

Steppin' Up: Youth Peace Conference 2006

Where will you be on Saturday, May 13, at 11AM? Over 800 area youth will be on the move that morning, converging by train, bus, and van on the Boston Park Plaza Hotel for TE's 14th annual Youth Peace Conference.

To prepare for this important day of community change, TE staff are training more than 100 youth to make powerful and personal speeches, lead interactive work sessions, and hold a deep and meaningful healing ceremony. We are joining in partnership with agencies from across the city and state to reach out to youth and engage them as leaders in a movement for positive change. We are working with State Representative Byron Rushing, State Senator Dianne Wilkerson, and Boston Mayor Tom Menino to bring in other public officials to attend the conference, listen, and respond

to what the young people have to say.

With violence on the city streets once again a serious, heartbreaking problem, Teen Empowerment is asking everyone to do what they can to support this effort. The theme of this year's Youth Peace Conference — **Steppin' Up to Change: From the Stoops to the State House** — speaks to TE's strong belief that the problems facing urban youth can only be solved when youth are empowered to voice their thoughts and experiences, and when policy-makers pay attention to what they have to say.

In the 1990's, the Peace Conference and TE youth leaders played a major role in turning young people away from gang violence and towards positive involvements with their communities. With your help, we can do it again. Please join us.

Here's how you can help:

- Volunteer to help with conference preparation, registration, or other tasks on the day of the conference. To volunteer, contact stephanie@teenempowerment.org.
- Mark your calendar, and plan to attend. Hear what the young people have to say, and share your own thoughts in a youth-led interactive dialogue session. For tickets (\$3), contact mary@teenempowerment.org.
- Help us pay for the day. The Peace Conference is a major financial commitment. Our corporate sponsors cover some of the cost, but the price tag for youth leaders' stipends, rental of space, and other essential elements is significant. You can donate online at www.teenempowerment.org.

Different schools with different races.
Different topics in different places.
Different people willing to share.
Different people, all willing to care.

— *English High School student*



Inside: Common Ground



14th annual Youth Peace Conference

Steppin' Up to Change From the Stoops to the State House

Saturday, May 13
11:00 am-5:00 pm

Boston Park Plaza Hotel
64 Arlington Street

Tickets \$3

*For tickets or more information,
call 617-536-4266 x 307*



Sponsors



Harvard Pilgrim
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Short Takes

DotCom

TE's new site serving Dorchester's Uphams Corner community has been dubbed the "DotCom" site, to distinguish it from our school site in Dorchester. Youth organizers and staff have testified at hearings and meetings, bringing the voice of youth into the citywide effort to end the violence that has killed so many young people. The site organized a powerful dialogue session attended by over 100 people. Nearly 50 of those present participated in the evening's Healing Ceremony, coming to the microphone to speak about loss and their hopes for a more peaceful community.

Somerville

TE's new program in Somerville doubled in size this year! With funding from the state through the Senator Charles E. Shannon Jr. At-Risk Youth Project, TE was able to hire staff to open a second site in the city. The sites have been bringing people together with dialogue sessions between youth and police, a youth-adult basketball tournament, and a "Night with the Neighbors" dinner and speakout.

Rochester, NY

TE youth and staff served on transition teams for Rochester's new mayor, Robert Duffy, helping develop plans for youth services and public safety. Now they are running Youth-to-Youth Dialogue Sessions to generate deep discussion about their "Youth Agenda for Youth," highlighting ways that

youth can take action for more positive, powerful and productive lives. They will also be continuing work on the Transitions Project, focusing on dialogue sessions through the Youth Police Unity Project.

New Teacher Training

Boston Public Schools contracted with TE to provide training for teachers new to the system. In February and March, TE staff conducted two Saturday sessions with 40 dedicated teachers, training them to use TE's interactive approach in the classroom. Between sessions, TE staff observed classes and provided individually tailored training to those teachers who requested it. In written evaluations, teachers agreed 95% of the time with the statement, "Overall, I found today's event helpful to my teaching," with 75% agreeing strongly.

Cultural Competency Initiative

TE worked with the MA Department of Education and Commissioner Driscoll to organize the kick-off conference for a statewide cultural competency initiative, as part of a strategy to address the persistent and troubling academic achievement gap. As TE continues our involvement with this initiative, our goal is to bring policymakers, funders, and practitioners in the field of education reform into direct, productive communication with urban youth so that they will understand the realities and struggles of these young people's lives.

From JP to Winchester, and Back

“The field trip to English High was not just a field trip, but an experience that will stick with us forever; it taught us about life, and people, things with much more value than a traditional educational subject. The people we met had so many deep concepts and opinions and brought us to the truth.” – Hannan Lin, student, Winchester High School

This winter, TE’s site at the English High School in Jamaica Plain worked with Winchester High to organize an exchange between students and teachers at their schools. About 40 students from each school participated. To prepare for the exchange, students read Jonathan Kozol’s *Savage Inequalities* and other books, and each student was assigned an “e-pal” with whom they could swap ideas and background information via email. Then, Winchester students came to EHS one week, and the following week, EHS went to Winchester. Each visit included interactive meetings where students spoke one-on-one and the visitors listened as students from the host school brainstormed the problems they see at their school.

In a follow-up essay, a Winchester student expressed profound appreciation for this opportunity: “Our trip to English High was one of the most educational school trips I have taken in my ten years of public school learning.” While the English High students took note of the greater resources available in Winchester, such as more books and computers, mostly they valued this opportunity to give their suburban peers a positive image of urban youth. Valeria Cabrera of EHS said, “I was intimidated by the fact that we were all so different. I was thinking about the things that they could be possibly thinking about me. Then I realized that I was giving in to the stereotypes. I had always said that



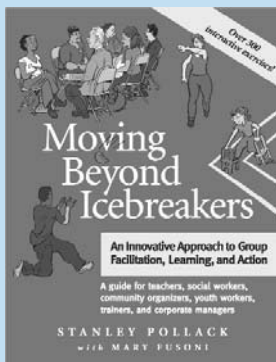
ELLEN BULLOCK, COURTESY OF THE WINCHESTER STAR

Miles Howard of Winchester High and Mike Roberson of English High exchange perceptions of each other’s schools.

stereotypes are a normal thing the first time we meet a person, but that we cannot let that keep us from finding out who the person actually is. I then decided to follow my beliefs and to wear the prettiest smile that I could to make them feel welcomed.” WHS students responded to this welcome. As one said: “Things that surprised me about English High were the sensitivity and exceptionally powerful personalities of the students. They are real people. They are not stereotypes; they are their own people, and they have their own not-so-well-disguised hurts, their passions, their own personal senses of humor.”

Although, as a Winchester student said, “It seems like we come from different worlds, and deal with different issues,” an English student captured the intense nature of the experience in these lines from a “group poem”:

We discovered the differences and similarities.
That’s why it was hard to say goodbye.



Moving Beyond Icebreakers is a splendid presentation of techniques that enhance group cohesiveness and productivity. Any agency or institution practicing the interactive group exercises outlined in this book will be enriched. I highly recommend it.

— Alvin F. Poussaint, MD
Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School
and Judge Baker Children’s Center, Boston MA

Moving Beyond Icebreakers is our new “bible.” It is not allowed to leave my office. It is so useful for any educator, facilitator, instructor — basically anyone who wants to engage a group of people in a thoughtful and meaningful way.

— Jenna Sigman, New England Aquarium

Check it out and place your order at www.movingbeyondicebreakers.org!

Lives that Inspire



Marquis Tucker and some volunteers have fun with an interactive exercise. From left: Jerrica Pompilus, William Arias, Stella Downie, Jane Uptegrove, and Melissa Diaz.

More than 350 people came together last November at TE's Celebration of Hope and Caring to honor Frieda Garcia and Rep. Byron Rushing. These long-time activists are an inspiration to the youth and staff of Teen Empowerment and to everyone who works for a more just society. TE presented Frieda and Byron with the "Lives that Inspire a New Generation" award, which included a TE-produced video documentary of their lives and achievements. We are grateful to Frieda and Byron for their support of Teen Empowerment; to the co-chairs of the event, Wayne and Jacqui Budd and Bishop Thomas Shaw; and to everyone who joined us in body and in spirit that evening.



TE staff members Heang Ly, Gina San Inocencio, and LaTia King



Frieda Garcia and Rep. Byron Rushing with their "Lives that Inspire a New Generation" award

PHOTOS: MERRILL SHEA



Celebration co-chair Bishop Thomas Shaw



Bill Plunkett and Ibe Khonteh

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