

THE TORCH

CIVIL RIGHTS TEAM PROJECT NEWSLETTER

October 2006

Newsletter Editor: Amy Homans

Thank you to all of you who attended the faculty/community advisor trainings that took place over the last few weeks. It was great to see so many returning faces and a whole new crop of fresh ones. We are looking forward to seeing more of you and your team members at the team trainings that began in mid-October and run through the end of November.

In this issue of *The Torch*, you will find: 21 ideas for projects and events, information on the documentary film *Ugly Ducklings*, the Presenter of the Month, a great CD and songbook from Teaching Tolerance, an article from CRTP Director Thom Harnett; and much more.



WHAT MAINE DID ON ITS SUMMER VACATION THIS YEAR

BY THOMAS A. HARNETT, DIRECTOR,
Maine Civil Rights Team Project

This summer, the State of Maine went through a difficult stretch in terms of civil rights enforcement actions. To paraphrase Charles Dickens: *It was the worst of times. It was the best of times.*

It was the worst of times for a young Somali woman, a mother, who took her son to go shopping at a Hannaford store in Portland.

As she and her son were waiting for a taxi to take them home, the young mother asked a woman to please stop smoking because they were in a non-smoking area and her son had allergic reactions to cigarette smoke. Rather than simply put out her cigarette, the woman, who was Caucasian, began to scream at the Somali woman and her son and threatened them with physical violence while using racially derogatory language about the Somali family's skin color and national origin. She then told the young family to "take a boat back to where they came from."

It was the worst of times for a Somali man and his wife who were driving through Lewiston when the man began to drive slowly as he was navigating his car through some road construction. The Caucasian woman who was driving behind him decided that the man was driving too slow and that she was going to do something about it. Unfortunately for the Somali couple, she decided to get out of her car and go up to the driver's side of the car driven by the couple. At this point she shouted racially insulting comments at the Somali man, called him "a monkey" and spit in his face. All of this happened as the man's wife sat in the car in terror.

It was the worst of times for a lesbian couple in the process of moving from Poland, Maine to Millinocket. In early July, they received a call from a neighbor in Poland telling them to get back quickly because something was wrong at their home there. When they arrived, the couple discovered that a car they owned had its windows kicked out and its headlights smashed. Upon entering their home they found that almost everything they owned had been destroyed, damaged or stolen. They also

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discovered that sexually derogatory comments, slurs and pictures had been painted on the walls of their home.

It was the worst of times for the worshipers at a Mosque located in Lewiston who, while engaged in deep prayer on the night of July 3rd, had their services disrupted by a Caucasian man who threw a pig's head into their place of worship. Pork is considered so vile in the Muslim faith that the people in the Mosque could not even pick up or touch the pig's head in any manner to get it out. Fortunately, police officers responding to the incident removed it for them. Nonetheless, the damage was done. The elders at the Mosque, in accordance with religious doctrine, had to wash and dry the contaminated area of the carpet seven times. In addition, attendance at the Mosque declined significantly in the days following this disruption. As one member of Mosque said to me, "This time it was a pig's head. What if next time it is a bomb?"

Finally, it was the worst of times for a 21-year-old African-American woman who made the *mistake* of driving into a convenient mart to pick up a sandwich in early September in Hancock, Maine. The woman, who had been a member of a Civil Rights Team while in high school in Ellsworth, was also seven months pregnant at the time. As she sat in her car, a Caucasian man began to scream racially derogatory comments at her, threatened to assault her and challenged her to fight. He also threw a partially full can of beer at her hitting her on the arm. He then circled around her car, opened the driver side door and kicked her in the stomach. The young woman began to experience contractions and drove herself to the hospital where she

stayed overnight so doctors could keep her under observation.

It was the worst of times because some of Maine's residents who were filled with hatred choose to threaten or attack people simply because of their heritage, the color of their skin, their religious beliefs or because of whom they loved.

How could this also reflect *the best of times*? The best of times, the best of Maine was reflected by how we responded to these horrific incidents as a State and as a community. In all five of these cases, the persons whose actions were motivated by hate were charged with violations of Maine's criminal laws. In all five cases, the Office of the Attorney General filed actions under the Maine Civil Rights Act and in all cases Maine's courts entered injunctions telling the defendants to cease violating the Civil Rights laws and to leave the targets and their families alone. The courts also told the defendants that if they violated these court orders as to the victims or anyone else, they would face jail time. This represented a swift and efficient response by the law enforcement community.

Perhaps even more remarkable was the community response to these outrageous acts. Religious and political leaders along with residents of the City of Lewiston and other parts of Maine came together to stand with Maine's Muslim residents to condemn the assault of the Mosque and the attack on freedom of religion that represented. A short time later, hundreds of people came together in the City of Portland to express the communal outrage over the destruction of the home of the lesbian couple in Poland. Most recently, residents of Hancock County came together by the hundreds and held a

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community baby shower for the young African-American woman who was so brutally assaulted. In all of these events, the voices of the many came together in an effort to drown out the voices of hate of the few. It was also the best of times for the young African-American woman who recently gave birth, though prematurely, to a beautiful and healthy baby girl.

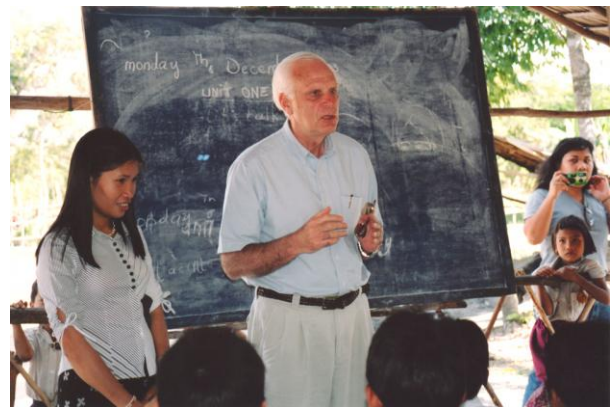
Maine and its people consistently speak out loudly and clearly about hate after incidents like these, and that is good. But we must do more. By the time we respond by filing lawsuits under the Maine Civil Rights Act, by the time we respond with public shows of support for targets and condemnation of those who act on hatred, it is too late. By that time, someone's life has been changed forever. By that time, some person has been injured in a very real way. By that time, some person has had memories created for them; memories they might carry around for the rest of their lives.

We must do more. We must do everything within our power to prevent these incidents from ever happening. Otherwise what happens is not fair, is not right and is not the Maine we want. That is what the CRTP is all about. Through the CRTP we bring about real change and make a real difference. Every time a faculty advisor or a team member educates another student or community member about the pain inflicted by hateful language or conduct, we save someone from perhaps ever being a target. Every time you make a positive change in your school's climate, you improve somebody's chances of receiving the education to which they are entitled. Every thing you do can have a positive impact on someone's life. When the struggle seems hard, as it sometimes does, remember that

the seeds you sow and cultivate today, determine the fruit we all harvest tomorrow. Our youth are the seeds and your work with them can produce a bountiful harvest.

Thank you for all that you do as advisors and all that your students do as team members. *[Editor's note: This article provides all the information anyone needs to respond to the question: Why does Maine have civil rights teams in its schools? Because we care enough about these types of incidents to do everything we can to try and stop more people from becoming either victim or harasser.]*

Presenter of the Month: Frederick Lipp



Some of you may remember Fred Lipp from the elementary school workshop he put on at the 2006 Statewide Conference in Augusta. Fred is known for his lively, engaging talks with children that gently open new doors to understanding our diverse neighbors, here at home and abroad.

Fred is also an award-winning author of seven multicultural children's picture

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books that tell poignant, universal stories set in different countries around the world: Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and even the United States, in the communities of Maine's newest immigrants.

His first book, *The Caged Birds of Phnom Penh*, was named a notable book for a Global Society by the International Reading Association, a Parents Choice 2001 Silver Honor book, and was the winner of the American Library Association's Amelia Bloomer Award for feminist literature.

Fred is a retired Unitarian minister who worked in the United Kingdom and the United States, including Portland's First Parish Church. In addition to writing children's books, he is founder and president of the Cambodian Arts and Scholarship Foundation, which helps educate girls in Cambodia.

Fred's most recent book, *FATIMA*, is a wonderfully written story about a young Muslim girl in America who is teased about the fact that her mother wears a traditional headscarf, know as a hijab. Over the course of the book, the young girl, Fatima, comes up with a clever way to deal with the bully and to ensure that she is not teased again.

After we read *FATIMA*, we realized that it would be the perfect book to structure a civil rights training session around. Fred graciously agreed to participate in our trainings and to read and discuss *FATIMA* with team members. In

addition, because *FATIMA* lends itself so wonderfully to being performed as a play, Fred explains to students how they can break *FATIMA* into scenes and perform it at their school. He has also offered to attend performances of *FATIMA* if any schools elect to make it into a play.

For those of you who will be attending the elementary school trainings, signed copies of *FATIMA* will be available to purchase for \$8 a copy on the day of the training. Fred is also available, for a very reasonable fee, to come to your school to read one of his books and lead a discussion with your students. His talks are appropriate for students ages 5-12 and he will customize his presentation for your group.

Fred is a great supporter of what we are all trying to accomplish through the Civil Rights Team Project and his entire presentation meshes beautifully with our mission. Fred is familiar with what we do, not only because he participated in last year's conference, but also because his wife, Kitty, was a long time faculty advisor at Lincoln Middle School in Portland. He is a wonderful addition to the resources that we are pleased to be able to share with you.

If you are interested in purchasing books and/or in having Fred come to your school, Kitty handles book orders and schedules Fred's personal appearance. She can be reached at lippk@msn.com.

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[Editors note: I had the great privilege of watching Fred's session at our first team training on October 17th in Brewer. Fred was energetic, clever, creative and just terrific with the kids. In short, he was really, really good and a very tough act to follow!]



LOOKING FOR A GOOD IDEA? Check out this list!

It is the rare team that isn't looking for a few good ideas this time of year in order to get the ball rolling. We thought we would give you a helping hand by listing some of the successful projects done in past years by our teams around the state. There's a little something for everyone on this list so hopefully you will find something that lights your fire.

1. Diversity Day: Invite outside groups and speakers in to present a broad view of cultures, music, food, religion, gender issues, living with disabilities, and anything else you think members of

your school community would benefit from learning about.

2. Disability Awareness Day: Plan events at your school that raise awareness of what it is like to live every day with a specific type of disability. At the end of the day, have students who volunteered to spend the day with a particular type of disability talk about what their experience was like.
3. Sponsor a Civil Rights Assembly and show the video on the Maine Civil Rights Act and one or more of the other short videos made by Civil Rights Teams in Maine. Introduce your team members and explain what you are trying to accomplish in your school.
4. Intentional Acts of Kindness Project: Recognize students who intentionally do a good deed for a peer or adult, post the names announce them over the PA system and provide them with a sticker or

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pin that says: "I am someone who makes a difference."

5. Participate in No Name Calling Week, January 22–26, 2007. For more information, click on www.nonamecallingweek.org/cgi-bin/iowa/home.html.
6. Hold a Coffee House night with Open Mike to provide an opportunity for people who usually do not meet and converse to get together and celebrate the diverse talents in your school community. Solicit your school for free coffee and local vendors for food donations.
7. Hold a "Word Day" by creating necklaces or bracelets with a single nice word on each one and then distributing them to students in your school. Ask them to use their nice word as many times as they can that day when speaking to other people. (This project was done by a middle school team that distributed nice word necklaces to 170 K–2 students at an assembly.)
8. Do outreach to younger students by choosing a book with a message of kindness and inclusion to read and discuss. Use the book to explain the mission of the Civil Rights Team Project. Check out the recently updated Resource Guide for book ideas.
9. Maintain a Civil Rights Team Bulletin Board with monthly themes. Start the year out with a bulletin board that describes the mission of the Civil Rights Team Project, who your team members are and why they are part of the team.
10. Create and present skits on bullying and harassment to perform for peers or lower grades and facilitate follow up discussions.
11. Create one or more skits or script a short video and have it filmed and edited by the CRTP's Video Project. Contact Debi Lettre @

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debi.lettre@maine.gov for more information.

The Torch for more information on *Make It Stop!*.

12. Mix it Up Day: Sponsor a Mix It Up Day at your school to encourage students to meet and mix with students they normally do not hang out with. Create an activity that must be completed by the mixed up group and award small prizes to groups that complete the activity. For more information on how to do a Mix It Up Day, go to www.tolerance.org/teach/mix_it_up/index.jsp. If a mix it up lunch isn't your bag, try mixing up advisee groups for a week or come up with your own Mix It Up idea, such as designating a table or separate room for students who are interested in getting to know new people to meet and eat. National Mix It Up Day is November 14th.
13. Put on a performance for your school community of *Make It Stop!*, from Add Verb Productions' youth action kit. See the September issue of
14. Recruit members of your school community to volunteer at a Special Olympics event.
15. Help your team stand out in your school community by spending a meeting tie dying your old or new t-shirts. This is a low cost way to create a team t-shirt and a great team builder.
16. Select some of the team building and icebreaker activities listed in your Tool Box and take them into the classrooms in your school to help students get to know each other a little better.
17. Sponsor a film festival and put on a series of movies over the course of the school year that highlight civil rights issues. See your recently updated Resource Guide for movie ideas.

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18. Sponsor a Civil Rights themed Trivia Bee. Research a topic, such as famous blacks, women, gays and lesbians, civil rights leaders, etc., and post facts about selected individuals and events around your school for a period of weeks. At the end of the designated time period, have each homeroom take the trivia quiz and then honor winners at an assembly or other school event.

19. Obtain Teaching Tolerance's free *I Will Be Your Friend* CD and songbook and teach selected songs to students in your school or your local elementary school. (See below for information on how to obtain the CD and songbook.)

20. Invite a speaker to come in and talk about an issue related to civil rights. Connect your speaker's topic to an important event in civil rights history such as Black History Month or Women's History Month

21. Make a Kindness Quilt for your school. Have team members or students in your school create panels, out of cloth or paper, with drawings on them that personify what a selected civil rights related quote means to them. Hang your "quilt" in a prominent place in your school. Alternatively, give a different quote to different classrooms or grades and have each one create their own quilt.



More great materials from Teaching Tolerance

Once again, Teaching Tolerance is offering a superb teaching tool, for free, to promote youth activism. *I Will Be Your Friend, Songs and Activities for Young Peacemakers* is a 26 song anthology that teaches activism through our nation's history of social change through music. This teaching kit includes a 26 song CD, a songbook, classroom activities, biographies of songwriters and performers, the origins of the songs, and a Resource Guide to musical activism. *I Will Be Your Friend* was the winner of a 2003 Parents Choice Silver Honor Award

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To order your free copy of the *I Will Be Your Friend* teaching kit, go to http://www.tolerance.org/teach/resources/your_friend.jsp. [Editor's note: We are using the title song and an accompanying activity in our elementary school trainings this fall, but the music and activities are appropriate for older grades as well.]

For those of you who are not familiar with Teaching Tolerance, this organization is part of the renowned Southern Poverty Law Center and is a tremendous resource for educators such as yourselves. It has a superb website, a free monthly newsletter, lesson plans, and a vast array of outstanding teaching materials in a multitude of mediums that are free for the asking. Teaching Tolerance's mission is very closely aligned with our own and you will find its resources to be enormously helpful. For more information, go to <http://www.tolerance.org/>.

This is also a site that is a terrific one to share with your colleagues in your school community who may not be aware of all that Teaching Tolerance has to offer to classroom teachers.



Ugly Ducklings: a film that takes a stark look at the lives of young lesbians

Waterville based Hardy Girls/Healthy Women, with its partner the Greater Waterville Communities for Children Youth Coalition, have taken on a nationwide effort to raise awareness of the issues faced by young gays and lesbians. To further this goal, they have produced the award winning documentary film, *Ugly Ducklings*, and created an accompanying community action kit.

The film is set at a Maine girls' summer camp where the campers and their counselors struggle with homophobia, recognition of their own emerging sexualities, and vicious harassment. Add Verb Productions' Cathy Plourde directs the film and the actors include 13 girls of varying ages and sexual orientations, and one adult. The film includes commentary from the actors on their own experiences with homophobia and harassment within the Maine schools that they attend.

The documentary film and accompanying community action kit were developed to educate youth and adults about biased-based harassment and to assist those who wish to openly support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth by creating safe and supportive environments and the opportunity for dialogue to reduce harassment. The objectives of this project are remarkably simple: "that regardless of religious belief or political affiliation, we can all rally around the common goal of

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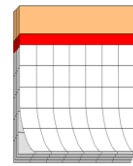
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protecting children and youth from the harassment and violence that can lead to self-harm and suicide.” (Hardy Girls/Healthy Women: www.hardygirlshealthywomen.org/uglyducklings.php)

In the words of Carolyn Gage, the playwright who wrote *Ugly Ducklings*, “A few years ago, here in Maine, two sixteen-year-old girls committed suicide together, driving their car a hundred miles an hour into a grove of birch trees. They left a suicide note on the seat of the car. The contents of the note were suppressed by the local police, who claimed ‘the family had suffered enough.’ Let this play speak where lesbian and gay young people, even in death, have found their stories censored and their words erased.”

The full community action kit with documentary and enhanced interactive DVD can be purchased by nonprofits, public schools and individuals for \$165 plus \$10 shipping and handling. The fee for the documentary only is \$125 plus \$10 s/h. To view trailers for the film and for more information on *Ugly Ducklings* and Hardy Girls/Healthy Women, go to www.hardygirlshealthywomen.org/uglyducklings.php.

[editor's note: Teams interested in purchasing these materials might consider making a joint purchase with one or more teams in your region in order to share the cost.]



UPCOMING EVENTS AND SIGNIFICANT DATES

October 17 -November 30: Regional Student Trainings

Note: There is room on Nov. 6th (Augusta Civic Center) for middle and high school teams that were unable to attend their assigned date. Registrations are due by Wednesday, Nov. 1st at 10:00 a.m.

Now through November 16: A Matter of Perception 2006: Exhibit by Artists with Disabilities; Hauk Auditorium Lobby, University of Maine, Orono. This is a biennial exhibit for Maine adult artists with disabilities.

November 14: National Mix It Up at Lunch Day. Go to www.tolerance.org/teach/mix_it_up/index.jsp for constructive ideas for your Mix It Up Day project.

November 18: Watch the PBS special *Native Teens, Who We Are*. This program shows what it is like to be a young Native American today as teens from throughout the United States share their stories in an upcoming In the Mix special co-hosted by Native American rap artist and film actor Litefoot. Shot around the country, the program features profiles of accomplished teens, short films made by young Native Americans, and an insightful discussion with a group of young Native leaders from cities and reservations throughout the United States.

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January 15: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

January 22-26: No Name Calling Week.
For more information, go to
www.nonamecallingweek.org/cgi-bin/iowa/home.html.

February: Black History Month

March: Women's History Month

Monday, May 7, 2007: CRTP Statewide Conference, Augusta Civic Center.



Please Remember... if you are not receiving email messages, including an online copy of *The Torch* from your Regional Coordinator, he or she does not have your address in their CRTP list serve of advisors. Please make sure that your Regional Coordinator has that information. Also, if you see names on the email list serve of people who are no longer affiliated with the CRTP in your school, please let your RC know so the name can be removed from the list. The fall is a very busy time for all of us and keeping the email lists updated is on everyone's to-do list.

And one more thing.... re: Fall Trainings

It has been wonderful seeing all of you who have attending the team trainings that have taken place to date. The enthusiasm has been incredible and we

at the CRTP have left each training feeling fortunate to be doing this sort of work with our lives.

If you are planning on attending a team training, but have not yet registered your team, please do so as soon as humanly possibly. Debi Lettre needs to get final numbers to the folks in Saco, Augusta and Presque Isle. Also if you have registered, but will not be able to attend or have students who registered but will not be able to attend, let Debi know so she can adjust the numbers. Many thanks.

This newsletter is written and distributed by the Civil Rights Team Project, a statewide program under the auspices of the Maine Office of the Attorney General. The mission of the Civil Rights Team Project is to increase the safety of high school, middle school and elementary school students and to reduce the incidence of bias-motivated harassment and violence in schools.

G. Steven Rowe --- Attorney General
Thomas A. Harnett—Director, Civil Rights Education & Enforcement Unit
Debi Lettre, Civil Rights Project Administrator