KidGab on mission to end cyber bullying

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By: **Rachel Rose**

The children's social networking website KidGab was created by Texas A&M University computer science and engineering Ph.D. student, Stephanie Valentine, who works in the Sketch Recognition Lab led by Dr. Tracy Hammond, associate professor in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering.

KidGab is built for children who are not old enough to join websites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The goal of the site is to help children understand social media and put an end to cyber bullying.

"KidGab is intended as a closed social network for small communities of children and adults, like a scouting troop, a sports team, or a classroom," Valentine said. "Kids can learn how to social network in a safe environment, mentored by their parents, teachers, community leaders and professionals."

Valentine said that she knew she wanted to do something philanthropic for her dissertation and began exploring topics to research.

"I looked into a lot of societal problems, but the issue of cyberbullying really stood out to me, given that I understood so well how it felt to be bullied," Valentine said. "I read so many research papers about cyberbullying that said somebody needs to do something about this and I remember getting so frustrated that nobody was actually doing anything

about it. So, I decided I would do something. And that's how KidGab was born."

Valentine has started spreading KidGab's mission by partnering with the Girl Scouts of Central Texas (GSCTX). She just completed her first eight-week Digital Friendship program with GSCTX in Caldwell, Texas. There are six more eight-week programs scheduled for the spring semester in the Bryan/College Station area, Austin, Waco and Killeen. Valentine thinks that her partnership with GSCTX is wonderful, and that she is also open to working with other organizations and schools.

There are several people who make KidGab possible.

"My advisor, Dr. Tracy Hammond has supported me every step of the way, beginning with a Technological Philanthropy class, on through the software design process, through the formation of Wired Youth, and she helped me lead the first workshop," Valentine said.

Fellow Ph.D. student, Cassandra Odula, and GSCTX program specialist, Emily Magnotta also assisted in leading the first workshop.

Valentine is the founding president of **Wired Youth Inc.**, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster an understanding among children and families of the permanent, public, and context-free nature of Internet communications. It also aims to empower children and families with good habits of digital friendship and cyber-citizenship through active practice of those skills. Wired Youth offers workshops on Digital Friendship to Girl Scouts and other groups of children.

KidGab is an example of a CSE student standing up for something she believes in and making a difference in the surrounding community.