

For Information Contact:
Shauna Schuda
Public Relations Department Manager
630-468-7075
Shauna.Schuda@LionsClubs.org

For Immediate Release

Canadian 6th Grader, Keaton Hamilton, Takes Home the Grand Prize in Lions International Peace Essay Contest

(Oak Brook, Ill.) – Keaton Hamilton, a 12-year-old from Ontario, Canada, knows what peace is. Hamilton put pen to paper to illustrate his ideas for the world's eyes in his award-winning essay entitled "*Friends as Leaders*" which demonstrates the good that can come from standing up for what is right.

"Young people experience the world in a unique way, and the Lions International Peace Essay Contest empowers participants to show us what can happen when we lead with compassion," said Lions International President Brian Sheehan. "We can all learn something from Keaton and answer the call to promote and spread peace."

Created to give young people with visual impairments an opportunity to express their feelings about peace, the Lions International Peace Essay Contest is a staple of Lions clubs around the world. Lions work with local schools and area families to identify young people interested in participating and who could benefit from this program.

"I am lucky to live in a country where I am safe, comfortable and supported," said Hamilton on the topic of peace. "I don't have to worry about food and shelter and being safe. I wish everyone would feel safe and comfortable in the world."

The winning essay was selected for its originality, organization, merit and portrayal of the contest theme, "Lead With Compassion."

The Newmarket Lions Club – Ontario sponsored the local contest that gave this talented 6th grader the opportunity to participate in this global event and share his words of peace with the world. Through his essay, Hamilton shares the idea that the most valuable leaders are those who set an honorable standard by speaking up even when it might be easier to remain silent. His words also highlight the importance of being a support system in the community and making accommodations for those around us when they need a friendly face and a helping hand. The 6th grader ends his essay by encouraging us never to be afraid to ask for help because there will always be someone around ready to lead with compassion.

"I try to take advantage of opportunities in school, sports, activities and writing," added Hamilton. "[The Lions International Peace Essay Contest] gives a chance for the blind and low vision community to express themselves in writing and have a chance to succeed." The 12-year-old hopes to help create more opportunities for the visually impaired community around the world, and even in outer space, by becoming an astronomer.

As the contest winner, Hamilton will receive a US\$5,000 cash prize, an award and an invitation to attend Lions Day with the United Nations in New York as well as the Lions Clubs International Convention in Boston. Visit lionsclubs.org/peace-essay, to read Hamilton's essay and learn more about the contest.

Lions International, the world's largest service club organization, is made up of more than 1.4 million men and women in over 200 countries and geographical areas throughout the world. Lions International created the Peace Essay Contest to foster a spirit of peace and international understanding in young people worldwide.

Friends as Leaders

By Keaton Hamilton, age 12

Right now, wherever you are at this moment, I would like you to imagine that you are a new student in grade 5. You are 5 feet tall, like video games, play sports, and you're just like an ordinary kid. But there's a wall between you and the rest of the students, in this class (not literally of course). You can't see that well. Not the writing on a white page, but the objects around you. Not the colours of anybody's eyes, but the colour of desks, chairs and markers. Now, a short kid with black hair looks at your white cane, hanging on a hook by the door. "Uh, what is that like a spear or something?" he says with the intent of making others feel sad. "No, it's ... my cane," you say in a small voice. "Don't they tell you no weapons at school?" "It's not a weapon it's my white cane." "Do you know it's white or..."

"Stop being rude," says a strong voice coming from another student. "It is what they use to know what's around them, no need to think they can't do anything when they are blind! Don't bully them about something they can't control."

That student who stood up for you. That was completely their choice. They could have said nothing or ignore you all they wanted. But, they went out of their way and stood up for you. This is just one example of "leading with compassion", and even without this example you could probably think of a time in your life where someone looked out for you, assisted you with something, gave you a general hint, etc. When you were in school, maybe your teachers lead with compassion by giving you work in a form that was best for you, whether that be on a computer, on paper with pencil, or upside down. Your friends lead with compassion. After all, somebody who does not is bossy and only thinks about themselves.

We all know the feeling of being looked out for, and having friends to fall back on. Knowing that someone has your back while accomplishing any difficult task and achieving goals is one of those shiny diamonds in life.

We all play a role in ensuring that our peers feel welcome and safe in learning environments, groups and while alone. While being a best friend is not required, at least look out for people and make sure to help if they ask for it. Everybody in a community is responsible, should feel like they belong, and should try and assist any one in need of a helping hand. Even if it's just another local citizen that seems troubled, you can at least smile or offer guidance. That's how new friends are formed. And remember,

there's no harm in reaching out for help. A good person would respond and you can look out for each other. That is what friends would do, and that's what leading with compassion is all about.