



Fall 2006

TE Times

A NEWSLETTER FROM TEEN EMPOWERMENT

Neighborhood Builders

Each year, Bank of America selects two nonprofit organizations in Greater Boston to receive its Neighborhood Builder Award, which is designed to recognize, nurture, and reward organizations that are helping their neighborhoods achieve excellence. Teen Empowerment is honored to be chosen as one of this year's recipients, along with Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation. The award provides \$200,000 in operating support over two years, as well as professional development training for senior staff. It was

announced on November 15 at a celebratory event at the New England Aquarium.

"The efforts of Teen Empowerment are truly a testament to your commitment to making Greater Boston the best it can be. We are thrilled to present you with the Neighborhood Builder award and look forward to sharing your accomplishments with the community."

— Robert E. Gallery, Bank of America

Storefront Organizing

In July, TE opened a storefront office on Bowdoin Street in Dorchester. An intense and talented group of youth organizers went to work immediately reclaiming the back yard of the building from waist-high weeds and rubble, in preparation for their inaugural event: the "Taste a Piece of Peace" Barbecue and Festival. Neighborhood people of all ages thronged to the event, which featured performances and speeches urging community members to bring peace to the streets. Next, TE youth contributed their talents to the Ronan Park Multicultural Festival, leading a healing ceremony and helping to dedicate a memorial to slain peace activist John Beresford. At the end of August, TE worked with the Bird Street Community Center and break-dance activists The Floor Lords to present "Street Life," an inspiring evening of rap, poetry, song, dance, and drama at the Strand Theater. See excerpts on page 3 from youths' words at these events, and look for more great things from these young people.

For photos of these events and many others, visit the Photo Gallery at www.teenempowerment.org.

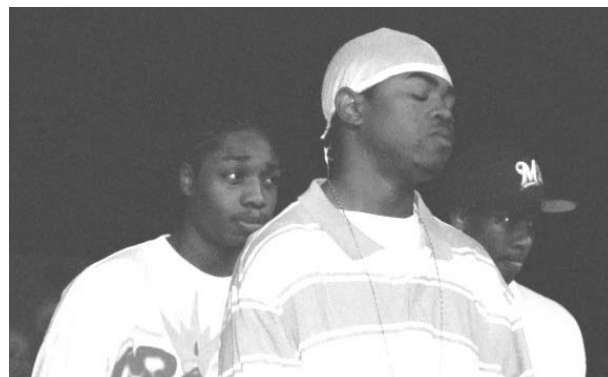


PHOTO: SUSAN BORQUE

Juumane Kendrick, Tyquan Evans, and John McNeill leading hundreds of their peers in a healing ceremony during "Street Life" at the Strand.

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Behind the Initials

or What happens when TE, HIPP, and BCYF work together

The Drane Family Fund is catalyzing an effort to “increase the peace” on Boston’s streets by supporting a collaborative effort in Roxbury this year. Boston Centers for Youth and Families, the city-run youth and human services agency, is a key partner; its community center at Madison Park is home to the program. Teen Empowerment is supplying several components of the program itself, beginning with TE’s intensive hiring process, which was used to hire a group of 12 neighborhood young people. The youth are being trained

by staff from the Help Increase the Peace Program (HIPP) to lead workshops with their peers on finding peaceable solutions to problems that might otherwise escalate into violence. BCYF staff are providing support to the program and working to recruit youth as workshop participants. The hope of everyone involved is that pooling the resources of our three organizations will truly help increase the peace on Boston streets, and that this collaboration will spread to BCYF centers throughout the city.

Snapshots from School

English High School: EHS youth organizers recognize several key issues facing the school: increasing respect, improving race/cultural relations, reducing peer pressure, and talking about sexuality. To help address tensions between English-speaking and Spanish-speaking students, the YOs are running a school-wide assembly where the issue will be dramatized and then talked about from the perspectives of students dealing with it. This will be followed up by classroom sessions where students can participate in an earnest dialogue.

Noonan Business Academy: The youth organizers at NBA are working on building school spirit and

continuing to improve relations between students and teachers. They are organizing a school-wide trivia game and a basketball game, with teams for both events comprised of students and teachers.

Urban Science Academy: TE consulting staff are working with two teachers to set up the Student Leadership Council. Among other issues, the group will focus on building a stronger school community, improving student-teacher relationships, and organizing more events for the school. They are planning a Thanksgiving celebration and a canned food drive for November, and a toy drive and a Student-Teacher Talent Showcase for December.



PHOTO: SCOTT LIBERATORE

Natacha Montina and Christine Aruda at TE’s Field Day at Conway Park in Somerville. The Somerville sites will soon begin preparations for their first youth conference, scheduled for April 7 at Somerville High School.

Roc City Youth News

In a busy and productive summer, TE’s Rochester site trained police recruits on how to communicate more effectively with youth, and they organized two “Citywide Vibe” gatherings involving 150 youth. Participants provided input to the site’s Youth Agenda for Youth campaign, prioritizing things young people need to do to be more positive, powerful, and productive in their lives.

In October, TE youth organizers delivered powerful speeches at a march and rally to gain equitable funding for urban schools. The rally was sponsored by the Alliance for Quality Education as part of New York’s Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

Roc Site is preparing for the 3rd annual Citywide Youth Conference and Speak Out on December 9 at Monroe High School. The conference, which is expected to draw more than 600 participants, will focus on how events in history play a role in the issues youth are facing in Rochester, and will continue work on the Youth Agenda for Youth.

Taste a Piece of Peace

by *Jacqueline Fontes*

Excerpt from a speech given at TE's "Taste a Piece of Peace" Barbecue and Festival, August 2006

When we moved in here a month ago, this yard was a mess. Well, over this short time we worked in 90-degree heat to transform it into a place where the community can come and enjoy themselves. The way we changed this yard is how we want to change the whole community. It's time we cleared away the weeds that are hiding the positive things about this community, and that's what we are here to do. We know we aren't going to change everything in one day, but we want to help support the work that so many people have been doing here for years. We organized this event to bring our community together in order to whet our appetites for a brighter future. So today we are reaching out our hands and asking if you are willing to help us bring peace to our community. Because I know I am.

PHOTO: CRAIG MCCLAY



TE youth organizer **Jacqueline Fontes**

Just Another Casualty*

(an excerpt)

*Poetry and spoken word by Ketchup (Sarah Lawrence)
Performed at the "Street Life" event, August 2006*

...
When he was 10, losing his goldfish
Was just another casualty
When he was 12, losing his first dog
Just another casualty
That his heart mourned casually
And now 17, and he lost his life
It was predictable so
His family mourned just another casualty
...
Yo, I won't let this death scene
Become just another fad to me
Cause actually
I don't see his eyes shutting for the last time
And his body hitting the concrete for the umpteenth time
As just another casualty
His heart and soul alone
Never mind his beautiful eyes and skin tone
All of that was so much more to me
...
Then she woke up from this nightmare and thought
I wanna go to a place where
Bullets aren't the only things in flight in the night sky
Cause where I come from
Dreams don't soar that high past five
And nightmares start at half past nine

* © 2006 by Sarah Lawrence

14th Annual Youth Peace Conference

PHOTO: MERRILL SHEA



Sam Kidane, 2nd place winner in TE's spoken word contest, performs at the Youth Peace Conference.

Amidst torrential rain and a sorrowful season of street violence, more than 1100 people came to the Boston Park Plaza Hotel on May 13 to listen to youth and to share their thoughts about what young people in the city need to live productive lives, and to simply live. The following day, with the rain still falling, several TE staff joined with one of our partner agencies, the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute, in their annual Mothers Day Walk for Peace. You can see video and photos of the Peace Conference on our website.

DVDs for Groups and Classes

TE now has outstanding scenes from past Peace Conferences available for sale. These 20-minute DVDs will spark discussion in classrooms and group settings about issues of economic justice, marketing, war and peace, and other topics. Check out the trailers at www.teenempowerment.org/dvds.

A Meeting in the Park

Not long ago, Lexington Park in Somerville was little more than a basketball hoop embedded in an expanse of concrete. It wasn't much, but it did serve as a gathering place for neighborhood youth. Yet everyone in the area—teens, seniors, parents, children—wished for something better. Eventually people got the renovations they wished for, but the new park has created tension and anger over who should be there and how different constituencies can coexist.

While the old park was mostly a basketball court, the new park has both a playground and a tot lot with shiny new structures. But the basketball area is now an awkward, stunted place—two half-courts side by side, separated from the playground by a low fence. Parents gained a lovely play space for their children, but teens lost the full court where they could run and compete. When the teens do play, the ball frequently bounces over the fence into the children's area, causing consternation and complaints from parents. With escalating tensions came incidents such as parents calling for the park to be off-limits for teens, and a nighttime tagger spray-painting "Kill a Yuppie" on the fence. Clearly, some intervention was called for.

One of the youth who used to hang at the old

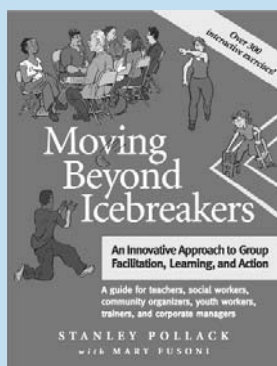
park is TE staff member Danny McLaughlin. He recognized that the interactive meeting structure he uses daily with youth at TE's West Somerville site could help create a dialogue between teens and parents at the park, help break down the tension, and get people working together for a solution. So he organized a meeting at the park.

On the appointed August evening, about 30 people sat down to participate. The agenda (see box) was designed to get people talking to others one-on-one, thinking in a positive way about their neighborhood, and moving towards action to reach a shared vision. The group brainstormed 25 possible action steps, one of which—a neighborhood basketball tournament—was implemented a few weeks later. Youth and adults who had not previously had civil exchanges built relationships based on sharing their lives and their visions.

It's a rare meeting that solves a thorny problem, of course, and this meeting did not solve the structural difficulties that make peaceful coexistence difficult at Lexington Park. Yet it did create hope, generate ideas, and build alliances for making both needed changes in the park and a neighborhood that works for everyone.

The Lexington Park Dialogue Agenda

Introduction	Welcome. A brief history of Lexington Park. Preview the agenda.
Warm-up Question	Say your name and talk about your vision of utopia, and why you have that vision.
Concentric Circles	People speak with each other in designated pairs for 2 minutes each, answering 10 specific questions such as: Where did you grow up? Talk about your best friend when you were a child. What's your favorite memory of a park when you were growing up? What's your vision for this park?
Wordstorm	What words come to your mind when you hear the phrase "ideal neighborhood"?
Brainstorm	Action steps for a better Lexington Park
Evaluation	Each person evaluates on a scale from 1 to 10.



I received the book *Moving Beyond Icebreakers* and facilitated my meeting based on the book's guidelines. It was overwhelmingly successful. The youths enjoyed it and the participation level increased immensely.

— Donna Marcelin-Samuel
President, Positive Reactions Youth Group, Trinidad, W.I.

This book—packed as it is with practical and useful activities, exercises, and advice—points the way toward meetings that bring groups together, accomplish goals, and prove that hard work and fun can and should go together.

— Steve Seidel
Director, Harvard Project Zero & The Arts In Education Program
Harvard Graduate School of Education

Place your order at www.movingbeyondicebreakers.org!