeroom class. That means we got more time together in class and I was able to properly guide him and give him options to do things that will result in a win-win situation. I can count on my fingers on my one hand how many melt downs he had this school year. My Alex Ander is a better person this year. Yes, he still has outbursts, but he had progressed a lot.

Just last May 18, 2021, that Student Support Assistant (SSA) who used to work with Alex when he was in Grade 7 visited our room and caught Alex very focused in doing his work. I was beaming with pride and joy when she praised Alex. Her words are as follows:

"Wow! Alex! I am so proud of you! When you were in Grade 7, you cannot sit still, you don't do work. But now, look at all the work you've done. I AM SO PROUD OF YOU"

I affirmed the SSA's observation in front of the class. I told Alex that What the SSA is saying is very true. I can see in Alex's face how proud he is of himself. He was wearing that same grin the day he decided his middle name will be "Ander".

Alex is also a big brother. I often hear him say, "May I have fruits? I'll give it to my baby brother." When I asked him if he wants my old frisbee he said "Yeah, I'll play with my baby brother." In a way, he is trying his best to be a role model for his baby brother. He cares. He knows how to show it. He just needs proper guidance and a lot of compassion.

Recently, the Nunavut Teachers' Association launched the "Thank You for Making a Difference" campaign where students can write the things about their teachers that they are grateful for. Alex had the most entries. He had written notes to 5 of his teachers. Alex can see and recognize the people who made a difference in his lives.

It was our exam week last week (May 17-21) and Alex patiently wrote all of his exams without rushing to hand in his paper. In Grade 7, exams for him are not a serious thing. He would hand in papers with only his name in it. No answers. But this year was different. Last week, even if he was the only student left writing the exam, he exuded calmness. He did not rush. He asked a few questions. He submitted his paper and when I checked, every item was answered. He passed the Math exam with flying colours. The Science exam, because it dealt with a lot of words, was a challenge for him as shown in the mark that he got. Nevertheless, his effort to finish the test was a great accomplishment.

In closing, my Alex Ander, in his own rights, deserve the Upinnaqtuq Award because, even if things are out of his control and a lot of factors outside of the school are having great impacts on him, he still strived to become better. Alex is one of my greatest accomplishment this school year that I want to celebrate...that I am proud of! I am in the teaching profession for students like him. He wanted to be better. He could still be a lot better. He deserves better. He is a better person now!

Sincerely,

Kevin John C. Germino
Homeroom Teacher