

# *GinaMarie Raimondo*

## **BULLYING...WE'RE KICKIN' IT FOUNDER SUMMARY BIO**

It began in elementary school, when GinaMarie was recognized with a Citizenship Award, from then on her path in helping others was paved. GinaMarie grew into an independent, savvy business owner operating several successful businesses from the corporate world of accounting and factoring to hands on physical businesses such as a graphic design company, lettering Hummers for the Outback Steakhouse and Award Winning show vehicles; to operating a gas station, a well-recognized deli and a delivery service. With the overwhelming success, she felt there was something missing, she reassessed her life and although extremely thankful for her career path, she walked away from it all and selflessly decided to help preserve the lives of our youth...which turned out to be her most difficult but rewarding position thus far.

As the Founder of Kickin' It, GinaMarie created an effective method of educating children on how to positively express and resolve interpersonal problems through the practical application of the Golden Rule: "Do unto others..." Her unique approach rapidly led her to create the first and only anti-bullying and leadership center in the country.

In 2010, GinaMarie launched a grassroots campaign to empower and inspire children to overcome bullying and negative obstacles so they can freely develop into their own unique selves. Rather than focusing on one aspect she desired to reach and support all children. Understanding that bullying is personal, it takes many forms and for some can occur on a daily basis, it became obvious that a personal, interactive counter-approach was necessary, regardless of whether the child is on the receiving end, a by/upstander or the aggressor; GinaMarie created an all-encompassing approach engaging children with programs starting at age two and making it available to them on a continuous basis.

To raise awareness GinaMarie boldly toured the country in an RV with her dog Jersey, for two years bringing a powerful message into schools across the country. In 2013, after visiting schools and communities across the country and piloting various programs, GinaMarie felt children needed something more; as horrific stories of bullying still echoed in headlines across the country. This is when she realized in order to change the school and social climate; children not only need a place to go to feel safe and validated for being their own unique self, children also needed an environment where they can learn positive, respectful behaviors and how to interact with others in a healthy manner. Thus, her journey began to create such a place.

She went back to NJ and tirelessly bargained for space, in the local mall to athletic clubs and parks to finding and fixing up a leased building only to have the owner then change the use. After several failed attempts, losing space and not having a permanent home for the center, with no financial support, GinaMarie regrouped once again. She sold the last bit of her belongings, gave up every possession and took on several jobs including becoming a letter carrier for the USPS.

February 2015, GinaMarie came across an ad for a preschool for sale, GinaMarie convinced the owners to lease the property with an all or nothing agreement to buy them out within 36 months. On September 8th 2015, the Kickin' It Kids Learning Academy, Antibullying & Leadership Center opened, the first preschool class graduated in June 2016.

GinaMarie's passion, selflessness and fierce determination created this highly regarded groundbreaking organization. However, according to GinaMarie it's because of the loyal supporters and dedicated individuals that make Kickin' It so effective. Her humility and dedication is an example of what one individual can do to impact their community, and how that individual can rally other likeminded individuals and have their legacy live on as an example of inspirational leadership and heroism.

In addition to helping children, GinaMarie has fostered and rescued countless animals; some are at the Kickin' It Kids Center. In December 2015 GinaMarie was honored by the Rescue Mission for her efforts to support the local homeless shelter, February 2016 she was honored by the Governor's Office as a NJ Hero, May 2016 she was honored by Manalapan Mayor Musich for her work in the community. October 2016 the Mayor signed a Proclamation declaring the Kickin' It Center as a resource. In her spare time she enjoys boxing, working with animals, cooking and comic conventions.