Tammy Friend (00:04):

Welcome to the Guide for Life Podcast, exploring topics related to the personal competency skills that empower Arkansas's students and teachers to thrive at home school, on the job and in the community.

(00:21):

I'm Tammy Friend. Thank you for joining us today and today, miss Jada Simpson, Miss University of Central Arkansas is with us.

(00:31):

Hello, Jada.

Jada Simpson (00:32):

Hi. Thank you for having me.

Tammy Friend (00:34):

I appreciate you being here, and congratulations on being named Miss UCA.

Jada Simpson (00:40):

Thank you so much.

Tammy Friend (00:42):

I understand that you're an elementary education major also.

Jada Simpson (00:46):

Yes.

Tammy Friend (00:47):

So what factors made you choose education?

Jada Simpson (00:50):

Yeah, absolutely. So when I was growing up, I had a really great support system in my family. I'm an only child, so we were like the three amigos, me, my mom, and my dad, and they came to all my choir concerts when I didn't really sound the best and all of my school plays, they were still there. And so I was really grateful to have that support system. But with that, I also realized that not many students had that. Some students didn't have anyone who was at their events and their concerts and things like that. So I wanted to be a teacher so that I could be that support system for them. I want to be the one that's in their corner, the one who's cheer them on, letting them know that they have someone who wants them to succeed and that they have someone who is rooting for them.

Tammy Friend (01:39):

Absolutely. And that is so insightful to look through that lens, aware of how blessed with your support system, as you say.

Jada Simpson (01:47):

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. That's something that I really honed in on when I got a little bit older and realized, man, a lot of people don't have this, so I want to be that blessing for other people.

Tammy Friend (02:00):

You're an advocate, you definitely are. So you're a president of Educators Rising. So tell us a little bit about that for those that may not be familiar.

Jada Simpson (02:10):

Educators Rising specifically at UCA and the collegiate level is really just a way for future educators to connect with one another outside of the classroom. We really just meet biweekly to have guest speakers come in to talk to us about education and where we can see ourselves going in the next couple of years. We also want to make it a more relaxed environment.

(02:36):

A lot of times people think that, "oh, you're just teaching elementary students that can't be that hard. Your classes aren't that hard." And that is not the case, we have challenging classes just like any other major. And so we want to find this time together to connect outside of that and just really have a more relaxed environment, be able to have fun. We throw parties with each other. Just here in a couple of weeks we're going on our challenge course that we have on campus, and we also talk about what we want to see improved in our education department so that we can then get in contact with the necessary people to see those changes happen. So it's a lot of things that we are doing just outside of the classroom. And it's open for all education majors, it can be elementary, middle, high school, physical education, anything like that. We encourage all education majors to just come and really have a good time with us so that we can connect outside of the classroom setting.

Tammy Friend (03:34):

That is so important, the networking opportunity and building those relationships because you do have that support system. So about how many members are there?

Jada Simpson (03:45):

Currently 40 plus members? It kind of fluctuates because not everyone always comes to the meetings every time because there are a lot of time conflicts, but sure, we do have a good amount of people that are at least in the organization, and so we like to meet biweekly so that sometimes a handful of people will come and things like that. But we do have about 40 members who are currently active.

Tammy Friend (04:11):

And just knowing who to contact, knowing that there are people out they can pick up the phone or shoot a text if they have a question or need something.

Jada Simpson (04:20):

Yes. Absolutely.

Tammy Friend (04:22):

I love to hear that you have that in place. Let's circle back to your role as Miss UCA. When I got to meet you a couple of weeks ago when you're up here at the agency, you said that your platform is focused on anti-bullying.

Jada Simpson (04:37):

Yes.

Tammy Friend (04:40):

And it definitely is a need, I'm so glad that you are targeting this issue, why did you choose this one?

Jada Simpson (04:49):

As I mentioned, I'm going to be an educator. So really just making sure that students have the best experience in school as possible. School is required, you have to go. So there's no reason for our students to be dreading going to school every day, and unfortunately, bullying is the number one reason why students fake sick or things like that so that they can miss out on school because they're afraid that they'll be bullied. So I want to really target bullying and look at it as not focusing on the negatives of the bullies, but focusing on how we can just shift the thinking. Oftentimes, bullies are just not thinking of the consequences that their actions will have on someone else. My goal is to get a bully to think about, "I'm going to say this to this person, is this going to help them or is this going to hurt them?" And when they can decipher between the two and they can say, "What I'm about to say or do is going to hurt this person, let me make a better choice. Let me walk away from this situation because if I don't have anything nice to say or do I need to remove myself."

(06:08):

So if I can focus on that, then we can start to see a decrease in our school bullying cases, which is what we all want. Students need to be excited to go to school. They need to be excited to learn new things and to see their friends and not see a bully when they are entering the school setting. So that's really my goal and that's my purpose of my anti-bullying campaign as Miss UCA.

Tammy Friend (06:33):

It's valuable. I've visited with people, and you've heard the saying, probably hurt people hurt people.

Jada Simpson (06:39):

Yes, ma'am.

Tammy Friend (06:40):

And oftentimes people who've been bullied end up being a bully, you also hear that as well. I will say, I've talked about this before of Dr. Bruce Perry and Oprah Winfrey wrote the book, What Happened To You? And they discuss, if you look through the lens of the behavior, look through the lens of what happened to you rather than, what are you doing? Why'd you do that? But see that behavior as a symptom of something else going on. Then you can approach the person who is showing the bullying behavior with the approach of what happened to you and by doing so, hope to instill empathy.

Jada Simpson (07:22):

And that's my goal as well. Like I said, I don't want to focus on the bad and saying, "You're being mean. You're being a bully." But instead saying, "Let's correct this action. Let's see where we go wrong and how we can move forward from here."

Tammy Friend (07:37):

What are some specific things you plan to do to combat it?

Jada Simpson (07:42):

As Miss UCA and as a title holder in general in the Miss Arkansas and Miss America organization with your platform, your social impact initiative, you go around and spread it as much as you can. And so that is really my main focus is to make sure that I'm getting into these schools so that my initiative is reaching as many students as possible. And so it really just goes back to the approach that I have of making sure that they are understanding where their behavior has a consequence on someone else. It can affect someone else. So that's really what my strategy is to combat the bullying, is really just making sure that the person who is showing these signs of bullying themselves understands where their mistake is and how they can correct it.

Tammy Friend (08:31):

And it's a high visibility, position, your role, so will you be able to go in and talk to students?

Jada Simpson (08:39):

Yes, ma'am. I go in and I talk to them. I can do assemblies for whole schools, or I can even focus it in a little bit more on just certain grades, certain classrooms, whatever that school really is needing. I can be that for them, because sometimes the whole school may not be showing a bullying problem, but one class may be having some issues and struggling in that department. So if I need to just focus in on that one class, then I can do so.

Tammy Friend (09:08):

Sure. While you are an adult, you are closer in age, say, than their teacher perhaps. And I have picked up on in the classroom, they're more prone to listen to someone almost more like a peer. While you're not, I think that you will be relatable to the students and they will look up to you.

Jada Simpson (09:35):

Especially because they see their teacher every day, so oftentimes when you see someone all the time, you kind of don't listen to them as much. But if someone like me who is practically a stranger to them comes in and they're reiterating what their teacher has already told them, then it kind of starts to sink in and they say, "Okay, let me actually start thinking about this. Maybe there's some truth to what my teacher has been saying this whole time. "I think that happens a lot with parents. You hear your parents say something, but then when someone else says it, you're like, "Oh, okay, that actually might be true. So [inaudible 00:10:09] listen, this time."

Tammy Friend (10:10):

That's exactly what I was thinking when you were sharing that example. I was like, yep, just luck with my son or anybody else. You can tell them and then a complete stranger or a teacher, one of their teachers

that they really respect and hold in high regard, can tell them the same thing I've been telling and it looks a little differently, they buy in.

Jada Simpson (10:32):

It just shifts that thinking a little bit of, "Okay, I actually might need to pay attention to what I'm hearing right now."

Tammy Friend (10:38):

Absolutely. Well, I am thankful for the work that you're doing.

Jada Simpson (10:43):

Thank you.

Tammy Friend (10:44):

And I know that in the counseling office, we get calls about bullying. "Do you have strategies? What do you recommend? What can we do?" There's been an uptick since COVID, so it's encouraging to know that you're going to tackle that.

Jada Simpson (11:00):

Yeah, especially with COVID, we've seen, like you said, an uprising in it because our students were out of the classroom setting for so long. So now that they're reentering and maybe those students who skipped a couple of grades due to the COVID years of kindergarten, first, and they're entering school as a second grader, they haven't had those social interactions with people yet. So now they're not really understanding how can I interact with this person? What do I do? What does my behavior look like? And so that's why we're seeing this uprising in our bullying cases. So it's really important for us to try to decrease them as much as possible.

Tammy Friend (11:38):

Sure. Certainly. So do you have any final thoughts to leave with us today?

Jada Simpson (11:44):

I just wanted to say thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited to be able to spread my social impact more so I can try to reach as many students as possible, and parents as well, parents, teachers, anyone who can then spread this message to their students is really what my goal is as Miss UCA and going into Miss Arkansas this summer, June 3rd through 10th, I'll be competing for Miss Arkansas. Yes. That's how [inaudible 00:12:11]-

Tammy Friend (12:10):

How exciting.

Jada Simpson (12:12):

I know. I know. It's my first time. I don't really know what to expect, but I'm super excited. If anyone wants to follow my journey as Miss UCA and going into Miss Arkansas, my Instagram is Miss_UCA. That's

M-I-S-S_UCA. And that'll be all things Miss UCA, all things Miss Arkansas. It's really exciting and just so many things happening. I'm super excited. I know it's a lot.

Tammy Friend (12:40):

No, that is exciting. I'm excited for you, Jada.

Jada Simpson (12:43):

Thank you.

Tammy Friend (12:44):

And I'll be following you today. I'll be following Miss_ UCA How exciting. Well, thank you again for joining us.

Jada Simpson (12:55):

Thank you so much.

Tammy Friend (12:57):

I will be following you on Instagram, and I will definitely this summer be tuning in.

Jada Simpson (13:03):

Yes. Thank you so much. Thank you, miss Tammy for having me.

Tammy Friend (13:06):

Thanks Jada.

(13:13):

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