

# THE TORCH

## CIVIL RIGHTS TEAM PROJECT NEWSLETTER

September 2006

Newsletter Editor: Amy Homans

Everyone at the Civil Rights Team Project is excited over the start of the new school year. We have been working this summer on the upcoming fall trainings for students and advisors and look forward to seeing you all as we travel around the state in the upcoming months. In the meantime, we hope that this issue of *The Torch* helps to get everyone's gears greased for another successful year with The Project.

In this issue of *The Torch*, you will find: an article from guest contributor Patricia Ryan, Executive Director of the Maine Human Rights Commission; and about upcoming events; new resources; Team Builder of the Month; Tool Box Tip of the Month; a grant opportunity from Teaching Tolerance; free anti-bullying training materials; information on a "theater in a box" kit and more.



September 15-October 15 is Latino Heritage Month

The continuing controversy over immigrant rights in America is one especially important reason to highlight Latino Heritage Month in your school community this year.

Teaching Tolerance has developed some great teaching tools to use with your students to facilitate an understanding and appreciation of the issues faced by Latino youth in our country. Due to the current political climate regarding immigration issues, the Teaching Tolerance materials have a special focus on immigration. The

materials include many classroom activities for elementary, middle and high school students as well as essays by Latino students. To access this material, click on [www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?ar=709](http://www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?ar=709).

Many people in Maine are unaware of Maine's small, but growing Latino population. This summer, the *Ellsworth American* newspaper published an excellent series of articles, written by reporter Tom Walsh, that focused on the minority groups living within Maine. The four part series, entitled *The Whitest State*, included an article on the established Latino community in the Down East town of Milbridge. To read about how a group of Latino migrant families came to Maine and decided to stay, work, and raise their families in western Washington County, go to <http://www.ellsworthamerican.com/whitest/>.

Milbridge's Latino community, as well as Maine's Native American population, is featured in the series' final segment, entitled *Beyond Invisible: Moving Out of the Shadows*.



### **Grant Opportunity For All Schools**

Here is a grant opportunity that all of you are eligible to apply for.\* *Mix It Up*, a project of the [Southern Poverty](http://www.southernpoverty.org)

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Law Center's Teaching Tolerance program, provides \$500 grants to schools for youth-directed programs and projects that address social boundaries in schools or communities. The only guidelines are:

- Youth must serve as decision-makers in the project. Ideally, the project is created and implemented by youth.
- Projects must promote collaboration across social boundaries — different youth groups, clubs or community groups working together.
- The project or program should be a part of an ongoing effort, or an effort that's just getting started, but will continue.
- Grants are non-renewable.

*Mix it Up's* site states that it is open to new ideas and urges applicants to be creative. The only project that is not eligible for the grant money is Mix It Up Day. Click on [www.tolerance.org/teens/about.jsp](http://www.tolerance.org/teens/about.jsp) to read more about *Mix It Up* and its belief in the power of youth to create and sustain real change.

This is a great opportunity to motivate your team members to put their heads together and come up with a creative proposal for a project or program in your school or

community. Please let us know if you are successful in obtaining this grant money and we will include a description of your project in a future issue of *The Torch*.

Even if you do not apply for a grant through *Mix It Up*, consider signing up for its monthly newsletter. Updates on what other student activists are doing to create more inclusive environments in their school as well as new *Mix It Up* activities are regular features of this e-newsletter. Subscribe now by clicking on [www.tolerance.org/teens/getnewsletter.jsp](http://www.tolerance.org/teens/getnewsletter.jsp).

*[editor's note: Although this program is listed under "teens" at the Teaching Tolerance site, there is nothing in the grant information materials that suggests that it is limited.]*



### **Discrimination and the Maine Human Rights Act**

**Contributed by Patricia Ryan,  
Executive Director of the Maine  
Human Rights Commission**

*This month, The Torch is featuring its first guest contributor. Patricia Ryan, Executive*

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*Director of the Maine Human Rights Committee graciously wrote the following article for The Torch in order to help schools and teams understand how the Maine Human Rights Act, applies in an educational setting.*

The Maine Human Rights Act is the state law that prohibits discrimination in specific areas, including education and employment.

Most people are familiar with the word “discrimination.” To “discriminate” against someone means to treat that person differently, or less favorably, for some reason.

In school, students can be discriminated against by school friends, teachers, coaches, administrators, or others employed by the school. In a job, students can be discriminated against by managers, supervisors, or co-workers.

If students are working, they are protected from discrimination because of race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, age, and disability.

In education, students are protected from discrimination because of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, and disability. While the law protects students from unlawful discrimination in all academic programs and activities -- from admission to financial assistance to participation in athletic programs -- it is the area of harassment in which most complaints occur. Harassment based on sex, disability, race, national origin or sexual

orientation is a violation of the Maine Human Rights Act.

The most recent amendment to the Human Rights Act was one protecting gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals from discrimination. It went in to effect December 28, 2005. Under Maine law, sexual orientation means a person’s actual or perceived *heterosexuality, bisexuality, homosexuality, gender identity or gender expression.*

The following discussion is about discrimination against students in schools. Similar provisions apply to employment discrimination complaints.

### Who enforces the law prohibiting discrimination?

The Maine Human Rights Commission is the state agency that enforces the Maine Human Rights Act. The Maine Department of Education is also responsible for assisting in enforcing the part of the Act that protects students from discrimination. The Commissioner of the Department of Education is notified of each complaint that is filed with the Human Rights Commission, and may participate in resolution of all complaints prior to any investigation, or after an investigation is complete. The Commissioner is also notified of the results of all investigations.

### How do you file a complaint of discrimination?

You file an education discrimination complaint with the Maine Human

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Rights Commission whenever you believe you are:

- Being treated unfairly in your school because of your race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation or disability; or
- being harassed at school for any of these reasons; or
- being treated unfairly or harassed because you complained about discrimination or assisted with a discrimination investigation.

This complaint is called a "Charge of Discrimination." It must be filed, signed and notarized, before an investigation is done. If a student is under 18, the Charge must be filed by a parent or guardian. There are time limits for filing a discrimination complaint with the MHRC. You have six (6) months to file a complaint. You should contact the Commission as soon as possible after you believe you have been discriminated against. The Commission will help you draft your complaint.

### What should a school do to prevent discrimination or respond to a complaint?

Every school has a plan that addresses discrimination. It is important that the plan be updated on a continuing basis, and that the school's non-discrimination policy be communicated effectively to students and faculty. The Commission always asks for the following information when it investigates complaints of discrimination.

- A copy of the school's policies that address (a) student

complaint process; (b) anti-discrimination policy; (c) harassment policy and procedures, including sexual orientation harassment; (d) disciplinary policy.

- A list of the workshops, meetings, assemblies and other training events held by the school or for school employees and students in the past 2 years regarding harassment, procedure for complaints against a student by another student (or parent), and procedure for reporting assault or harassment.
- The method(s) used to notify students and employees of the school's harassment policy. Posters? Annual notices? Other?
- Whether the person complained about harassment while s/he was a student (either by him/herself or through his/her parent)?
- A detailed account of the investigative and corrective actions taken with regard to complainant's concerns, including who was interviewed, when, and what corrective action was taken in response to concerns.

For more information, contact the Maine Human Rights Commission at 624-2050, or [www.maine.gov/mhrc](http://www.maine.gov/mhrc).

*[editor's note: Patricia Ryan will be the featured speaker at this fall's regional Faculty/Community Advisor trainings*

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*in Saco, Farmington and Augusta. The Commission's attorney, John Gause, will be the speaker at the Orono training.]*



### **Ch-ch-ch-changes....**

Has your school had a change in faculty or community advisor? Please let Debi Gray know any changes in the names and contact information for your school's faculty and/or community advisor(s) so she can keep her database updated. She will pass along information on new advisors to the regional coordinators so they can update their databases as well. Debi can be contacted at [debi.gray@maine.gov](mailto:debi.gray@maine.gov).

If your school is beginning the new year without a faculty advisor, please let Debi know. And please remember, not only do schools that participate in the Civil Rights Team Project have a contractual obligation to provide a faculty advisor, it is critically important that new faculty advisors are recruited as soon as possible in order to ensure that teams are formed in time to attend the regional fall trainings that will begin in October.



### Team Building Tip of the Month

At our student trainings, at some point in the course of the day one of us invariably makes reference to "talking the talk and walking the walk." We frequently stress that the quickest way for a team to become totally ineffectual in its school is for its members to talk a good game, but to fail to follow through by using their own actions as an example for others. When team members demonstrate the kinds of behaviors that it is the mission of the CRTP to eliminate from school environments, it is often because they don't fully understand their role as a member of a civil rights team.

This month's Team Building Tip deals with the issue of helping your students to understand and fulfill their responsibilities as members of their school's civil rights team. Finding a means to help your students to not only talk the talk but to walk the walk can only help to strengthen the effectiveness of your team within your school community.

Different schools address this issue in different ways. At Falmouth Middle School, where the team numbers between 50 and 60 students each year, each team member signs a contract that contains FMS's Student Code of Conduct for Ethical and Responsible behavior, the Civil Rights Team Pledge and clearly delineated consequences for violations of the Code of Conduct. The



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contract is a mandatory part of team membership and must be signed by both the team member and his or her parent or guardian.

The Falmouth team contract states as follows:

The students at Falmouth Middle School are dedicated to the values of fairness, compassion, honesty, responsibility, respect, and courtesy that contribute to a positive, diverse, safe and caring learning environment for ALL students.

As a member of the Falmouth Middle School Civil Rights Team, I agree to help promote the ideal that "All students deserve to be treated with kindness and respect." I will take the Civil Rights Pledge to:

- >Eliminate teasing from my behavior.
- >Encourage others to do the same.
- >Do my part to make the community a safe place by being more sensitive to others.
- >Eliminate put downs and name calling.
- >Not let my words or actions hurt others.
- >Be part of the solution not part of the problem.
- >Believe that ONE person can make a DIFFERENCE.

The following are actions that will be taken if I break my pledge and will be in addition to any penalties for breaking the FMS Code of Conduct:

First Violation: Warning and student must apologize to the victim.

Second Violation: Student must apologize to victim, meet with [the vice principal] or a CRT advisor to devise an action plan to initiate behavioral changes.

Third Violation: Student must apologize to victim, meet with [vice principal] or CRT advisor to review action plan and face possible dismissal from the Civil Rights Team.

The document is then signed and dated by the team member and a parent/guardian. According to FA George Conant, the team members take their commitment very seriously and the contract helps to clearly define what is expected of them as FMS civil rights team members.

Regardless of how you approach the issue of defining your team members' responsibilities, what is most important is that you find a way to do it that works best for your team. The whole concept of civil rights is complex and new to most kids and it is a lot to expect that everyone will get it right without a misstep over the course of the year. So, whether you use a pledge or a contract or some other means of your own invention, just make certain that your kids know what is expected of them and what, if any, consequences will confront them if they stumble along the way. In this way, you can give your team members a leg up on walking the walk while they talk the talk.

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### ***Make It Stop!***

Add Verb Productions' *Youth Action Kit: A resource for high school teams*

Portland-based theatre for social change organization *Add Verb Productions* has launched a new peer education program on bullying and harassment prevention – the ***Make It Stop!*** Youth Action Kit. Development of the program was funded by a grant from Maine's Project Safe Neighborhoods (*PSN Maine*) Task Force, a group of representatives from across Maine dedicated to reducing gun violence in Maine's communities and schools. Through *PSN Maine*, ***Make It Stop!*** Youth Action Kits were distributed to every Maine high school in January and March 2006. In May, the kit was recognized nationally at the National PSN Conference in Denver, Colorado.

From name-calling to school gun violence, girl fighting to gay bashing, from cyber bullying to the problem of denial, ***Make It Stop!*** explores bullying and harassment in many forms – capturing the pain of these issues while encouraging prevention, action and empathy. ***Make It Stop!*** does more than simply explore youth experiences with bullying and harassment; it models strategies for what individuals can do to acknowledge the need for change, to break the silence and complacency around the emotional isolation and abuse many kids

experience daily and to model changing the climate in our schools and communities.

***Make It Stop!*** is also more than a stand-alone play; the script comes packaged in a Youth Action Kit, complete with simple props, a how-to guide that walks youth actors through the steps of group building, rehearsal, directing and producing the play. With an engaging script that is flexible in length, cast size, and types of venues, ***Make It Stop!*** is easily accessible to high school-age youth and it is perfect for drama clubs, civil rights teams, or peer education initiatives. The kit also includes handouts with resources and strategies for taking action.

One Maine high school student who performed the play last year had this to say about ***Make It Stop!***: "Rehearsing the opening sequence strengthened our group and opened up discussion about issues we face every day. We chose to perform the skits that talked about the bullying issues that go on in our school. They're fun, entertaining and informative for the audience, and we learn the lessons in the play through performing them."

***Make It Stop!*** Youth Action Kits were shipped, **free of charge**, to every public high school in the State of Maine during the last school year. If your school received a copy of this terrific resource, but you have yet to hear about it, track it down within your school and talk with your team about whether it would like to perform ***Make It Stop!*** at your school. This project really is tailor made for civil rights teams in that it seeks to address bullying and harassment issues that detract from a positive atmosphere in our schools.

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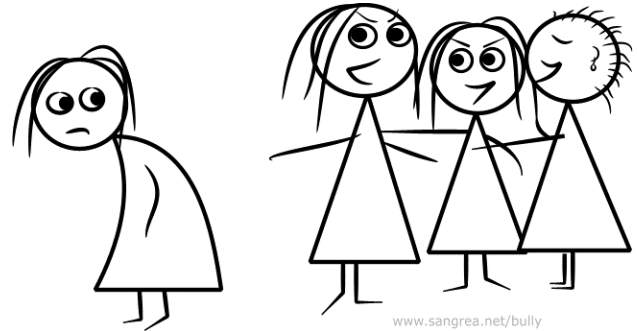
Schools that were not eligible to receive a free kit may obtain one for \$125, plus shipping and handling from Add Verb Productions. Visit

[www.addverbproductions.com](http://www.addverbproductions.com) for more information, script and handbook excerpts, and reports from youth groups who have performed the play in their community. Stay tuned for new topics in the Youth Action Kit series, as *Add Verb* plans to produce and box additional issue-based plays this year.

For those of you who are not familiar with *Add Verb Productions*, through the arts and education, it works to awaken community-based action and understanding of social issues through theatre, creative expression and dialogue. Based in Portland, *Add Verb* works locally and nationally to incite dialogue and change around critical social issues. Across the nation, *Add Verb*'s issue-based touring plays are instigating understanding and action around such complex problems as eating disorders, bullying and harassment, dating violence and sexual assault. Locally, *Add Verb* produces workshops bringing youth together with theatre artists to create original performance pieces, scripts, and dialogue around issues that are central to their lives. This organization is a tremendous resource for all us and we are fortunate that it is located here in Maine.

**About PSN Maine:** In 2001, the Department of Justice launched Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), an initiative to reduce gun violence in America. Project Sentry, a part of this initiative, is a program focused on preventing gun violence tragedies in schools through both prosecution and education. During a competitive grant process administered by *PSN Maine* in 2004, approximately

\$120,400 was distributed to juvenile and/or school related programs, including *Add Verb Productions*.



### More Resources on Bullying and Harassment

The 2006 Maine Governor's Children's Cabinet recently published a new, free resource intended to be used to as a training guide for schools and communities in tackling issues relating to bullying and harassment. Designed to address the mandatory training requirement in the "anti-bullying law", LD 564 that was passed during the last legislative session, *Maine's Best Practices in Bullying and Harassment Prevention* includes an extremely comprehensive training manual with extensive resources as well as overheads for use with an opaque projector.

This excellent resource is being mailed out to every public school in the State this fall. In addition, the Department of Education will offer a free, on-line web-based tool beginning this month that will include the *Best Practices* guide, additional resources, and training opportunities to support your work in reducing bullying and harassment in your school and in your community.

The Civil Rights Team Project was able to impact the final product through the



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contributions of Thom Harnett, Director of the Maine Civil Rights Team Project and the Attorney General's Civil Rights Education and Enforcement Unit, who served as a member of the LD 564 *Best Practice Guide* Design Team.



### TOOL BOX TIP OF THE MONTH

With the start of the new school year and a lot of new advisors on board, it seems appropriate that the Tool Box Tip of the Month be the **Tool Box** itself. Whether you are a first timer with the Civil Rights Team Project or have been with us since the start, a trip through the Tool Box at the start of the year is a good thing.

Each team has, or should have, a large plastic storage container [a/k/a the Tool Box] that houses a multitude of resources for you and your team. Depending upon the grade levels of your team, your Tool Box may contain books, videos and teaching materials. All of the Tool Boxes contain organized, labeled folders of resource information. There is a table of contents in the first folder and it sets out in detail everything that is included in your Tool Box. Your Tool Box includes information on:

- Getting your team started
- Discussion starters
- Surveys
- New Team Member Orientation
- Running and managing a meeting
- Group processes and problem solving

- Ice Breakers and Team Builders (dozens of ideas for team centered activities)
- Ideas for Activities (describes more than 30 different activities)
- Quotes
- Descriptions of some of the best long and short term projects done by teams around the State to date
- Teaching Tolerance materials
- Resources for Speakers
- General Resources
- Intervention Methods that can be used by your team/school
- Public Relations/Visibility in Your Community
- Sample Policies
- Funding Sources /Ideas
- Advisors and Community Advisors
- Southern Poverty Law Center- Teaching Tolerance Kits

You and your team are encouraged to dive headfirst into your Tool Box. The only caveat is it would be helpful if you were able to keep your folders intact, as more information will be provided to you in the coming years. The Tool Box is meant to be “expandable” and we hope to keep useful materials coming your way as we discover additional materials in years to come.

Invite your team members to drop by your room or office to look through the Tool Box when they have some spare time or have a couple of volunteers take on the task of gleaning through the Tool Box for ideas of things to do over the course of the school year. However you choose to utilize the Tool Box, remember that its purpose is to assist you and your team so that you do not feel that you need to constantly be re-inventing the wheel. We publish a monthly issue of *The Torch* for that same reason.

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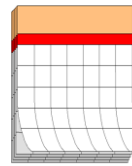
We recognize that you and your team members are incredibly busy with a lot of demands on your time. The Civil Rights Team Project provides you with these resources to help you use your time as efficiently and as effectively as possible, as well as to help keep everyone inspired and motivated throughout the school year.

In the event you do not have a Tool Box, please let your Regional Coordinator know and an effort will be made to get one to you.



### **Don't forget!!**

If you are planning on attending your regional faculty training and/or bringing your team to a regional training this fall, please remember to register with Debi Gray. Registration packets arrived last month and deadlines vary, depending on the date of the training. If you will **not** be attending a faculty/community advisor training or bringing your students to a team training, please let Debi know as soon as possible. This is particularly important with respect to student trainings as many schools have more than 10 students who would like to attend the training. Debi can allocate unused slots to those schools if she is made aware of them far enough in advance of the training date.



### **UPCOMING EVENTS AND SIGNIFICANT DATES**

**September 25: Regional FA/CA training, Saco Holiday Inn Express**

**September 27: Regional FA/CA training, UMO**

**September 29: Regional FA/CA training, UM Farmington**

**October 3: Regional FA/CA training, Augusta**

**October 17-November 7: Regional Student Trainings**

**November 14: National Mix It Up at Lunch Day. Go to**

**[www.tolerance.org/teach/mix\\_it\\_up/index.jsp](http://www.tolerance.org/teach/mix_it_up/index.jsp) for constructive ideas for your Mix It Up Day project.**

**May 7, 2007: CRTP Statewide Conference, Augusta**

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*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 Gray, Civil Rights Project Administrator**